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The Roman frontier in Arabia (Jordanian sector)

David Kennedy

S. THOMAS PARKER, *ROMANS AND SARACENS. A HISTORY OF THE ARABIAN FRONTIER* (American Schools of Oriental Research, Dissertation Series 6, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, Indiana 1986). Pp. xiii + 247, 12 plates, 74 line drawings. ISBN 0-89757-106-1. \$25.00 (paper).

S. THOMAS PARKER (Ed.), *THE ROMAN FRONTIER IN CENTRAL JORDAN. INTERIM REPORT ON THE LIMES ARABICUS PROJECT 1980-1985* (British Archaeological Reports, International Series 340, Oxford 1987). Pp. x + 821 (2 vols.), 109 plates, 150 line drawings. ISBN 0-86054-438-9. £50 (paper).

Introduction

Suddenly, the military history of the Roman east has again become academically popular. In the last years of the Ottoman empire there were major discoveries and publications (Butler *et al.* 1903-14; 1907-43; Brünnow and von Domaszewski 1904-9; Andrae 1908-12; Sarre and Herzfeld 1911-20; Musil 1907-8); then under French and British Mandates discoveries were announced and major publications produced with great regularity (Cumont 1926; Baur *et al.* 1929-52; Musil 1926, 1927a, 1927b, 1928; Poidebard 1934; Stein 1938, 1940, 1941; Mouterde and Poidebard 1945) (the most notable omission was eastern Turkey). Subsequently, independence and warfare in the region reduced fieldwork and publications to a trickle, the only significant exceptions being at Singara in northern Iraq (Oates 1956, 1959, 1968) and in Israel, which hosted the Seventh Congress of Roman Frontier Studies in 1967 (Applebaum 1971). Articles on the army in the east and on military sites in Israel continued to appear, but there was limited general activity until the mid-1970s.

Publications appearing during 1990 show just how much has changed: 37 papers in the published proceedings of a conference — the third devoted entirely to the eastern frontier and army (French and Lightfoot 1989 [1990];¹ for the two previous conferences cf. Mitchell 1983, and Freeman and Kennedy 1986); a book on *Rome's desert frontier from the air* by the present reviewer and Derrick Riley; and Ben Isaac's superb study of the Roman army in the east (reviewed by Parker in this volume). Forthcoming are further publications relating to the new French excavations at Dura Europos (Leriche *et al.* 1986); a conference on Roman desert frontiers in Oxford in 1992; the fourth colloquium on the eastern frontier, to be held under the direction of Edward Dąbrowa of the Jagiellonian University at Krakow in 1992;² and just completed is Shelagh Gregory's important study of Roman military architecture in the east (1991). There have also been important publications in the past two decades on the roads and sites of eastern Turkey (e.g. French 1981; Mitford 1980; Wagner 1976, 1983, 1985), in the Negev Desert (see Negev 1986, 145 f. for a lengthy bibliography; Cohen 1982); and the enormous regional surveys in Saudi Arabia (e.g. Ingraham *et al.* 1981) have added important new evidence to the pioneering work of Peter Parr in the Hedjaz (Parr 1968/69, 1971). On the army there has been a thick scatter of publications, notably by Michael Speidel (e.g. 1977, 1983), as well as theses by Gracey (1981) and myself (1980). Major studies by Irfan Shahid continue to appear on Roman and Byzantine relations with the Arabs (1984a, 1984b, 1989).

While research, discoveries and fieldwork have increased generally throughout the region from the Black Sea to the Red, one area stands out. Beginning in the mid 1970s as an outcome of the Arab-Israeli wars of 1967 and 1973, foreign institutes of archaeology, till then largely concentrated in East Jerusalem, set up new centres in Amman. With the generous and ever-friendly support of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan under the direction of first Adnan Hadidi, then Ghazi Bisheh, and now Safwan et-Tell, the scale of fieldwork of all sorts increased considerably. A further impetus came in 1980 when

1 Held in Ankara and followed by a memorable tour of the eastern frontier regions where a number of key sites were about to disappear beneath the rising waters of dams on the Euphrates: French & Lightfoot 1989, xv-xviii.
2 Correspondence until May 1992 should be sent to Dr. Dąbrowa at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, N.J. 08540.