

David F. Graf, *Rome and the Arabian Frontier: From the Nabataeans to the Saracens*, Variorum Collected Studies Series, Hampshire: Aldershot, 1997. xviii + 348 pp. ISBN 0-86078-658-7.

David Graf belongs to a group of scholars from various countries who have been active in the study of the Roman province of Arabia over the past few decades. He has combined literary inquiry with fieldwork, the latter comprising survey and epigraphy rather than large-scale excavations. So far he has been a man of substantial articles rather than monographs. It is therefore particularly welcome to have many of his important articles brought together in this volume. Although he has worked in this field for over twenty years, the papers here republished represent mostly his work in the last ten years. They appear as originally published, with the addition of some recent bibliography and comments on pp. ix-xiii. Graf's chronological range is broad, and so are the topics he is interested in. Unlike some other scholars, whose interest is limited to the material remains of Roman army camps, Graf has always been interested in local texts and culture. He is an active participant in many current scholarly debates and not afraid to take a stand, or to speculate at times. This is not to deny his important discoveries in the field. For instance, his paper on the *Via Nova Traiana* in Arabia Petraea (VI) has established beyond doubt how Petra was integrated into the regional Roman road-network, an important point that used to be insufficiently clear. The Appendix to 'Qurā 'Arabiyya and Provincia Arabia' (No. VIII) contains valuable improved readings of graffiti from the northern Hejāz, texts which contribute to our understanding of the role of Nabataean and Roman troops in the area. The conclusions he has based on this material regarding the extent of the Roman province of Arabia south of Aela/'Aqaba have not been universally accepted, but they cannot be ignored. He has drawn attention to the importance of the site of Humayma, some 60 km. north of 'Aqaba, represented in this collection only by No. VII, 'The "God" of Humayma.' As a result of his observations the site has been explored systematically.

'The Nabataean Army and the *Cohortes Ulpiae Petraeorum*' (No. V) is a very useful and lucid survey of what is known about this subject. On matters of detail: Graf is neither the first to attempt to clarify the ambiguous function of *strategoī* (pp. 275-9), nor will he be the last. The title '*Petraeorum*' of units recruited in the province of Arabia is probably not a reference to the defunct royal army of Nabataea (they may have been named *Nabataeorum*), but an indication that these units were recruited in the huge territory of the city of Petra. The discussion of initial recruitment is interesting, as it shows that the original formation of these units took place in the years 111-114, roughly coinciding with the construction of the *Via Nova Traiana* and the first issue of provincial coins. In other words, three of the most distinctive features in the formation of the province coincided, some five to eight years after the annexation and on the eve of Trajan's Parthian war. Graf convincingly argues that the units were drafted for this war.

There are many topics discussed in this collection which are now also receiving attention in Israel. Thus No. III, a review article of J.-M. Dentzer (ed.) *HAURAN I*, raises (p. 5) the question of the existence of *villae rusticae*, a subject discussed for Judaea by S. Applebaum before there was much evidence found there. We still have

only a partial impression of what Roman villas looked like in the Near East.<sup>1</sup> The same article discusses the character of villages and private houses as evidence for social structures.<sup>2</sup> Such topics show that the lack of contact between Israel and neighbouring Syria is becoming more of a hindrance to progress as archaeology in both countries grows more sophisticated. Inevitably there will be disagreement on various matters. Thus I cannot see what evidence there is of a massive building programme at Bostra, following the annexation of the Nabataean kingdom in AD 106 (p. 20). The epigraphic evidence, at least, does not confirm this. While it is clear that the annexation resulted in the establishment of a legionary base represented by tile stamps but not yet excavated, urban development as attested by inscriptions seems to have been slow.<sup>3</sup> Recently it has been argued again that Petra, not Bostra, was the seat of the governor for at least some time following the annexation of the Nabataean kingdom.<sup>4</sup> There are other points that could be discussed, such as Graf's conclusion that the adoption of Greco-Roman culture by the local population of the Hauran was only a veneer (p. 22) or the identification of the 'Medes' mentioned in Safaitic texts with the forces of Zenobia of Palmyra (pp. 22f.).

Graf's first major article (1978), published here as chapter IX, was 'The Saracens and the Defense of the Arabian Frontier.' He was the first to consider the interaction between Rome and the Arabs since the publication of the pioneering works of Vasiliev and Bowersock. Undoubtedly he would now have written a different article. At the time, however, it formed an important contribution in its consideration of the Roman organisation of the southern frontier of the province of Arabia. He pointed out that in the second and third centuries there is no evidence of Roman military organisation in the Hejāz, while in the southern part of modern Jordan the only evidence of a Roman presence is the *Via Nova Traiana* with its road-stations. This observation is correct and it raises questions regarding the nature of the frontier in this area. Graf's approach here is to consider what is known about the relations between Rome and the local population: he attempts to interpret Thamudic inscriptions and the Rawwāfa inscriptions in order to reach an understanding of the interaction of the Romans and the local population. His interesting — though not generally accepted — suggestion regarding the meaning of the term 'Sarakenoi' and 'Saraceni' is briefly mentioned here, while it was extensively argued in an article not reprinted in the pre-

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- 1 Y. Hirschfeld, 'Jewish Rural Settlement in Judaea in the Early Roman Period', in *The Early Roman Empire in the East* (ed. S.E. Alcock, Exeter 1997). Remains of rural estates belonging to Jews (identified by ritual baths and stone implements) have been found from the period before the First Revolt. Cf. Y. Hirschfeld and R. Birger-Calderon, 'Early Roman and Byzantine Estates near Caesarea', *IEJ* 41 (1991), 81-111, for the excavation of one of the estates discussed by Hirschfeld. There was not much evidence of estates before the most recent excavations and surveys: cf. H.-P. Kuhnen, *Palästina in griechisch-römischer Zeit* (Munich 1990), 241, for the little there was to be cited at the time.
  - 2 Yizhar Hirschfeld, *The Palestinian dwelling in the Roman-Byzantine period* (Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, collectio minor 34, Jerusalem 1995).
  - 3 B. Isaac, *The Limits of Empire: The Roman Army in the East* (Oxford, revised ed. 1992), 344f.; 349f.
  - 4 R. Haensch, *Capita provinciarum: Statthaltersitze und Provinzialverwaltung in der römischen Kaiserzeit* (Mainz am Rhein 1997), 238-42.

sent volume. His cautious comments on the pottery chronology employed for surveys in the 1970s in Jordan should have been taken to heart by all scholars involved.

Graf is one of a number of scholars who have been insisting for years that there is a need to reassess the relationship between the settled population and the nomads and pastoralists (No. III 18-20, 24; No. X: 'Rome and the Saracens: Reassessing the Nomadic Menace'). Rather than seeing two antagonistic groups, where the latter represents a systemic threat to the existence of the former, he has made an attempt to understand the complex relationship between various parts of the population of the region.<sup>5</sup> The last article, Chapter X, on Rome and the Saracens, is a valuable discussion of the information about Rome and the Arab nomads. Graf here joins in a debate in which he clearly takes sides, criticising the conclusions of S. Thomas Parker and discarding the theory that the pre-Islamic Arabs formed a continuous threat to the stability of the Roman provinces. Wherever one stands on these matters, it is clear that these essays, now accessible in one volume, are indispensable reading for anyone interested in the field.

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David Braund, *Ruling Roman Britain: Kings, Queens, Governors and Emperors from Julius Caesar to Agricola*, London and New York: Routledge, 1996. xiv + 217 pp.

The sub-title is important. This perceptive and illuminating book is not a study of how the Romans governed Britain, although it does devote a chapter to what the Romans (or Cicero, at least, and some Greek philosophers) thought were the moral duties of a provincial governor. It does not claim to be a history of Roman Britain. The map includes the frontiers which Domitian's neglected conquest forced upon his successors, but the book ends with Agricola's recall from Britain, barely forty years after the Claudian invasion, when Hadrian's Wall was still forty years in the future, and altogether the Romans would be ruling Britain for another 325 years. There is a passing allusion to 'a new and more advanced group of camps', but Braund never names a Roman military base; and of Agricola's crowning victory at Mons Graupius he says, 'the site of the battle need not detain us'. It will not be another of those insular books about Roman Britain. The author's perspective is the view from Rome. 'In writing Britain' Romans such as Caesar and Tacitus were 'also writing Rome'. What ties the book together are 'the three interwoven strands of geography, imperialism and monarchy': Britain before the invasions was a land of legendary remoteness,

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5 The interpretation of the Safaitic inscriptions in No. X has been criticized extensively by M.C.A. Macdonald, 'Nomads and the Hawrān in the Late Hellenistic and Roman Periods: A Reassessment of the Epigraphic Evidence,' *Syria* 70 (1993), 303-413, at 335-46; cf. Graf on pp. xiii f. of the introduction to the present volume.