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THE ANNEXATION OF THE NABATAEAN KINGDOM IN 106 A.D: NEW EPIGRAPHIC AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATION

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ABSTRACT

In 106 A.D., the Roman emperor Trajan annexed the Nabataean kingdom and formed the new province i.e. Roman Arabia. One of the vexed question regarding the annexation of Nabataea is that was it bloodless or there was Nabataean resistance? Such question of broad significance will be discussed below. In contrast to the general consensus among scholars that the annexation was peaceful, this article will argue that there was Nabataean armed resistance of the Roman annexation of their kingdom. Such an argument will be based only on archaeological and epigraphic evidence.

KEYWORDS: *the Nabataeans, the Roman, Trajan, annexation of Nabataea.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In 106 A.D. and after the death of the last Nabataean king Rabell II, the Roman emperor Trajan (98-117 A.D.) (Fig. 1) asked his governor of Syria to annex Nabataea and he did 'Trajan attendit sans', Starcky (1966: 920) says, 'doute la mort de Rabbel II pour annexer à l'Empire le royaume de Nabatène, mettant ainsi fin à quatre siècles de relative autonomie.' Dio Cassius (lxviii, 14, 5) says:

κατὰ δὲ τὸν αὐτὸν τοῦτον χρόνον καὶ Πάλλμας τῆς Συρίας ἄρχων τὴν Ἀραβίαν τὴν πρὸς τῇ Πέτρᾳ ἐχειρῶσατο καὶ Ῥωμαίων ὑπήκοον ἐποιήσατο.

About the same time Palma, the governor of Syria, subdued the part of Arabia around Petra and made it subject to the Romans.

However, in spite of the fact that the formal reasons and the exact manner of annexation are still unknown, the Nabataeans' stand regarding the annexation of their kingdom is understood by many scholars as passive reaction. If these scholars are asked about the manner of the Nabataean annexation, they will say it was a peaceful conquest since classical sources (Roman sources) are silent on this point. For example Peters (1997: 318) says, '[...] At the death of the Nabataean king Rabbel II in A.D. 106, both southern Auranitis and the rest of the Nabataean kingdom were converted into *Provincia Arabia* (map 1). These were simple administrative acts *unaccompanied by resistance or violence* [...]' [Italics mine]. Another scholar writes, 'The end, when it came, was swift and apparently *peaceful*' and '[...] It was a peaceful annexation with no force required' [my italics] (Taylor, 2001: 28). Yet a third one says, 'Whatever the reason, it was a peaceful annexation with no force required' (Ball, 2000: 64).

This article will challenge such an academic view of the annexation of Nabataea. We will use both archaeology and epigraphy to prove that there was Nabataean military resistance.

1.1 Archaeological Evidence for the Nabataean Resistance

The excavations of Brown University in Petra reveals many Roman ballista that have been discovered in the Great Temple at Petra (Fig. 2). One may think that the Romans used these balls to destroy some building in the Nabataean capital. The result was a destruction in Site Phase VI dated to 106 C.E. In addition, some scholars think that north gallery may also have been bombarded by the Romans (Martha Joukowsky, pers.comm. 30/11/2003)

It is not surprising that the Great Temple was attacked. Such building would be, one may assume, a central administrative centre in the Nabataean capi-

tal which may have played a great defensive role when the city was attacked by the Romans. In addition, one may think that the Nabataean fighters would have gathered in the Great Temple which led the Romans to attack the building. Looking at the Romans military history, we will see similar cases. For instance, the temple of Tamfana in Germany was destroyed by the Romans during the Caesar invasion of Germany since the German fighters gathered in it (Tacitus Annals 1. 51). The use of the ballista by the Romans is also seen in Dacia. During the Dacian war, the Roman emperor Trajan ordered his army to use these balls to destroy some buildings (Fig. 3).

However, the aforementioned destruction was not limited to the Nabataean metropolis Petra. Thanks to the Israeli excavations in 'Avdat we know that at 'Avdat, the temple in addition to some other public buildings were burnt at the beginning of the 2nd century A.D. This may have been a result of Nabataean resistance to the imperial army (Negev, 1963: 121). This led Starcky (ibid.) to say, 'Il semble que l'occupation ne fut pas entièrement pacifique [...].'

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND EPIGRAPHIC EVIDENCE

2.1 Epigraphic Evidence for the Nabataean Resistance

As far as inscriptions are concerned, we have four Nafaitic inscriptions which mention revolts against the Romans and taken by some scholars to refer to the annexation of Nabataea at the beginning of the second century A.D. (e.g. Bowersock, 1983: 80, n. 13; Sartre, 1982: 131-132).¹ In the first one, we read 'snt mrdt nb! 'lrm' (in the year when the Nabataeans revolted against the Romans) (Winnett and Harding, 1978: 406-407, no. 2815; al-Rawsān, 1987: 259). However, Al-Rawsān translates 'mrdt' as 'defeated' (1987: 259). If we accept his translation, (in the year when the Nabataeans defeated the Romans), then we have here the first record of a Nabataean victory over the Romans. Such a victory should not come as a surprise taking the military skills of the Nabataea into consideration (Graf, 1994: 3; Bowersock, 1983: 12).

In addition to the above mentioned inscriptions, we have another Nafaitic inscriptions which reads: *snt wsg bn rm nb!* 'The year of the struggle between the Romans and the Nabataeans' (Macdonald, 1993: 331). Two other Nafaitic inscriptions; however, mention (the year of Nabataean war) '*snt hrb nb!*' (Macdonald, 1993: 144, no. 45). *Indeed the Nafaitic in-*

¹ There are some other Nafaitic inscriptions which talk about revolts against the Romans. For example, we know from one of these inscriptions that PnYm son of Gtfn son of Pdnt (Odenath), of YAwidh tribe, participated in a revolt against the Romans. For more information, see Sartre, 1982: 127-128.

scriptions are not clearly dated, however, one may think that they may refer to the annexation of Nabataea in 106 A.D. this is because concentrating on this war to be a basis for dating these texts meant that this war must have associated with a big event that was known by the people of the area.²

Therefore, this war was taken by the Šafaites as a base for dating their inscriptions. In fact, such historical context, associating this inscription with the annexation, is given by some scholars (e.g. Littmann, 1904: 144; Sartre, 1982: 131-132). Littmann (*ibid.*) strongly believes that this text refers to the event of 106 A.D. as he says:

[I explained the phrase šnt ḥrb nbt] as a reference to the war between the Romans and the Nabataeans of the year 106 A.D. [...] I still believe that this is the most natural explanation, since the briefness of the phrase seems to indicate some very important event which was impressed upon the minds of all people in the neighborhood.

2.2 Malik III's Defeat of the Romans

A newly discovered Šafaitic inscription asserts the Nabataean military resistance of the Romans. Husaen Zeinaddin who discovered the text gave the following reading:

L whb'l bn ḥnn bn 'bd bn ḡt bn šrk bn skrn
d 'l gšm wšty hdr mrk snt trḡ mk mlk nbt tlt
m't qtl 'l rm wsq tmr lhz'm gd 'wḡ whlt
whš'hqm ḡnyt wslm wḥrḡ wḡnmt lḡ d'y h ḥtt

By Whb'l son of Ḥnn son of 'bd son of Ḡt son of Šrk son of Skrn from the tribe of Qšm. And he spent the winter in this place staying in the year in which Mk Malik III, king of the Nabataeans killed three hundred Romans and drove Tamar to the chief (his leader). So, O Gd-'wḡ, Allat, and Shay'-al-Qawm grant richness and safety for the one who watches and grant gain for the one who leaves this writing intact.

Depending on the tree of Šafaitic genealogy drawn by Milik (1982), Zeinaddin dated this inscription between the years 90 and 115 A.D. Hence, Malik mentioned in this text must have been Malik III, the successor of the last Nabatean king Rabbel II who was mentioned another inscriptions (Jaussen and Savignac, 1909: 204, no. 39).

It seems that the Romans militarily intervene in Nabataea prevent the succession of Malik III in 106

to (Kennedy, 1980: 286) led to military clashes resulting in the killing of three hundred Romans. This may be supported by the account of Ammianus' account in which he emphasized the fact that there were more than a military clashes between the Nabataeans and the Romans. He writes (14. 8. 13): "Hanc provinciae imposito nomine, rectoreque adtributo, obtemperare legibus nostris Traianus compulit imperator, incolarum tumore saepe contunso, cum glorioso Marte Mediam urgert et Parthos". (transl.) "It was given the name of province, assigned a governor, and compelled to obey our laws by the emperor Trajan, who, by, frequent victories crushed the arrogance of its inhabitants when he was waging glorious war with Media and the Parthians".

3. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, as has been seen, the annexation of Nabataea by the Romans in 106 A.D. was not bloodless as many scholars may think. In addition to the inscriptions mentioned above, which shows clearly the resistance of the Nabataeans, archaeological excavations may show the same thing. The Roman ballista discovered in Petra, one may say, was used to bombard the Great Temple and some building in the Nabataean capital in 106 A.D. In 'Avdat, for example, the temple and some other public buildings were burnt at the beginning of the 2nd century A.D.

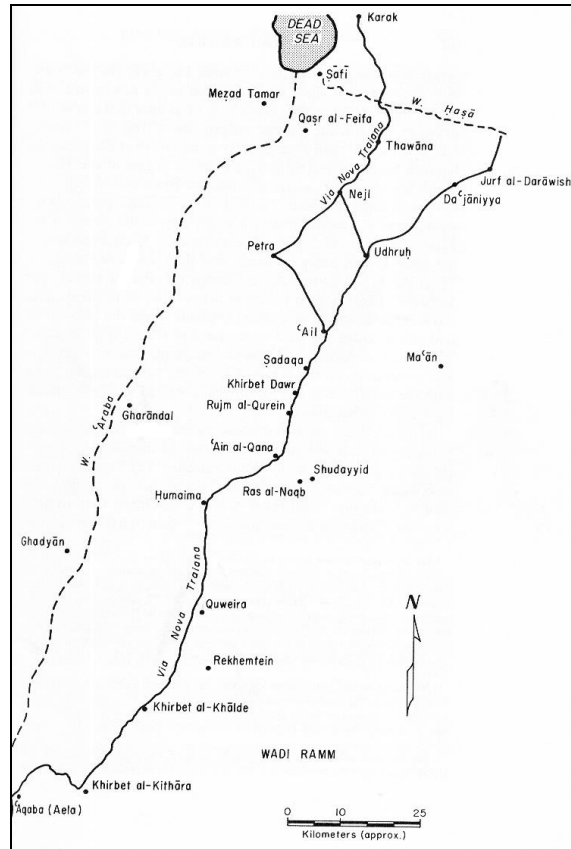
² Similar cases are seen in Nafaitic inscriptions. just as the Nafaites dated by šnt ngy qsr hmd (the year Caesar expelled the Persians) (see Abbadi, 1996: 21, no. 88).

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Map 1: The map of *Provincia Arabia* (Bowersock, 1983: 93)



Fig. 1: The emperor Trajan stamping down Armenia (Hannestad, 1979)



Fig. 2: Here the ballista is drawn by mules during the Roman preparation of a fortified enclosure during the Dacian war (Coarelli, 2000: 115). The picture is taken from Trajan's Column

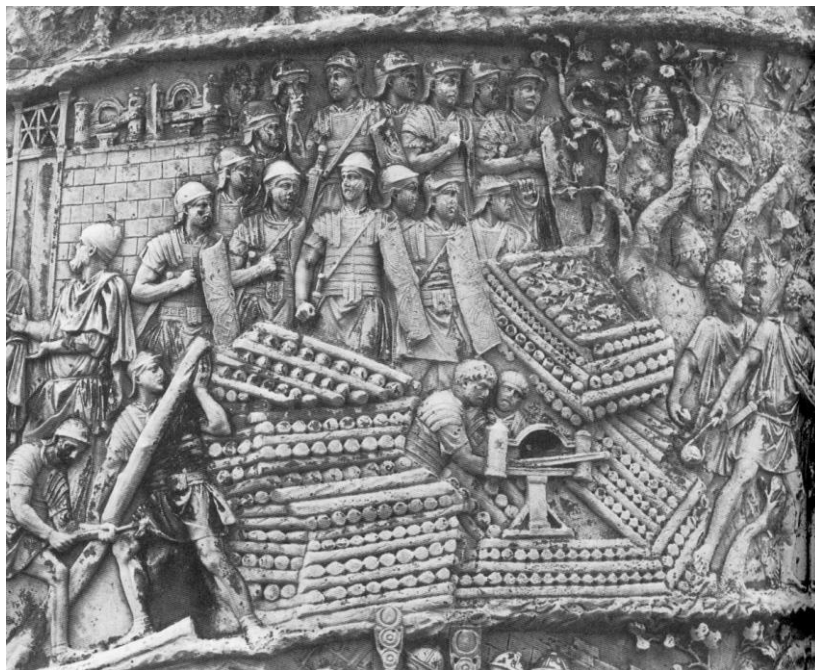


Fig. 3: Here the enclosure is armed with ballista while beyond it the Roman army is waiting the order to start their assault (Coarelli, 2000: 116). The picture is taken from Trajan's Column