

SYRIA UNDER VESPASIAN

By G. W. BOWERSOCK

The history of Syria and Transjordan during the period immediately after the close of the Jewish War is obscure. Yet scattered hints in the sources together with the random evidence of epigraphy and numismatics imply policies and developments of some moment. These may be presumed to have a bearing upon the annexation of Arabia by Trajan. The present investigation emphasizes the land which lies to the east of the great depression which runs from north to south along the River Orontes, the Lebanese Beqa', and the River Jordan. When the literary texts are brought into conjunction with the evidence on and from the ground, some progress can be made.

Josephus has left us a detailed account of the Jewish War of Vespasian. This emperor's knowledge of the Near East was superior to that of all his predecessors on the throne of the Caesars. Apart from Augustus' and Tiberius' visit in 20 B.C. none had ever seen the Levant. Policy was made at a distance and administered when necessary by persons specially empowered, an Agrippa or a Germanicus. In the prosecution of the war against the Jews Vespasian had the valuable assistance of an able commander from Italica in southern Spain, M. Ulpius Traianus, father of the future emperor Trajan. The elder Trajan, whom we may call Traianus to avoid confusion, served with distinction on the east bank of the Jordan and returned across the river to join with Vespasian at Jericho.¹ His signal successes brought him a suffect consulate probably in June or July of the year A.D. 70, before Vespasian had completed the first full year of his reign.² Like the emperor, Traianus had an intimate knowledge of the Near East.

This background leads reasonably to a number of suppositions. Vespasian's acquaintance with Palestine and surrounding regions should have provided the basis for an informed policy in respect to the provinces of the area. He might have been expected to rely upon a man like Traianus, whose service in the East he had conspicuously recognized. The inscriptions confirm suppositions of this kind. They show Traianus to have been legate of Syria before becoming proconsul of Asia, holding both posts naturally subsequent to his consulate. A text from Laodicea on the Lycus fixes him as Asian proconsul in 79/80.³ In 1932 Henri Seyrig republished, with new readings, a famous milestone from Arak in Syria, to the northeast of Palmyra. This stone, originally read by Mouterde a few years earlier, reveals Traianus as governor supervising the construction of a road to Sura on the upper Euphrates by way of Tayyibe and Resafa.⁴ Seyrig demonstrated that the date of the inscription was exactly A.D. 75. It can now be correlated with an inscription from Antioch reported in 1951 by Louis Robert in which Traianus is shown to have been governor of Syria in 73/74.⁵ A coin, also from Antioch, mentions Traianus as still governor during a year of the local era which corresponds to October 76-October 77.⁶ It is certain, therefore, that Traianus was legate of Syria between 73/74 and 76/77. He appears to have taken over the post from P. Marius Celsus, whose term in Syria was brief (we do not know why) in succession to L. Caesennius Paetus, documented as still governor in 72.⁷ L. Ceionius Commodus, consul ordinarius in 78, was presumably Traianus' successor, beginning his term immediately upon completion of his consulate, therefore in 78/79.⁸ Traianus' substantial term as governor of Syria may therefore be given as 73/74 to 77/78.

¹ Legate of X Fretensis: Jos., *BJ* 3, 289 ff., 458, 485; 4, 450.

² cf. J. Morris, *JRS* 43 (1953), 79; R. Syme, *JRS* 43 (1953), 154 and *Tacitus* (1958), 30, n. 2.

³ *IGR* 4, 845.

⁴ H. Seyrig, *Syria* 13 (1932), 266 ff. = *AE* 1933, 205, improving on P. Mouterde, *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* xv, 6 (1930), 232-3.

⁵ L. Robert, *CRAI* 1951, 255.

⁶ *BMC Syria*, p. 180, no. 239. Cf. W. Eck, *Senatoren von Vespasian bis Hadrian* (1970), p. 123, n. 51.

⁷ Celsus: *AE* 1907, 193; Paetus: Jos., *BJ* 7, 59. Cf.

Eck, *op. cit.* (n. 6), pp. 115 and 117.

⁸ C. B. Welles and C. H. Kraeling, *Gerasa: City of the Decapolis* (1938), pp. 397-8, n. 50, discussed below; *BMC Galatia*, p. 272, no. 31. Cf. *PIR*², C 603; also Eck, *op. cit.* (n. 6), p. 125, n. 61: 'Er dürfte wohl der unmittelbare Nachfolger des M. Ulpius Traianus in Syrien sein'. It is theoretically possible that an unknown governor succeeded Traianus in 77 and that Commodus did not arrive until 79, but this would not be the most plausible interpretation of the present evidence.

It is regrettable that Fulvio Grosso, when publishing in 1957 an elaborate hypothesis about Traianus' activities as governor of Syria, was unaware of the Antioch inscription noticed in 1951 and failed to consider the date of Commodus' succession. Accordingly, his hypothesis need not detain us; indeed, it is implausible on its own terms, inasmuch as its principal evidence is a passage in the *Suda* which refers explicitly to the emperor Trajan, not his father.⁹

Traianus' relatively swift return to the Near East after his consulate, the length of his term as governor, and the construction of the road to the Euphrates all attest a mission of significance. So too do the words of the younger Pliny in his Panegyric to the emperor Trajan: the emperor's father is there said to have received the *ornamenta triumphalia* for his service in Syria.¹⁰ Pliny mentions a Parthian laurel (*Parthica laurus*). It appears incidentally that Traianus' son, the future emperor, was military tribune in the East with his father.¹¹

The juxtaposition of this evidence suggests events and policies of considerable significance in Syria. The Parthians had been a constant problem for the Roman administration, and it would not be surprising to find them causing further concern. The operations of Traianus have to be seen against the panorama of changes which Vespasian launched in the East. Early in his reign Lesser Armenia was annexed, and Cappadocia was transformed into a consular province equipped with two legions—an important upgrading of the province that faced Armenia.¹² Sir Ronald Syme has made the very attractive proposal that the man in charge of organizing the new Cappadocian complex was none other than Traianus during the two years or so just after his consulate.¹³ This would eliminate altogether the gap between Traianus' consulate and his return to the East.

An inscription from the architrave of the Nymphaeum at Miletus can be plausibly supplemented to accommodate Syme's idea. The text which Dessau published as *ILS* 8970 was superseded in 1919 by his revised text in the *Milet* volumes edited by Wiegand.¹⁴ Dessau's version is as follows:

[M. Ulp]ium Traianum cos., lega[tum d]ivi Vespas[iani et imp. Titi C]aesa[r]is divi Vespasia[ni] f. Vespas[iani Aug. provinciae . . .] et provinciae Syriae, procos. Asiae et Hispaniae B[a]eticae, XV vir[um s. f., soda]lem Flavialem, triumphalibus ornamentis ex s. c.

The accusative case instead of the dative is evidently due to the influence of Greek epigraphic usage. Before *et provinciae Syriae*, Syme would insert a reference to Cappadocia. This suggestion can stand, but it is worth observing that Dessau's restoration is still unsatisfactory. Despite the irregular ordering of posts in this inscription, Traianus could not have been described as legate of Vespasian *and Titus* in two provinces in which his service was entirely under Vespasian. Geza Alföldy notes this difficulty but claims that it is obviously due to the fact that the inscription was put up under Titus (i.e. when Traianus was governor of Asia).¹⁵ In fact, as Dessau pointed out, the inscription must be dated to the reign of the emperor Trajan and is part of a commemoration of father and son.¹⁶ Christian Habicht once suggested to me that there may be a reference to a legionary legateship. Perhaps, therefore, Traianus' joint legateship of Vespasian and Titus should be his command in the Jewish War. For

⁹F. Grosso, 'M. Ulpio Traiano, governatore di Siria', *Rend. Instit. Lombardo* (1957), 318-342. The Antioch inscription was also missed by M. Durry, 'Sur Trajan père', *Les empereurs romains d'Espagne* (1965), p. 45 ff.

¹⁰Pliny, *Panegyric*, 16, 1.

¹¹op. cit. (n. 10), 14, 1.

¹²For Lesser Armenia, see F. Cumont, 'L'annexion du Pont Polémoniaque et de la Petite Arménie', *Anatolian Studies pres. to Ramsay* (1923), 109 ff. Cappadocia: Suetonius, *Vesp.* 8, 4.

¹³Syme, *Tacitus* (1958), p. 31, n. 1.

¹⁴*Milet* i, 5 (1919), p. 53 (where the reading of the first fragment should be corrected to IVM, etc.). I am

very grateful to Peter Herrmann for sending me squeezes of this inscription. Like Dessau, I cannot place the fragment ΠΙΘ (or ΠΙΘ), but [VL]ΠΙΘ suggests itself.

¹⁵G. Alföldy, *Fasti Hispanienses* (1969), p. 157 with n. 49: 'Der Irrtum ergab sich offenbar dadurch, dass die Inschrift unter Titus gesetzt wurde'. Alföldy prints Dessau's *ILS* text and follows Hanslik (P-W Suppl. x, 1033) in wrongly reporting Syme's proposal as a governorship of a praetorian (*sic*) province such as Cappadocia-Galatia in 69/70.

¹⁶cf. Dessau, op. cit. (n. 14). The Trajanic date of the Nymphaeum inscription was properly recognized by Durry, op. cit. (n. 9), p. 48.

his service with Titus, see Josephus, *BJ* iii, 298-300, 485. A more acceptable interpretation of the fragments of this inscription may be hazarded:

[M. Ulp]ium Traianum cos., lega[tum d]ivi Vespas[iani et divi Titi C]aesa[r]is divi Vespasia[ni] f. Vespa[siani] bello Iudaico, legatum divi Vespasiani provinciae Cappadociae] et provinciae Syriae, procos. Asiae et Hispaniae B[a]eticae, XV vir[um s. f., soda]lem Flavialem, triumphalibus ornamentis ex s. c.

To return to events along the Euphrates: in 72, allegedly on receipt of a report that Antiochus, the king of Commagene, was about to join forces with Vologaeses, the king of Parthia, Caesennius Paetus, governor of Syria and kinsman of Vespasian, promptly annexed Antiochus' realm to the empire of Rome.¹⁷ Commagene lay south of Cappadocia and, like it, had the upper Euphrates as its eastern frontier.¹⁸ The city of Samosata, at the crossing of the river, became Flavia Samosata, to become the headquarters of the XVI Flavia legion. The subjugation of Commagene, the annexation of Lesser Armenia, and the strengthening of Cappadocia are manifestly parts of a single policy of establishing firm Roman control west of the Euphrates.

Traianus was already in Syria in the year after Paetus, whose immediate successor, Marius Celsus, vanished from the province, as we have seen, soon after his arrival. The arrangements to the north, in Commagene and Cappadocia, were by then secured; and Traianus devoted himself to his new province. The triumphal decorations for the Syrian command and the Parthian laurel, both of which the younger Pliny mentions, imply some degree of military confrontation with the Parthians. It is, however, impossible to deduce from this testimony just how serious the confrontation was, for Pliny was writing a panegyric and Vespasian was honouring a favourite commander. Suetonius records the prospect of an eastern campaign on which the young Domitian hankered to go; that may be an allusion to a request which, according to Cassius Dio, the Parthian king issued in about 75 for help against the Alani.¹⁹ Vespasian refused, and it has been imagined that the indignant king launched an abortive attack on the Romans.²⁰ But this does not seem very likely if he was genuinely threatened at the time by the Alani. One should possibly look a year or two earlier for Traianus' exploits, in the aftermath of Paetus' removal of Antiochus.²¹ It is much easier to assume that the sudden disappearance of Marius Celsus soon after taking office was caused by troubles which Traianus then quelled. In any event, the securing of the Euphrates frontier and the construction of a road to Sura are clearly attested. Traianus was strengthening the condition of Syria.²²

It becomes legitimate, in the light of all this, to ask what impact the eastern policy of Vespasian and the activity of the elder Traianus during his long governorship of Syria had upon the major cities of the interior. Important evidence has come to light at Palmyra, Gerasa, and Bostra. Although already available, some is very recent, in need of correlation and, sometimes, re-interpretation.

Let us begin with Palmyra. The elder Pliny wrote as if the city were not a part of the Roman Empire: *privata sorte inter duo imperia summa Romanorum Parthorumque*, a private buffer state between the empires of Rome and Parthia.²³ Yet here, as so often, Pliny cannot be assumed to be speaking of his own time; he is reproducing

¹⁷ Jos., *BJ* 7, 219 ff.

¹⁸ On this frontier see Strabo, C 748-9. For the problems of Nero's policy and Corbulo's regard for the Euphrates as the frontier, see the excellent book of Mario Pani, *Roma e i re d'oriente da Augusto a Tiberio* (1972), pp. 222 ff., especially 226.

¹⁹ Domitian: Suet., *Dom.* 2, 2. Vologaeses' request: Dio 66, 15, 3.

²⁰ E. Paribeni, *Optimus Princeps* i (1936), p. 73.

²¹ Note two irreconcilable texts: Aur. Vict., *de Caes.* 9, 10, 'Ac bello rex Parthorum Vologaeses in pacem coactus est'; Anon., *Epit. de Caes.* 9, 12 'Rex Parthorum Vologaeses metu solo in pacem coactus est'. The two texts are manifestly related. The second is likely to contain the corruption: see the argument

below on an inscription from Jerash.

²² A new inscription from Palmyra contains a dedication θεῷ Σουρηνῶν δεϊκέω· ἔτους π'ε': Chr. Dunant, *Le sanctuaire de Ba'alshamīn à Palmyre*: vol. III, Les inscriptions (Institut suisse de Rome, 1971), pp. 42-3, no. 30. She suggests that this is the god of Sura. The date omits, as often at Palmyra, the hundred digit: it is either (3)85=73/74 or (4)85=173/74. The editor, it is true, opts for the later date, 'en raison de l'aspect général de la pierre et de l'inscription', but the date of 73/74 is attractive when one thinks of the road to Sura at about that time and the fact that this deity is not otherwise known at Palmyra.

²³ Pliny, *NH* 5, 88.

without personal comment an earlier source, presumably Augustan.²⁴ Such is the way many ancient scholars worked, with only an intermittent regard for their own times and, on occasion, their own observations. It cannot be claimed, as it sometimes is, that the elder Pliny had any special knowledge of Vespasianic Syria because of service in that province, since Mommsen's celebrated attribution to Pliny of a fragmentary inscription from Arad has been thoroughly and repeatedly discredited, notably by Hirschfeld, Münzer, Pflaum, and most recently Rey-Coquais.²⁵ That Pliny cannot be trusted concerning the Palmyra of his day is proven, as Seyrig has pointed out,²⁶ by several important inscriptions. One is a dedication of three statues in the Bēl temple by the legate of the X Fretensis legion to Tiberius, Germanicus, and Drusus—hence datable to Germanicus' tour of the East and not later than his death in A.D. 19.²⁷ With this can be compared another inscription recording the journey of a Palmyrene merchant to the kingdom at the head of the Persian Gulf expressly on the orders of Germanicus himself. The text, in its fragmentary state, also makes reference to Samsigeramus, the king of Emesa.²⁸ It is difficult not to see in these documents evidence of the incorporation of Palmyra into the provincial organization of Syria. There seems further to be some attempt to deal with trade from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean by way of Palmyra and Emesa. In A.D. 18 precisely, Tiberius had annexed the kingdom of Cappadocia as a province,²⁹ and it now looks as if Germanicus attended to connections with the lower Euphrates.

The protection of Rome appears to have given fresh impetus to the Palmyrenes as no doubt did the shifting trade patterns which led ultimately to the weakening of the southern Nabataean trading centres in this period.³⁰ The great temple of Bēl at Palmyra was dedicated, according to an inscription, in 32, and work on the colonnades in the precinct of the temple of Ba'alshamīn is dated to 23; by 67 a temple existed on that site, although the present one was not dedicated until the time of Hadrian.³¹ The bilingual inscription recording the customs tariff of Palmyra in the Hadrianic age contains in its dossier several valuable clues to the history of Palmyra before Vespasian.³² A long letter, composed (as Seyrig has proved) by C. Licinius Mucianus, governor of Syria in 68/69, is inscribed in both Palmyrene and Greek.³³ Mucianus there cites earlier documents, one by an unidentified governor called Marinus or Marianus (the vocalization is uncertain since the name exists only in Palmyrene) and one by Corbulo, who clearly had jurisdiction over Palmyra during his governorship of Syria.³⁴ Mucianus' detailed attention to the economy of Palmyra is especially notable, for he was perhaps the most influential of Vespasian's counsellors at the time of the accession.

Under Vespasian (as we have seen) Palmyra was linked to the Euphrates by way of Arak, Tayyibe, and Resāfa, and Traianus effected this through construction of the great road attested in 75. Within the city the earliest inscribed dates for the agora are 76 and 81.³⁵ It would seem, therefore, that this sector of the city was an early Flavian development. To connect the building of the market-place with the building of the road to the Euphrates would not be unreasonable. The stimulus of Traianus' activities for local enterprise will have been comparable to the stimulus of Germanicus' intervention. There is, however, no reason to assume that either Roman ordered the Palmyrenes to build. We can only be sure of some striking chronological coincidences

²⁴ cf., e.g., H. Seyrig, *Syria* 22 (1941), 168; D. Schlumberger, *L'orient hellénisé* (1970), p. 78.

²⁵ References to earlier scholars are collected in the admirable edition of the inscription by J.-P. Rey-Coquais, *Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie* vii (1970), pp. 36-39, no. 4011. Grosso, op. cit. (n. 9), follows Mommsen.

²⁶ op. cit. (n. 24).

²⁷ H. Seyrig, *Syria* 13 (1932), 267 = J. Cantineau, *Inventaire des inscriptions de Palmyre* ix, 2.

²⁸ J. Cantineau, *Syria* 12 (1931), 139: The merchant is named 'LKSNDRWS (Alexandros) in l. 1; Germanicus appears in l. 3 as GRMNQS and Samsigeramus in l. 6 as [ŠM]ŠGRM.

²⁹ Tac., *Ann.* 2, 42. Cf. Pani, op. cit. (n. 18).

³⁰ See G. W. Bowersock, *JRS* 61 (1971), 221-8.

³¹ Dedication of Temple of Bēl: J. Cantineau, *Syria* 14 (1933), 171 = *Inventaire* (n. 27) ix, 1. Ba'alshamīn colonnades: Dunant, op. cit. (n. 22), pp. 24-5, no. 10. Temple in 67: Dunant, op. cit. (n. 22), pp. 14-5, nos. 1A and 1B.

³² See the magisterial paper of H. Seyrig, 'Le statut de Palmyre', *Syria* 22 (1941), 155 ff.

³³ For the restoration of Mucianus' name as [MW]QYNS in the Palmyrene, see Seyrig, op. cit. (n. 32), p. 167.

³⁴ op. cit. (n. 32), p. 159.

³⁵ H. Seyrig, *CRAI* 1940, 240.

and infer that the Romans provided a situation conducive to urban growth on the part of the local citizens. And that may well have been exactly what Germanicus or Traianus had in mind.

Recent excavations along the Jebel Munṭār which dominates the spring of Palmyra have revealed some precious new facts. A shrine was constructed on the top of the hill and against a wall which runs up the side of the hill. This wall has towers at regular intervals, and one of these was actually incorporated into the shrine.³⁶ As van Berchem pointed out a few years ago, it is evident that the wall must have existed before the shrine.³⁷ Two inscriptions from the site have shown that the shrine was sacred to Bēl Ḥammōn and that it was dedicated in A.D. 89.³⁸ Therefore, the wall was built before that date. These inscriptions imply that the city plan of first-century Palmyra was substantially different from that of the late third century.³⁹ The wall on the Jebel Munṭār has to antedate A.D. 89 but must be later than 41 B.C. when Antony found Palmyra without walls and attacked it.⁴⁰

Van Berchem has argued that the early wall of Palmyra should be associated with the revival sparked by Germanicus in the reign of Tiberius.⁴¹ Yet our evidence for this revival and for subsequent Palmyrene activity under the Julio-Claudians gives no hint of military preparedness or concern. On the contrary, we know only of new temples and of increased trade. There is but one moment before 89 when Palmyra would seem to have been imperilled by a military operation, and that is the campaign (of whatever proportions) waged by Traianus sometime in the period of his governorship. It would accordingly be prudent to place the construction of Palmyra's early fortification wall in the reign of Vespasian. Possibly, when the danger passed, the wall was never completed; certainly one of the problems in studying it is that its circuit cannot be determined since traces elsewhere have not been found. Twelve or thirteen years after Traianus' military success the danger could easily have seemed sufficiently remote for the prospering Palmyrenes to choose the fine outlook of the Jebel Munṭār as a place for worship.

Van Berchem stressed the failure of the elder Pliny to mention the early wall at Palmyra,⁴² but this is of a piece with Pliny's citation of evidence half-a-century old and false in his day. Van Berchem also argued that the Hellenistic burial area in the precinct of Ba'alshamīn was closed between A.D. 11 and 23, consecrated to the god, and then duly included within the enclosure of the first wall—built, as he believes, about that time.⁴³ This will not do: the burial area was still in use as late as A.D. 57/58,⁴⁴ and in any case it is not known whether or not the wall included it. If it did, the date will have to be sometime after 57/58.⁴⁵ This is fully consistent with the Vespasianic date proposed here.

Gerasa, city of the Decapolis to the south, furnishes a useful parallel with Palmyra. The disposition of Pompey had included the incorporation of this city into the newly established province of Syria in 63 B.C.⁴⁶ Its subsequent history is obscure, but it appears to have followed a pattern of growth and increasing prosperity very similar to that of Palmyra. Inscriptions attest gifts from local magnates in the first half of the first century A.D. for the construction of a new temple of Zeus on the acropolis which overlooks the city's notorious oval forum. The earliest donation is dated to 22/23,⁴⁷ strikingly close to the earliest date for the work on the temple of Bēl at Palmyra. It is

³⁶ R. du Mesnil du Buisson, *CRAI* 1966, 170 ff., D. Van Berchem, *CRAI* 1970, 231 ff.

³⁷ Van Berchem, *op. cit.* (n. 36), 232.

³⁸ Du Mesnil, van Berchem, *op. cit.* (n. 36).

³⁹ For the later organization, see I. A. Richmond, *JRS* 53 (1963), 48. He, like von Gerkan whom he quotes, believed the early wall at Palmyra to be the siege-works of Aurelian and the massive later wall to be the town wall at the time of the siege. In favour of a Diocletianic date for the later wall: D. van Berchem, *Syria* 31 (1954), 256, and D. Schlumberger, *Mélanges de l'Université Saint Joseph* 38 (1962), 87 (in an article arguing that the so-called camp of Diocletian was Zenobia's palace).

⁴⁰ *App., Bell. Civ.* 5, 9, 37-8.

⁴¹ Van Berchem, *op. cit.* (n. 36), 235-7.

⁴² *op. cit.* (n. 36), 234.

⁴³ *op. cit.* (n. 36), 237.

⁴⁴ R. Fellmann, *Le sanctuaire de Ba'alshamīn à Palmyre*: vol. v, *Die Grabanlage* (Institut suisse de Rome, 1970), pp. 115-16. It is suggested that the cremation in grave no. 11 may be due to Roman influence: pp. 62-3, 123.

⁴⁵ Intensive work on the temple is attested for 67: Fellmann, *op. cit.* (n. 44), pp. 116-18, and note 31 above.

⁴⁶ See C. H. Kraeling, *op. cit.* (n. 8), p. 34.

⁴⁷ C. B. Welles *apud* Kraeling, *op. cit.* (n. 8), pp. 373-4, no. 2.

clear that the two temples were being built at the same time and through the munificence of local citizens of wealth. There is substantial evidence for strong Nabataean influence at Gerasa;⁴⁸ it would be natural to suppose that the local affluence which appeared in the reign of Tiberius was connected, at least in part, with the contemporary era of Nabataean prosperity under the king Aretas IV. We have already observed that the presence of Germanicus in the Near East served as a stimulus for development in Palmyra through the protection of its trade. The same is probably true of Gerasa and the northern interests of the Nabataeans.

The next major stage in the history of that city occurred under Vespasian. The city was planned afresh, and the old layout abandoned. The well known system of axial *cardo* and *decumanus* at Gerasa is clearly at variance with the orientation of the acropolis and forum; yet under the Julio-Claudians a temple to Zeus was being built on the acropolis still in harmony with the old plan of the city. The date of the new plan of Gerasa is generally agreed to have followed the construction of the Zeus temple, on which work was proceeding as late as 69.⁴⁹ The *terminus ante quem* for the new plan is firmly fixed by an inscription from the north-west gate of the city: this gate presupposes the completion of the orthogonal plan, and it is the only known gate which was not rebuilt later. The inscription is explicitly dated to the Syrian governorship of L. Ceionius Commodus, consul ordinarius in 78. His term lasted from that year until 81.⁵⁰ The new city plan of Gerasa was therefore being completed between 69 and about 80. There can be no doubt that this great new development belongs to the reign of Vespasian.

The inscription on the north-west gate of Gerasa poses some problems, however, and it seems prudent to deal with them before proceeding. The text is a composite of six fragments, one of which is now missing. C. B. Welles' text is as follows:

[?E]τους ηλρ'. Ὑπ[έ]ρ τῆς τῶν Σεβαστῶν σ[ω]τηρίας -- 15 --
 [.]ΠΑΙΑΝΗΣ τῆ[ν] ἱερὰν πύλην οἱ τ[ῆ]ς Ἄρ[τε]μιδος -- 15 --
 [ἐκ τ]ῶν ἰδίων ἀν[έ]θηκον κα[τ'] εὐ[χ]ὴν ---- 28 ----
 [ἐπὶ Λ(ουκίου) Κ]ειωνίου Κομμ[ό]δου πρε[σ]βευτοῦ Σεβαστ[οῦ] ἀντ[ισ]τρατήγου]

The fragment]ου ἀντ[ισ] makes it certain that Ceionius Commodus is mentioned here as *legatus Augusti pro praetore*; and as he was consul in A.D. 78, his governorship could not begin before that year. Yet the date in the first line according to the Gerasene era works out at 75/76. Either (1) it is an error, (2) it indicates the beginning of work not completed until 78 or after, or (3) Gerasa at the time no longer belonged to Syria but to a province with a praetorian legate as governor (i.e. Judaea). The third possibility, a bold hypothesis of Syme,⁵¹ omits consideration of line 2. The beginning of that line, wrote Welles, 'suggests no convincing interpretation'.⁵² Yet, with only one letter missing, it must be restored [Τ]ραϊανῆς. There is no other way. It will be a genitive in the sequence after ὑπέρ in line 1. Now inspection of either Welles' drawing or of the photographs reveals clearly that in indicating the approximate number of missing letters at the end of each of the first three lines Welles has inadvertently given the total for the lacuna including the letters of his own supplements. Thus in line 1 after σ[ω]τηρίας there is space for only about eight letters, not fifteen. This does not give much scope in restoration; for the next word after σωτηρίας must be καί. Finally, then, a word of some five letters: restore νίκης in a *pro salute et victoria* formula. There emerges a νίκη Τραϊανῆ, and this we may presume to be the success which warranted the *Parthica laurus* of Traianus.⁵³ Such a tribute to Traianus makes the hypothesis of Gerasa in Judaea virtually untenable. The conflict in dates on the inscription will have to be explained according to alternatives 1 or 2; of these 1 is possibly preferable.

⁴⁸ C. H. Kraeling, pp. 36-9, 'Nabataean influence'. See also n. 54 below.

⁴⁹ C. B. Welles *apud* Kraeling, pp. 375-6, no. 5.

⁵⁰ C. B. Welles *apud* Kraeling, pp. 397-8, no. 50. For the duration of Commodus' governorship, see Eck, *op. cit.* (n. 6), pp. 130-1.

⁵¹ R. Syme, *Athenaeum* 35 (1957), 312. I am grateful for a discussion of this point with him when I presented my views to the Columbia University

Seminar on Classical Civilization on 19 October, 1972.

⁵² C. B. Welles *apud* Kraeling, p. 398.

⁵³ cf. n. 11 above and also n. 21. For a comparable text mentioning the emperor's *salus* and a governor's *victoria*, cf. *ILS* 2486 (Mena'a in Algeria): [pro] salute im[pe]ratorum L. [S]eptimi Severi [Pe]rtinacis Aug. [et] M. Aureli Antoni[ni] Aug. [et] P. Septimi Getae] totiusque domus divinae et victoria -i Cens[i]ti leg. Aug. pr. pr. cos. desig.

The new city plan was, moreover, not all that transformed Gerasa at this time. A great fortification wall was begun at about the same time.⁵⁴ This circumvallation depends upon the axial system of streets and cannot therefore antedate it. The north-west gate constituted an exit through the fortification wall and therefore presupposes it. Thus the new Gerasene fortifications are firmly dated. We are again reminded of Palmyra, where—it was argued previously—a fortification wall was started in the same period. Is all of this accidental?

To the north-east of Gerasa, on the edge of the lava fields of the Jebel Drūz, lay another Syrian city, destined for eminence. This was Bostra, the modern village of Boṣrā eski Shām. The site had been of no great importance and was not actually a part of the Syrian province. It was one of the northern cities of the Nabataean kingdom, but it had naturally never been a match for the incomparable Petra, which lay directly on the caravan route up from Saudi Arabia. Yet during the reign of Rabbel II Bostra and the whole northern extremity of the kingdom begin to show unprecedented vigour and prosperity. Rabbel II ruled from 71-106 as the last of the Nabataean kings. On inscriptions he is named with the phrase 'who brought life and deliverance to his people'.⁵⁵ There has been considerable speculation as to what is implied by this phrase; it may possibly allude to recovery from devastation wrought by hostile nomads. In any case not only did Rabbel enjoy the reputation of a saviour of his people: he presided over the rise of Bostra and the northern kingdom as a focus for Nabataean civilization. The most impressive free-standing Roman monument in Bostra today, the massive arch through which one enters the western end of the modern village, and the triple arch on the cardo were both probably erected in the reign of the second Rabbel. Epigraphical attestations of this king are conspicuous in this north-east corner of the Nabataean kingdom, on the edge of Syria.⁵⁶

The shift of balance in the Nabataean kingdom under Rabbel II from Petra to Bostra was due to the gradual shift in Nabataean trade patterns as a result of the obsolescence of the old land route through Petra. With the help of the monsoons it appears that more and more eastern trade went directly to the coast of East Africa and then directly up to Alexandria. With this development coincides the marked increase in Nabataean sedentarization; the settling of the Nabataeans in the Negev and Transjordan made them of course, all the more vulnerable to marauding nomads from the desert. But they did not become impoverished, as the prosperity under Rabbel proves. It is extremely likely that many Nabataeans continued actively in trade through the interior desert routes that were not in competition with the Red Sea trade. Bostra stood at the head of the great desert route from central Saudi Arabia, the Wādī Sirhān; and I have argued elsewhere that this fact helps to explain the new importance of the city during the Roman Empire.⁵⁷ It was also very close to Syria. In 106 when the Nabataean kingdom was annexed to the Empire as the province of Arabia, Bostra became the provincial capital.

The transference of the Nabataean centre of gravity to the Syrian border was

⁵⁴ Kraeling, p. 42 (where the account of the north-west gate, however, has to be corrected). It should be noted here that the Nabataean community was apparently engaged in some kind of growth at about this time, to judge from the bilingual inscription (Greek and Nabataean) which is no. 1 in Welles' corpus *apud* Kraeling, pp. 371-3. J. T. Milik has proposed a new text of the Nabataean half for publication in the *CIS*, and he has generously allowed me to quote from it. It is a huge improvement on the clearly inadequate text of Vincent and Sauvignac published by Welles. Milik rejects the reading ḤRTT in line 3 of the Nabataean (= line 12 of the whole), but he sees a date in the final line (7 = 16) most of which can be read in the published photograph: 'ŠRYN WHD BSYWN ŠNT 'ŠR WHD[H], i.e. 21 Siwan, year 11 of Rabbel (mentioned in the preceding line) = June, A.D. 81. Milik has also read a reference to measurements in line 4 = 13 which at last makes a correlation with indications of direction in the Greek: the subject is the delimitation of a

sacred area.

⁵⁵ See, e.g., J. Cantineau, *Le Nabatéen* (1932) ii, p. 22, no. 10: DY 'HY Y WŠYZB 'MH. Cf. Bowersock, *op. cit.* (n. 30), 223.

⁵⁶ Note that the triple arch at Bostra has Nabataean capitals: See J. Starcky, *IX Congrès international d'archéologie classique* (Damascus, 1969), p. 27 = *Die Nabatäer*, Catalogue Munich Stadtmuseum 1970, p. 83. Cf. Haurān inscriptions of Rabbel II, e.g., in Cantineau, *op. cit.* (n. 55), pp. 19-23, nos. 8-10; also n. 54 above (Gerasa).

⁵⁷ Bowersock, *op. cit.* (n. 30), 221-2, 241-2. Prof. Maḥmūd Ghūl, of the American University of Beirut, communicated to an international symposium at Harvard University (17 December 1972) a new Latin inscription from the oasis at al-Jawf. It is a dedication by a centurion of III Cyrenaica. This proves that the Romans, like the Nabataeans, exploited the Wādī Sirhān.

clearly the work of Rabbel II, but it can be no accident that it occurred in the period in which the two other main interior cities of the Syrian desert (or steppe) experienced remarkable progress and development. The rise of Bostra cannot be dated exactly for want of requisite evidence, but it will be noted that Rabbel became king about one year after Vespasian became emperor, and that the epithet he soon acquired attests energy and achievement in the early years of his rule. Rabbel would hardly have been the first client king to identify Roman interests with his own. The initiative for the development of the northern Nabataean kingdom may well have been a part of the Roman stimulus to inner Syria. Someone, Vespasian or perhaps Traianus, may already have envisaged an Arabian province with its headquarters at Bostra.

The fortunes of Palmyra, Gerasa, and Bostra under Vespasian complement each other and imply systematic development of these cities. The work was done, according to the best traditions of Roman imperial government, by the local magnates—wealthy merchants or a king; but the coincidence and coherence of what was done show a larger plan. This was the broad design which also included the annexation of Commagene and the transformation of Cappadocia into a consular province.

Another element in this plan was undoubtedly the termination of the independent dynasty at Emesa, which came to an end precisely between 72, when the last ruler is attested, and 78 when a tomb of the house of Samsigeramus bears witness to the fact that the family had ceased to rule although it continued to exist. Schlumberger and Seyrig have both emphasized that an old argument for dating the incorporation of Emesa into the reign of Domitian is without foundation.⁵⁸ The fate of this city under Vespasian was due to one fact: it occupied the vital position where the road from Palmyra passed through a gap in the mountains to the sea.

Vespasian, with his knowledge of the Near East, was capable of working out the plan of Roman action and initiatives in that region. Yet he conspicuously entrusted the area to Traianus, who (if Syme is right) also organized Cappadocia before moving into Syria. It is probably more realistic to assume that with the emperor's confidence Traianus himself planned for the future of the East and supplied suitable stimuli to the local people in the form of military protection, roads, and advice. The road at Arak, the agora and wall at Palmyra, the new city plan and the wall at Gerasa, the arches at Bostra: all of these, virtually contemporaneous, cohere perfectly in time and purpose. Traianus may have been the genius behind them; the military threat from the Parthians, whatever its nature, he seems to have dealt with effectively. Only one thing remained to be done, but the time was not ripe in Traianus' day: that was the annexation of Arabia. In creating the province of Syria a century before, Pompey must have pondered what to do with Transjordan to the south; but Petra was a long way off and, as M. Aemilius Scaurus discovered and Pompey nearly did, impregnable.⁵⁹ The overall situation was different in Traianus' time; and, it can be argued, he encouraged the difference. Arabia was annexed in 106 with Bostra as capital. The emperor who was then responsible was Trajan, the son of Traianus; he, it will be recalled, had served with his father in Syria in the reign of Vespasian. It would not be unreasonable to suspect that much of the emperor Trajan's eastern policy had its origin in those early years in Syria.

Rome neither ignored her provincial cities nor ran them. What she could do and did was to provide initiative and coordination over a large area. In the case of Syria under Vespasian the dominating figure was the father of Trajan. Sir Ronald Syme, with his extraordinary ability to divine the truth about a situation, published fifteen years ago a passing remark which can now be verified: 'Traianus may have been Vespasian's principal agent in the ordering of the whole frontier and its defences, from the Armenian mountains to the desert of Arabia'.⁶⁰

Harvard University

⁵⁸ D. Schlumberger, *Syria* 20 (1939), 57, n. 1; H. Seyrig, *Syria* 29 (1952), 234, n. 1. Cf. Rey-Coquais, op. cit. (n. 25), p. 116, no. 2217: Emesa attached to the province of Syria 'peu avant 78'.

⁵⁹ cf. Bowersock, op. cit. (n. 30), 223; Jos., *AJ* 14,

46 ff.

⁶⁰ Syme, op. cit. (n. 13), p. 31. An abbreviated version of this paper was read in Munich to the Sixth International Congress for Greek and Latin Epigraphy on 19 September 1972.