

# Romans in the Egyptian desert : from desert space to Roman place

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### III

GARY REGER

## ROMANS IN THE EGYPTIAN DESERT

FROM DESERT SPACE TO ROMAN PLACE

### 1. Into the desert

In March and April, 118 CE, urgent and terrifying reports spread throughout the Roman forts of the Eastern Desert in Egypt: a band of “barbarians” was roaming through the desert, attacking the little garrisons and wreaking havoc. The reports are preserved on a long but in places very fragmentary compilation of seven letters and circulars dealing with the crisis. Two are complete enough to allow more or less continuous translation:

“Copy of the *diploma*. To the prefects (*eparchoi*), centurions, decurions, *duplicarii*, curators of the forts of the Myos Hormos road, Cassius Victor, centurion of the Second Cohort of the Iturians, greetings. I have attached below a copy of the *diploma* sent to me at Paremboule on the 19th ... of the present month Phamenot [= 9 March] by Antonius Celer, cavalryman of the century of Proclus [*unresolvable letters*] to the fort Patkoua so that you know that some occurrence may happen to you. Year 2 of the Emperor Trajan Hadrian Augustus, Phamenot 19th. Copy of the *diploma*. Cassius Victor to the centurion of the Second Cohort of the Iturians, Antonius Celer, cavalryman of the same cohort, greetings. I want you to know that on the 17th of the present month of Phamenot 60 barbarians came to the fort Patkoua with whom I fought along with my fellow soldiers from the 10th hour to the second of the night. They also invested the fort up to the morning. Killed on this day was Hermogenes, a soldier of the century

of Serenus, and a woman was taken captive with two children, and one child was killed. When morning came on the 18th - - - of the month, we fought against them and - - - Damanais the cavalryman of the century of your Victor and his horse [were killed?]. Wounded was also Valerius Ferm - - - - with his horse too.”

“Copy of the *diploma*. Arountis Agrippinos to the curators of the forts of the Myos Hormos road, greetings. It has been reported to me that a *sphendrillon* [σφένδριλλον] - - - of the name has disappeared from - - - - (*I omit here several fragmentary lines*) to make this apparent to you I have been zealous that you take greater care of your own matters - - - - and if any people from Koptos should convey supplies under my signature, you should provide greater security for these caravans (παραπομπᾶς) so that the barbarians make no move to do anything evil. Send this letter of mine from fort to fort, bringing it up to Myos Hormos as quickly as possible, and if you learn anything more definite immediately act to make it known to me. I pray that you are well. Phamenot 30th.”<sup>1</sup>

This remarkable document belongs to a series of texts recording encounters in the Eastern (Arabian) Desert of Roman Egypt between Roman troops and “barbarians”.<sup>2</sup> It attests to the sometimes fragile security of the desert routes that led from the Nile valley to the ports of the Red Sea, most notably Myos Hormos and Berenike (Pl. 3.1). When the Romans took control of Egypt after the defeat of Marcus Antonius and Kleopatra VII, they inherited a long tradition, going all the way back to the Old Kingdom, of activity in the Eastern Desert, including mining, quarrying, and transport of commercial and military goods between the Red Sea and the Nile.<sup>3</sup> But this space was, in many ways, an especially hostile one: extremely arid, remote, sparsely

<sup>1</sup> *O. Krok.* 1, 87, 14-42 and 89-105, with the commentary at CUVIGNY (2005b) 135-154. Translations throughout are my own unless otherwise noted. For a general introduction to the Eastern Desert in Roman times, see GATES-FOSTER (2012a). See BRUN (2002), (2003), (2015), and (2016) for overviews of the desert routes and their infrastructure.

<sup>2</sup> For a list and discussion see CUVIGNY (2014) 194-197.

<sup>3</sup> For Egyptian exploitation of the Eastern Desert, see KLEEM / KLEMM / MURR (2002); HARRELL (2002); SHAW (2002). For the amethyst mine at Abu Diyeiba, see HARRELL *et al.* (2007).

populated, and dangerous. Romans already had experience of other desert spaces and so the Eastern Desert did not present a wholly new and unique world to the Romans. Indeed, Greek and Roman geographic and ethnographic thought already had a plethora of tropes about desert spaces and desert peoples, which they deployed eagerly to the Eastern Desert. These tropes emphasized the strangeness of the desert world (a subset of the “edges of the world” where things were always, in Graeco-Roman conceptualization, strange indeed).<sup>4</sup> At the same time, the physical realities of the desert were strikingly different from the wetter and milder Mediterranean space the Romans came from, and while I would not want to trivialize the differences between the Italian heartland and other non-desert fringe spaces the Romans conquered, this harsh world of stark aridity and (apparent) agricultural sterility must have contrasted strongly with ordinary Romans’ ideas of a livable landscape and intellectual notions about the order of civilized life that placed agriculture at the pinnacle.<sup>5</sup> How did the Romans come to terms with this desert? How, in other words, and to what extent, did this desert space become a Roman place?

In what follows, I would like to examine some ways in which the Romans reconfigured the space of the Eastern Desert into a ‘place’ more familiar and more comfortable: to explore how they ‘normalized’ the desert.<sup>6</sup> I would contend that this process formed a crucial component of exercising control over the desert. Imperial control over space where almost everything is strange and foreign, from the climate to the people, entails in part, I would suggest, shaping a psychological space where occupation by the imperial power’s representatives feels right — they ‘belong’ there, and so the right to exercise power and authority is bolstered and justified. I do not claim space-making in this

<sup>4</sup> See ROMM (1992).

<sup>5</sup> ADAMS (2007b).

<sup>6</sup> Anthropologists often use “place-making” to capture this idea; see NOTAR (2008) 616, 622.



sense must be a conscious process; for the ordinary Romans, soldiers, traders, businessmen, who lived in or passed through the Eastern Desert, it was surely more a matter of feeling as much at ease as possible. But the larger effect, I suggest, played a role in imperial power, and so is worth exploring not only for its own sake, but also as a model or instance of the working-out of imperial authority in the larger Roman Empire.

## 2. The indigenous population: from headless barbarians to allies on the dole

In his circular quoted above Antonius calls his opponents simply “barbarians”; he was apparently unable to provide — or uninterested in providing — a more precise identification.<sup>7</sup> Roman officials could be more specific. A few years later in 122/3 CE Sulpicius Serenus, *praefectus Augusti*, erected an altar to Zeus in the Wadi al-Hammamat boasting that he had “pursued for two days the most iniquitous Agriophagi, the greater part of whom died in battle ... and carried away the booty on camels”.<sup>8</sup> The Agriophagi — “eaters of wild animals” — are one of several ethnic groups named in our sources as inhabiting the Eastern Desert.<sup>9</sup> Strabo, who visited the new province of Egypt in 26/5 BCE,<sup>10</sup> wrote of increased commerce on the Red Sea and the movement of caravans across the desert. He remarked on the peacefulness of the country as a whole and, of the desert inhabitants, the Blemmyes, Nubai, Trogodytai, and Megabaroï, that “these people are nomads and neither many nor bellicose,

<sup>7</sup> The *PME* 2 also speaks of inner desert “barbarians” along with the named Ichthyphagoi, Agriophagoi, and Moschophagoi. On “Arabians”, POWER (2007).

<sup>8</sup> *I. Pan* 87, 4-5 (*IGRR* I/II 1207) with CUVIGNY (2003b) 349 (date) and BÜLOW-JACOBSEN / CUVIGNY (2007) for Sulpicius; see also *O. Did.* 27 and the commentary there.

<sup>9</sup> On the problem of matching attested groups to archaeologically known populations, see BARNARD (2009a), and (2009b); on onomastics, SATZINGER (2014).

<sup>10</sup> See YOYOTTE (1997).

although they seemed so to the ancients because they often attacked as bandits the unguarded" (17, 1, 53).<sup>11</sup> The sense that the desert was not especially dangerous in the first half of the first century CE may find confirmation in the evidence about the infrastructure of those decades, for most installations in the Julio-Claudian and Flavian periods were unfortified wells, *hydreumata*; only under Vespasian, in 76/7 CE, was a major effort undertaken to begin to provide the desert routes with the fortified *praesidia* that dotted them down into the mid-third century or so.<sup>12</sup>

Greek ethnography had sketched a vivid picture of these Eastern Desert "barbarians" long before Aelius Aristides condemned them as "evil-minded" for their resistance to Roman peace-making.<sup>13</sup> Their strange habits and strange bodies fit into the generally hierarchical views of Greek theorists about the development of human cultures and civilization; the poles are represented by the Greeks, who stand culturally and ethnically at the top of the ladder, while people like the Ichthyophagoi of the Red Sea coast huddle at the bottom. Emblematic is the account of Simmias, dispatched by Ptolemy III of Egypt to explore the region, whose report is excerpted *in extenso* by Agatharchides of Knidos:

"[Simmias] says ... that the tribe of the "insensitive Aithiopians" [Ichthyophagoi] never drink anything, and that their nature does not crave it for the reasons just stated [because they are insensitive to pain]. He points out that, in general, they do not come into contact with other tribes nor does the strangeness of the appearance of those who visit them influence the natives, but, gazing at them intently, they remain impassive with their senses unmoved as though no one was present. For not even if someone draws a

<sup>11</sup> See PIERCE (2007).

<sup>12</sup> On this change, see CUVIGNY (2003b) 252-357; BAGNALL / HELMS / VERHOOGT in *O. Berenike*, p. 25 and the inscription *I. Berenike* 120. RUFFING (2012) 279-288, for a somewhat different view. Praise of peacefulness must be taken with a grain of salt, since it fits in with Augustan propaganda.

<sup>13</sup> ARISTID. 36, 70. See also *I. Portes* 4ter (*OGIS* 709) with BOULANGER (1923) 120-124, on Aristides' Egyptian sojourn. *OGIS* 709, is not from Alexandria but probably Smyrna: BINGEN (1987). PRESEDO VELO (1971) argues that Aristides knew Egypt well. See also POLANSKI (2006).

sword and strikes at them, do they flee; nor, if they suffer insult or blows, do they become angry. Further, the people as a whole do not share in the anger of the victims. Sometimes, even when their children or women are slaughtered before their eyes, they remain unmoved by what has happened, giving no indication of anger or, again, of compassion.”<sup>14</sup>

Clearly, people so constructed make formidable opponents, — immutable in the face of death and slaughter. An analogous account appears in a passage from Pomponius Mela, writing around 43 CE:

“Outside the gulf, in fact in the turn of the Red Sea, a part [of the land] is infested with animals (*bestiis*) and so desert (*deserta*); the Panchai inhabit part, those people whom they call Ophiophagi from the fact that they live on snakes ...”.<sup>15</sup>

Agatharchides’ account of the populations of the Eastern Desert also tells us something about Greek perceptions of their adaptation to the desert environment. The Ichthyophagoi are said to live near the sea on rocky coastlines. When they trap fish by constructing weirs in channels running from the water into the land, other creatures, “huge scorpions, eels and dogfish cast out from the sea but also seals and many other such creatures which are strange in appearance and name”, get caught too; these, “although they possess no sophisticated weapons”, they dispatch “by stabbing them with sharp goats’ horns and jagged pieces of rock”.<sup>16</sup> They spend four days hunting food in this manner without drinking water — instead they stuff themselves, sing “inarticulate songs”, and “mate with the women at random”. Pliny the Elder goes even farther: the Blemmyes, he reports, are said not to have heads.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> AGATHARCH. fr. 41b, trans. BURSTEIN (1989) 79-80; see THOMAS (2007); NALESINI (2009).

<sup>15</sup> POMPON. 3, 81. See DESANGES (1994-1995).

<sup>16</sup> AGATHARCH. fr. 33b, trans. BURSTEIN (1989) 72.

<sup>17</sup> AGATHARCH. fr. 37a, 37b, 38b, 40a and 40b, trans. BURSTEIN (1989) 75-76, 77-78. See THOMAS (2007). PLIN. *NH.* 5, 46; see GEUS (2016). Note also the inappropriate sexual behavior, a basic component of Roman construction of the ‘other’.

Thus these people are constructed not merely as standing at the bottom of human scale — although in other ways Agatharchides figures them as inhabiting a sort of “golden age”, a tension not atypical of views on inhabitants of the edges of the world<sup>18</sup> — but also as having an ability to resist the aridity of the desert, even to such an extent as not having to drink water at all. Here again, then, we have the desert barbarians as possessing adaptive advantages over their Roman opponents, who, like “normal” men and women, need water. This congeries of ideas about deserts and their inhabitants extends from start to finish of the Greek and Roman desert imaginary.<sup>19</sup> Herodotus, Sallust, and Lucan write about the dangerous snakes of the Libyan desert; scorpion-women consume horny soldiers in a tale of Dio Chrysostom; according to the *Chronicon Paschale* the emperor Decius (249-250 CE) “brought from desert Libya poisonous snakes and fearsome androgynous creatures and released them in the region of Egypt on account of the Nomades and barbarian Blemmyes”; monstrous desert snakes and demons pullulate in the deserts of the early Christian ascetics. Pomponius Mela insists that:

“of the snakes mention must especially be made of those that are quite small and, poisonous, emerge at a certain time of the year from the mud of swamps that have hardened; rushing in a great swarm they head for Egypt [i.e., the Nile valley], and right at their entrance into the boundaries they are taken up by an opposing mass of birds that they call ibises and are destroyed in the fight; so is the report.”<sup>20</sup>

As David Frankfurter remarks, apotropaic Egyptian amulets, “betrayed a marked sense of the dangers of the landscape: not only are there demons of disease, of terror, of unhappy dead, of scorpions, of lakes, but even the epiphanies of great gods, like Isis and Amun, are viewed as potentially dangerous”.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> See generally ROMM (1992).

<sup>19</sup> The term ‘imaginary’ borrowed from M. FOUCAULT by way of SOJA (1999).

<sup>20</sup> POMPON. 3, 81-84.

<sup>21</sup> *Chron. Pasc.* p. 505. See RÜCKER (2013) 27; FRANKFURTER (1998) 275.

But later a remarkable change overcame the conceptualization of these “barbarians”. As early as the 210s CE, texts from *praesidia* in the Eastern Desert begin to appear in which “barbarians” are mentioned in entirely peaceful contexts. Many of these come from the fort at Xeron Pelagos and have not yet been published, but Hélène Cuvigny has recently provided a summary account; others are from Dios (a fort on the Myos Hormos road built in 114/15) or Mons Claudianus. They show Romans and “barbarians” interacting in commerce, travel, and other contexts. Ostraca from Dios refer to one Baratit the *hypotyranos*, a title associated with the Blemmyes; these documents attest to close ties between the *praesidium* and Baratit and his people, including requests for and provision of food.

This last point gains even more salience in light of a mass of documentation — 96 texts — recording the delivery of wheat to barbarians and found at Xeron Pelagos. Here is the beginning of one example (*O. Xer. inv. 374*):

“In year 11, Phamouthi 25. Measure out  
to Engosarek on behalf of the name of Makak of wheat  
one-half an artaba, that is of wheat one-half an artaba.”

In five more lines the text orders distribution of wheat on behalf of three more people. J.-P. Brun has argued that these documents represent payments by the Romans to the Blemmyes in exchange for peace and/or other services. Since the *praesidia* were abandoned during this period, Brun suggests that the Romans may have subcontracted protection of the desert routes to the Blemmyes.<sup>22</sup> In other words, if this view be accepted, we can see the conversion of strange and bizarre desert inhabitants, whom Pliny could claim to have been headless, into Roman allies on the margin, providing security services and otherwise incorporated into a ‘normalized’ world.

<sup>22</sup> CUVIGNY (2014) 185-191, 194-197; BRUN (2016) 5-6; HÄGG (1990) 148-156.

### 3. Water

In early 201 CE a detachment of Roman troops from the headquarters of the Legio III Augusta in Lambasa was detached to build a new fort at Gholaia (modern Bu Njem), in Libya, south of the coast. Q. Avidius Quintianus, commander of the detachment, arranged for the construction in this dusty desert outpost of a bath, “the true waters of safety, amid such fires in those always sandy hills” where his soldiers “by swimming peacefully ... might soothe their bodies”.<sup>23</sup> Bath complexes have been discovered at the major quarries at Mons Claudianus and Mons Porphyrites and several other locations.<sup>24</sup>

The baths at Gholaia and in the Eastern Desert demanded two major resources not typically readily available in the desert: water and wood. Both commodities recur repeatedly in the ostraca from the Eastern Desert, although here I focus on water. Unlike in the Western Desert, very arid and with water only at oases, a relatively shallow aquifer underlies the Eastern Desert, covered by gravel and sand and fed by intermittent rainfall in the Red Sea Mountains; east of them it is possible to attain water at relatively shallow depths by digging wells.<sup>25</sup> The Romans took advantage of this geology. Strabo praises their quick work: “formerly”, he writes, referring to Ptolemaic times, “the camel-merchants used to travel by night, looking to the stars, and just like sailors they made their way carrying water; but now they [the Romans] have constructed wells by digging very deep and made cisterns for rain, although it is very rare” (17, 1,

<sup>23</sup> *IRT* 918; ADAMS (1999) 110-111, his translation.

<sup>24</sup> MAXFIELD (1997) 122-134; COPELAND / HANDLEY (2001); a comprehensive overview: REDON (2010) 410-434; SIDEBOTHAM (2011) 117-118. *O. Claud.* 1, 141, 4, now corrected to κατασπῶμεν τὸν λουτῆρα (see *BL* 11, 294-295), refers not to “paving a bath” but bringing down from the quarry a monolithic stone shaped like a bath or fountain. I am grateful for this information to H. Cuvigny, who will soon publish a paper on the toponyms of the Eastern Desert.

<sup>25</sup> See BARNARD (2009b) 19, with his schematic cross-section of the desert there, and (2009a) 15-16.



45). *O. Did.* 38, deposited after 235 CE, mentions a ποταμίτης (line 5), a specialist in dealing with hydraulic equipment attested, till now, only in the Nile valley. This person may have been involved in cleaning out wells.

Without water hope of exerting control over desert space was impossible. The ostraca of the Eastern Desert harp repeatedly on the problem of water in big and small ways. A letter from, probably, the *procurator* in charge of a satellite quarry of Mons Claudianus called Tiberiane mentions a well, ὕδρευμα, and then seems to beg urgently for the dispatch of two donkey-loads of water, “if only the water not smell”, (*O. Claud.* 4, 890, 13 and 16-17). This quarry was later abandoned because of lack of water.<sup>26</sup> A Trajanic text from Mons Claudianus records 70 stone-cutters, σκληρουργοί, assigned to a place called Διοσκούρια. Given that another text mentions a well by this name, it seems reasonable, as Adam Bülow-Jacobsen has suggested, to see these workers as engaged in well-digging.

A long inscription listing dozens of soldiers and dating to the Augustan or Tiberian period (but certainly after 4 BCE), commemorates the building of cisterns (*lacci*) and a camp, likely the military installation at Koptos.<sup>27</sup> A *proskynêma* at the Paneion of the Wadi Hammamat comes from a soldier who described himself as a “well digger”.<sup>28</sup> And the famous inscription commemorating the construction of the Via Nova Hadriana emphasized the provision of water: troops “cut the New Hadrianic Road from Berenike to Antinoos through safe, flat places along the Red Sea, supplied with abundant sources of water and stopping-places and forts”.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> BÜLOW-JACOBSEN (2009) 226 with n. 32 and 224.

<sup>27</sup> *I. Portes* 56 (*ILS* 2483; *CIL* III, Suppl. 1, 6627) with CUVIGNY (2003a) 267-273; CUVIGNY / BÜLOW-JACOBSEN (1999) 134-135; DE ROMANIS (1996) 219-224.

<sup>28</sup> *I.Ko.Ko.* 60a; the editor’s date is far too late: JÖRDENS (2009) 425, n. 125; FOURNET (1995) 205.

<sup>29</sup> *I. Pan* 80, 8-14 (*OGIS* 701; *IGRR* I 1142; see *I. Portes* 4, lacking text). For Berenike, SIDEBOTHAM (2011), with 224-241 on trade with India. For Antinopolis, BOATWRIGHT (2000) 190-196; *I. Portes*, pp. 23-107.

Another text reports on the discovery of water with considerable satisfaction:

“Antistius Flaccus to his own Calinius, greetings. From Raima I greet you, brother, and I indicate to you that by the will of the gods the well (*hydreuma*) has produced most abundant water (*aquam copiosissimam*), from which I hope you will find not the least security. Be well brother most dear.”<sup>30</sup>

In a Hadrianic ostrakon from Dios, which also had a bath, the overseer of the wells asks the *epitropos* of Augustus to arrange the seconding of a smith and a quantity of steel (στομώματα) to deal with the exceptionally hard rock encountered in digging a well.<sup>31</sup>

These examples, an almost random sample of the many texts dealing with water, demonstrate with absolute clarity the centrality of water supply to the normalization of Eastern Desert space. The sense of urgency about water never evaporated: to be in a desert environment entails, inevitably and incessantly, worries about water. But there is a big difference between worrying about water when you know there is water and worrying about water when there is not. So I suggest that the provision of water reliably and in abundance served as a central aspect of the transformation of the Eastern Desert to a space over which Romans felt they had control.

#### 4. Women and children

The Amphora of the Barbarians attests the presence of a woman and three children at Patkoua when the barbarians attacked. If Patkoua (still unidentified) was like the so-far explored installations, its staff was only a few dozen soldiers. In 118 Roman soldiers were still 79 years away from formal permission to

<sup>30</sup> *O. Claud.* 1, 2, 1-10. On Raima, see *O. Claud.* 2, 255-278 with BINGEN (1987) 81-83.

<sup>31</sup> BÜLOW-JACOBSEN / CUVIGNY (2007) 12-13. Bath: BRUN (2015) 12.



contract legitimate marriages. But other sources show women present in, or adjacent to, military establishments — and not just high-ranking women like the officers' wives on Hadrian's Wall. From epigraphic material in North Africa David Cherry has argued that most soldiers struck up liaisons with daughters of their fellow soldiers, a self-replicating society outside the bounds of legal Roman marriage.<sup>32</sup> In our desert world, we read about a man (who may not have been a soldier) located at Kampe writing to ask the *kibariates* to forward a letter from his own wife. In another case a certain Firmus, having heard that a friend is headed to Mons Porphyrites, asks him to deliver some wheat and “the money from wife Tasaleos”.<sup>33</sup>

The woman and children of Patkoua were, perhaps, the ‘common-law’ spouse and offspring of some soldier. But we also know of another way women came to spend time in the forts of the desert. Ostraca of Didymoi and Krokodilo on the Myos Hormos road report business dealings of one Philokles and his people. A major component of their business was rental of prostitutes to desert troops. Prostitution comes as no surprise (and not just given the universal propensities of soldiers), for the famous Tariff of Koptos, which sets rates for securing passes onto the roads in the desert, explicitly mentions them: they are charged 108 *drachmai* per woman if used as regular prostitutes, but only 20 *drachmai* if they are sailing out or for the use of soldiers.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> CHERRY (1998) 101-140; PHANG (2001) 17-19, 104-112. See SPEIDEL (1996) 53-54, for women at Vindonissa.

<sup>33</sup> *O. Claud.* 1, 155, 5, and 143, 3.

<sup>34</sup> *I. Portes* 67, 16-19 (*IGRR* I/II 1183) with BURKHALTER-ARCE (2002); RATHBONE (2002), and JÖRDENS (2009) 384-387. The long-term prostitution arrangements for soldiers makes it likely that the “women of soldiers” were prostitutes; the “women sailing out” are therefore also likely to be prostitutes, some perhaps hired “for the long haul” by sailors on commercial craft (the emendation of the text to ἐκπλεουσῶν by CUVIGNY (2003d) 375, makes good sense); for a different view, BERNAND in *I. Portes*, p. 206. There was a Roman fleet in the Red Sea: see SPEIDEL (2009) 633-649; MESSERI (2004-2005), and RUFFING (2012) 295-297, so it is possible that some women sailing out were intended to service these troops. RUFFING (2013) suggests that the high tariff imposed on women was

Philokles' 'business plan' for his prostitution operation took advantage of the numbers and isolation of the soldiers in the *praesidia*; it must have worked well, for he seems to have operated for at least a dozen years. A letter to one Aquila provides details:

"Philokles to the most honored Aquila, greetings. You know that they gave twenty-two staters [= 88 dr] per month for the girl. But when you came I wanted to give her to you rather than to the others. For indeed you yourself know that when the girl came out the *conductor* took from her three staters [= 12 dr] and the transport-cost of 2 drachmai. There came from the fifteen staters [= 60 dr] into my hand eleven staters and two drachmai [= 46 dr]. Therefore, then, you know that we have been in agreement with each other through the written (contract), no one will cause harm to the girl in violation of the agreement. Say hello to Kasylla. Be well."<sup>35</sup>

Another letter, from Longinus, *curator* of the *praesidium* at Aphrodite Orous ("Aphrodite of the Desert"), to a certain Kilikas, may shed additional light:

"Longinus, *curator* of Aphrodite Orous to Kilikas my brother, greetings. Those in the *praesidium* have asked me to write to you about your slave-girl who earns you sixty drachmai. Send her and the money is my responsibility or send word and I will send to you and the payment of the *conductor* will be our responsibility. Be well."<sup>36</sup>

These letters attest a regular practice of monthly rental of a prostitute to a *praesidium*. The arrangement seems to be negotiated by the commander (certainly Longinus, and very likely Aquila); the woman will have been available for use by all the troops at the fort, evidently without expectation of further

because they were being shipped as "merchandise," for sale as slaves in India, and not as local prostitutes.

<sup>35</sup> *O. Did.* 390: *conductor* refers to a tax, elsewhere the *quintana*, paid by prostitutes; see CUVIGNY (2010a) 163-166. Aquila appears also in the fragmentary *O. Did.* 388, 18.

<sup>36</sup> *O. Did.* 430.

pay. Many letters dealing with Philokles' prostitution business have yet to be published, and no doubt once the whole corpus is available it will be possible to say much more about this operation.<sup>37</sup>

Prostitution in a military context is attested from all over the Roman world. What I would like to stress here, though, is not the habits of soldiers but the creation of an obviously profitable business enterprise in the desert. Philokles' business, attested over twelve years, was diversified: he dealt not only in prostitutes but also in fresh vegetables which he raised at Persou (in the Wadi Hammamat) and shipped out to customers all along the line. Like Nikanor and his circle decades earlier,<sup>38</sup> his operation had a social impact as well as a personally profitable one: the availability of women and fresh food in the desert helped to 'normalize' the space. That is to say, despite the heat, dust, and isolation, inhabitants of the forts could expect to enjoy some of the normal amenities of life that they would have enjoyed in the Nile valley, or even in Italy. The point — which is perhaps simple and obvious — is just that women's presence, like the provision of water, makes the desert world less a strange and barbaric landscape and more a 'normalized' world. They help assert a conceptual control over a formerly hostile and dangerous space.

## 5. Food

A collection of texts that secure advances on foodstuffs for workers at the quarries of Mons Claudianus indicates that olive oil and lentils were dietary staples.<sup>39</sup> Some of these foodstuffs,

<sup>37</sup> For now, see CUVIGNY (2003d) 374-389; (2010a), and BÜLOW-JACOBSEN (2012) 295-298. BRUN (2016) 5, suggests a room at Xeron Pelagos may have been used for prostitution.

<sup>38</sup> On Nikanor's business, see ADAMS (2007b) 221-225, and RUFFING (1993).

<sup>39</sup> See the texts at *O. Claud.* 3, 417-545, with the commentary of CUVIGNY, *O. Claud.* 3, pp. 85-86. SIDEBOTHAM (2011) 114-116, on gardening in the desert in general.

like lentils and olive oil, certainly came from the Nile valley, where conditions for growing them were much better. But texts from Mons Claudianus attest to a wide variety of vegetables grown in a desert garden under the care of one Dioskoros.<sup>40</sup>

Dioskoros ran a little operation growing vegetables and conveying them to customers nearby, some high-ranking Roman officials. His gardens produced “vegetables”, λάχανα, and more specifically lettuce, cabbage, endives or chicory, beets, mustard, asparagus, turnips, jute, horseradish or plain radishes.<sup>41</sup> The letters give a sense of the operation: he dispatched vegetables to his customers through intermediaries, no doubt persons traveling regularly between wherever the garden was located and the stations of the customers — one such agent is named explicitly Artemidoros the camel-driver (*O. Claud.* 2, 224, 6-7) — and, when things went as expected, the recipients let him know they had received shipment:

“Dioskoros to Drakon and Eremesis and Ammonios the *curator*, all most dear, many greetings. And I make our act of worship before the Tyche of the *praesidium* and the desert where I am stationed. How many times did I write to you and not one of you wrote me? Receive from Eutykh - - 3 bunches of beets and another bunch of chicory. You three divide them up. Write me concerning your safety. Let there be no hesitation: what is received write to me in order that I know that “I have received it from this person”. I pray that you are healthy.”<sup>42</sup>

We do not know exactly where Dioskoros and his little garden were, but it is clear from an unpublished ostrakon that he was in military service, for we are told in that text that he is no longer a gardener: “Dioskoros has become a camel-scout”.<sup>43</sup> The texts

<sup>40</sup> *O. Claud.* 2, 224-242, all of the mid-second century CE. See VAN DER VEEN (1998a).

<sup>41</sup> BÜLOW-JACOBSEN (1997) 45.

<sup>42</sup> *O. Claud.* 2, 228, mid-second century CE.

<sup>43</sup> Inv. 7047, quoted by BÜLOW-JACOBSEN (1997) 44. The word Dioskoros uses about himself, ἐπιξεν[ι]οῦμαι, suggests an assignment to a duty.

never speak of payment, so it is impossible to know for sure whether these foodstuffs served as dietary supplements bought by the consumers or as part of the (officer-class's?) regular rations. Another text reveals one of the challenges of desert gardening; reporting the dispatch of a basket of onions and 40 olives, the writer complains that "the garden has been damaged by salt".<sup>44</sup> The salt damage was undoubtedly a result, all too typical in desert situations, of irrigation without proper drainage.

Ostraca also attest to a regular round of communication between people stationed out in the desert and friends and relatives back in the Nile valley — assuming that at least some of the correspondence found at Mons Claudianus and elsewhere originated in Egypt.<sup>45</sup> Letters back and forth to the Nile valley detail something of the private movement of all kinds of goods, including beets, bread, meats of various kinds, malt, oil, and pigs. Some examples: an assistant to the *kibariates* at Mons Claudianus acknowledges receipt of bread from the Nile valley. Serapias, who seems to be living in the Nile valley, sends her father, stationed at Maximianon, bread from home. Rustius Barbarus complains to his brother Pompeius that the latter has not written whether he received the bread Rustius dispatched; the correspondence seems to have turned rather nasty.<sup>46</sup> But the state also organized transport of foodstuffs for soldiers in the desert and workers in the quarries. The supplies came via the caravans, the *poreiai*, mentioned already, and brought a monthly ration of wheat, lentils, and oil. This basic ration, plus the supplemental foodstuffs noted above, have led some observers to speak of "a life of luxury" in the desert.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>44</sup> *O. Claud.* 2, 892, 6-7: κῆπεν τετραυματικόντα ἄλιν, corrected to τετραυματισμένον ἄλι{ν}: see BÜLOW-JACOBSEN (2009) 228.

<sup>45</sup> As BÜLOW-JACOBSEN (1992) 123-124, has suggested.

<sup>46</sup> List in *O. Claud.* 1, p. 123. *O. Claud.* 1, 7 and 8; *SB* 22, 15453; *O. Faw.* 1 (*CEL* 1, 73) and 2 (*CEL* 1, 74)

<sup>47</sup> CUVIGNY (1996) for the rations; "a life of luxury": ADAMS (2007b) 212 (good account of the transport system at 210-219), paraphrasing the title of VAN DER VEEN (1998b). See also POLANSKI (2006).

## 6. Gods of the desert

“It is”, writes H       Cuvigny in a fundamental article about the deities of the Eastern Desert, “a characteristic of Roman religion to seek, in a new place, to attract the benevolence of local divinities”.<sup>48</sup> Consider Pan. Paneia, Pan sanctuaries, dot the Eastern Desert in grottos or caves, following the standard Greek model. Visitors expressed devotion in short inscriptions called *proskyn  mata* (e.g., *I. Ko. Ko.* 115). The epithets Pan enjoys in these texts are redolent. He is “propitious”, “Pan the Helper”, “Pan the Greatest God”, “Pan of the Good Road”, “Pan the Savior”, and “Pan the Gold-Giver”, and, most emblematically, “Pan Who Walks the Desert”, Π  ν Όρηοβ  της.<sup>49</sup> It is no surprise that Pan gets thanks for “salvation” — he has made sure that, for example, Pachrates and his brother made it safely through the desert.<sup>50</sup>

Pan’s role in the desert plays nicely on his long-standing association with wilderness, the quintessential god of wild places, “[t]he panic landscape ... where strange phenomena take place” — for he was born in the dense mountain forests of Arkadia — and so the god who can bring the traveler safely to the end of his trip; hence Pan of the Good Road. His knowledge of the

<sup>48</sup> CUVIGNY (1997) 145. My dependence on this short but brilliant article cannot be overstated. See also ADAMS (2007b) 215-216.

<sup>49</sup> *I. Ko. Ko.* 43, 53, 141, 172, 177, 158, 163, 166, 181; *I. Pan* 59, 51, 78a, 86, 60; with corrections to many in CUVIGNY / B  LOW-JACOBSEN (1999) and FOURNET (1995); *I. Kana  s* 50, 25, 39, 43. Pan Who Walks the Desert: *I. Pan* 1, 2, and 4, 1-2; for   ρος in its meaning “deep desert”, see CADELL / R  MONDON (1967) 340-341 (ADAMS [2007b] 216, with n. 38, takes *oros* as “mountain”). *I. Pan* 82 may be a forgery: STRASSER (2004-2005) 465-468. There are many simple inscriptions “to Pan”, Π  ν  . Ostraka also preserve *proskyn  mata*: two recently published examples: *O. Did.* 379 and 381. Pan Who Walks the Desert must not be confused with Pan, “you who walk upon the hard-to-access rock of Arkadia” (EUR. *Tel. fr.* 967, 2 NAUCK), meaning a mountain (and see *Hymn. Hom. Pan.* 6-7, see BORGEAUD [1988] 213 n. 125). At home in Arkadia, he is Pan the Leader, *IG V* 2, 93.

<sup>50</sup> *I. Ko. Ko.* 150 with CUVIGNY / B  LOW-JACOBSEN (2000) 243 n. 7 and 248.



desert explains the epithet “gold-giver”, for since deep antiquity the Eastern Desert was exploited for its gold, and Pan knew where to find it, and other wealth: “To Pan together with the nymph. They have given it to Isidoros son of Menippos to discover these quarries” called Ptolemaïs.<sup>51</sup>

The persons offering devotion to Pan provide glimpses of the numbers and variety of travelers who roamed the desert. Soldiers are prominent, naturally, but striking are two adorations offered on behalf not just of a soldier but also his horse. In the Ptolemaic period groups of hunters sent out from Panopolis on the Nile into the desert included men charged with procuring elephants to be trained as war machines.<sup>52</sup> We meet bronze-workers, contractors, government officials, stone-cutters (some well diggers), hieroglyphic specialists, inhabitants of the metropolis of Oxyrhynchos on the middle Nile and the great Egyptian capital of Alexandria, and travelers returning from India.<sup>53</sup>

However, Pan, who was identified with the ithyphallic Egyptian god Min (a desert god whose sanctuaries Pan expropriated and deity of Koptos and Panopolis), does not remain the dominant divinity of the Eastern Desert. The last text dedicated to him from the Wadi Hammamat dates to 91 CE (*I. Ko. Ko.* 53). Most are considerably earlier, like Publius Iuventius Agathopous’

<sup>51</sup> Pan’s birthplace: BORGEAUD (1988) 3, 89 (quotation); representations: BOARDMAN in *LIMC*. KLEMM / KLEMM / MURR (2002). On Pan’s attributes as especially suitable to the desert, see BERNAND in *I. Ko. Ko.*, pp. 95-96 and *I. Pan*, pp. 276-277. Pan was frequently associated with nymphs: BORGEAUD (1988) 59, 62; *IG IV*<sup>2</sup> 1, 130, Pan the “leader of the nymphs;” *IG II*<sup>2</sup> 4545, 4546, 4827. *I. Pan* 16, 2-3, of 89-91 CE (*I. Metr.* 116).

<sup>52</sup> *I. Ko. Ko.* 127; KAYSER (1993) 120-121 no. 9 (66 CE). *I. Pan* 1, 4, 69 (well-digging, but the dedication here does not mention Pan by name), 77, *I. Ko. Ko.* 62.

<sup>53</sup> *I. Ko. Ko.* 91, 113, 127, 131 (bronze-workers, probably smiths), 48, 112 (contractors), 63; KAYSER (1993) 122-123 no. 11 (decurion, secretary: government officials), *I. Ko. Ko.* 105, 158 (stone-cutters), 89 (hieroglyph writers), 184 with CUVIGNY / BÜLOW-JACOBSEN (1999) 253 (citizen of Oxyrhynchos); CUVIGNY / BÜLOW-JACOBSEN (1999) 146, no. 23 (citizen of Alexandria), 140 no. 4 and no. 5 (returning from India), and 160 no. 52 (returning from Berenike).

dedications of 14 and 18 CE.<sup>54</sup> Although a Paneion is attested for Mons Claudianus in a water-distribution list of about 110 CE,<sup>55</sup> by c. 100 CE he has been, or is being, largely replaced. In a text cited above, Dioskoros assures his correspondents “I am making our act of worship before the Tyche of the *praesidium* and of the desert where I am stationed” (*O. Claud.* 2, 225, 6-9). Tychai of the *praesidia* become very common, but it is striking that Dioskoros’ Tyche also oversees the desert — earlier one might have expected Pan. The gods who receive *proskynēmata* and are attested at the *praesidia* of the desert roads after about 100 CE include Athena, Isis, Aphrodite, Apollo, and Zeus. Ostraca from the Wadi Hammamat record *proskynēmata* to Athena; an inscription from the Paneion at el-Buwayb honors Isis the Savior.<sup>56</sup>

From the Trajanic period on, Zeus Helios Megalos Sarapis played a crucial role in the religious life of people in the Eastern Desert. An oracular shrine stood at Iovis-Dios (founded in 114/15 CE); a graffito names the god. He is honored more elaborately in a dedication left by the architect Apollonios son of Ammonius from Alexandria: “To Zeus Helios Great Sarapis on behalf of the *Tyche* of lord Caesar Trajan”.<sup>57</sup> The oracular responses take this form: “27. In the morning. The matters about which you are asking shall turn out well and will be completed. You will grow old among good things, you shall not see anything bad. Your road is good, the gods will be very merciful”. There was also an oracle of Athena at Xeron Pelagos.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>54</sup> *I. Ko. Ko.* 39 and 41 with KAYSER (1993) 111-113.

<sup>55</sup> CUVIGNY (2005a) 312, line 9: ἐπιμελητῆς Πανείου. Compare *I. Pan* 5: ἱεροφύλαξ τοῦ Πάνος.

<sup>56</sup> *O. Faw.* 31; CUVIGNY (1997) 141 (*O. Max.* inv. 1214); *I. Ko. Ko.* 154 with BERNAND in *I. Pan*, p. 220 and CUVIGNY / BÜLOW-JACOBSEN (2000). *I. Kanais* 4 for a link between Pan and Thebes.

<sup>57</sup> *I. Pan* 38, 1-5; see *O. Claud.* 1, 15-18. BRUN (2015) 11-12 on Iovis/Dion.

<sup>58</sup> CUVIGNY (2010b) 246-247 no. 1 for the foundation; 253 no. 4 for Ioulios Achilles’s graffito; 265, no. 23 for the oracle. Athena oracle: BRUN (2016) 4-5.



## 7. Security and control

It is important to emphasize that desert spaces were not the only arenas resistant to thorough-going control. Mountains in regions otherwise brimming with urban centers, farmland, roads, and other markers of state authority, likewise proved difficult for the Roman state to bring under control. Consider, for example, the province of Lykia in Asia Minor (sometimes combined with Pamphylia). Home to multiple cities and laced with a road network now well-documented thanks to the recently published *Stadiasmus*,<sup>59</sup> it was nevertheless troubled by banditry and disorder. An inscription from Boubon in the northwestern sector of the province attests to the challenges locals faced. In a letter to the magistrates, *boulê*, and people of the town the emperor Commodus

“commended you and accepted the common wish of the *ethnos* of the Lykians, you who with so much zeal acted to apprehend the bandits and prevailed over them and killed some and took others alive.”<sup>60</sup>

Brent Shaw’s study of relations between the central Roman state and the “big men” of the Kilikian highlands emphasized how Roman representations of these people changed as Roman ability to exert authority ebbed and flowed and as the usefulness of mountain men rose and fell. Only rarely did the imperial state exercise actual, effective control over the mountain fastnesses of the Tauros; more often than not, the state had to be satisfied with striking agreements with local “war lords” or “big men” (demoted to “bandits” during episodes where the state tried to assert its claims) who then enjoyed considerable freedom of action.<sup>61</sup> Someone who was a “bandit chief” one year might become a local political leader the next, and we have seen how an analogous process played out in the Eastern Desert, as

<sup>59</sup> See ŞAHİN / ADAK (2007).

<sup>60</sup> KOKKINIA (2008) 32-34, no. 5.

<sup>61</sup> SHAW (1990).

raiding “barbarians” transmogrified into subsidized allies. The Eastern Desert was hardly unique.<sup>62</sup>

But there were differences between spaces like Lykia or Italy and the Egyptian desert. In the former, Roman imperial authority claimed control over all the territory and people within it. Even shepherds out in the deep countryside were subject to Roman rule, paying taxes, enlisted to build or repair roads, and overseen by officials acting on behalf of the state. Of course, to *claim* control was one thing, actually to *exercise* it, quite another. But claims were harder to exercise or even claim on vast stretches of desert territory. The raiders of the Amphora of the Barbarians paid no taxes and recognized no Roman authority over themselves, their lands, or their flocks. We can visualize the control of the Roman state over the desert as a series of narrow bands, centered on roads and forts, with nodes at quarries like Mons Claudianus and settled towns like Myos Hormos. The Tauros Mountains of Lykia present a rough and dangerous topography, and yet the Romans forced through roads, stationed *stationarii*, collected taxes, and enforced order. Resistance, whether in the form of banditry or more organized, perhaps anti-Roman movements, cropped up again and again, provoking a response intended to re-establish order. But there were settlements, like Boubon and other mountain towns and villages. Not quite so in the desert. There, groups without necessarily fixed abodes — perhaps; we need to be cautious, as archaeological exploration beyond the roads and *praesidia* remains in its infancy, and ruins out in the desert may prove to be not sixth-century Christian hermits’ cells but the archaeology of nomads<sup>63</sup> — presented a different category of problematics. And the climate and topography added to the challenges. The situation is nicely captured

<sup>62</sup> See WOLFF (2003) and BRÉLAZ (2008) on “barbarians” and control; MAC-MULLEN (1967) 255-268, a dated but still useful list of attestations of bandits — the designation, of course, comes from the vocabulary of the state: SHAW (1984) and (1990); GRÜNEWALD (2004).

<sup>63</sup> BARNARD (2009a) and (2009b); BURSTEIN (2008); THOMAS (2007).

in a few recent remarks of Jennifer Gates-Foster in a discussion of roads and cultural memory:

“[T]he presence of nomadic groups in the desert and their patterns of movement ... in the landscape was well known and, along with the harshness of the desert climate and its challenging topography ... defined the desert as a marginal space, inhabited by the gods and “others”. The experience of the desert — otherworldly, sacred, dangerous — encouraged the formation of a sense of connection among the individuals who traveled these roads ... No landscape was neutral ... especially a desert landscape, which was a place associated with death, chaos, and the transition between the earthly and heavenly realms.”<sup>64</sup>

A second difference was, perhaps, more consequential. When the Romans met the desert, they came equipped, as we have seen, with an ethnography that saw its inhabitants as fundamentally different from peoples of the Mediterranean. The bandit-kings of the Tauros, after all, had heads; they didn’t feast on fish and go for days without drinking. So the process of normalizing desert space, and conferring a sense of humanness on its inhabitants (and the space itself), presented, I suggest, a structurally and intellectually different kind of challenge. Roman place-making in the Eastern Desert demanded a different kind of relation with people and space than a basically Mediterranean territory, even one hostile to Roman imperial authority.

## 8. Conclusions

By way of conclusion I would like to return to the matter of imperial power. The process of ‘normalization’ contributed to more than simply making Roman soldiers or merchants feel more comfortable — or, perhaps, less uncomfortable — in the strange landscape of the Eastern Desert. It also served to expand and strengthen imperial control by increasing knowledge of the

<sup>64</sup> GATES-FOSTER (2012b) 203 and 205.

empire. From geographies and especially ethnographies depicting a fantastic or mythologized landscape the Roman state could move to a literature purporting to offer a realistic picture of the Roman world. The articulation of this literature, emblemized by the two great encyclopedias of Strabo and Pliny the Elder (though Pliny still trucked in headless Blemmyes), served, much like the famous map of Agrippa in the Porticus Vespania, to capture the empire in its enormous extent and diversity.<sup>65</sup>

With respect especially to the people who lived as subjects to imperial rule, the expansion of knowledge — and especially that derived from lived experience — served a central colonial purpose that can be paralleled in the activities of many other empires across space and time: the need “of colonial regimes ... to continually reiterate their position as articulators of the other and to define the terms and markers by which ... difference could be known and exchanged”.<sup>66</sup> Behind the shared strategies of the Roman Empire and later European colonial states of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries lurks the influence of Greco-Roman ethnography and theory. Categorization and capturing of peoples by the processes of description, especially repeated description, acted to help control space — to “make space” — by normalizing knowledge: read Agatharchides and you will know what those bizarre desert people are like, and knowing them makes it easier to deal with them, as a colonial authority.<sup>67</sup> But ‘normalization’ or ‘place-making’ also entails the quotidian activities of ordinary people — expectations about living space, foodways, sexual and family relations, social interactions. Of course, a desert space without safety or water did not present

<sup>65</sup> This task was undertaken by most empires: see BUTLIN (2009); ADAMS (2007b), briefly on geographic writers on the Eastern Desert. On Agrippa’s map, NICOLET (1991) 95-122.

<sup>66</sup> CONOR (2013) 246.

<sup>67</sup> I set aside trying to sort out the ethnography of the groups in our sources, Blemmyes or others. See BARNARD (2009b) 24 n. 52; BURSTEIN (2008). This conjunction of “knowing” space — both physically and ethnographically — as a mechanism of imperial control crops up everywhere: for an example from the US nineteenth-century West, see LISTE NOYA (2016).

a compelling stage on which to enact such normalizations; Roman provision of both water and security served as a *sine qua non*. But without the performance of such low-level normalizations, I am suggesting, control would have been incomplete.

While ‘equality’ has failed to appear explicitly in this contribution, in fact matters of equality and inequality simmer below the surface, and I would like to end by uncovering them. In the context of the desert imaginary with which the Romans arrived — hot, waterless, and dangerous — it was the indigenous inhabitants, able to go days without water and knowing the trackless landscape, who stood at a decided advantage. Only as the Romans normalized the desert and turned it into a *lived space*, a *lived experience*, precisely Soja’s Third Space, could they invert the pyramid: and this process of asserting Roman superiority over the indigenous inhabitants entailed fundamentally the construction of an *imperial space*, onto which standard Roman notions of inequality might be imposed, even to the point of turning wild desert tribes into client peoples. In other words, the experiences of the Eastern Desert afford a textured opportunity to explore the mechanisms of the creation of inequality in an imperial context, by and through the re-articulation of an alien space into a normalized place.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> SOJA (1999). I owe many thanks in connection with this paper: first to Sitta von Reden for the very kind invitation to participate in *Entretiens* 2016; to Pierre Ducrey for both intellectual and social companionship; to my fellow participants, whose comments sharpened my arguments and saved me from many errors; to H. Cuvigny, who read with great care and sympathy a draft of this paper and provided many corrections and references to literature; to J.-P. Brun, who sent me the indispensable BRUN (2015) and (2016) and gave me permission to reproduce the map; to Beth Notar, for help on anthropology.

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## DISCUSSION

*F. Beltrán Lloris:* I would like you to give me your opinion about ethnic names like Ichthyophagoi and its possible transformation along the time.

*G. Reger:* The matter of ethnic names in the Eastern Desert is very complex and subject of considerable literature. I should clarify that my own interests are less in identifying such groups (see for instance Satzinger [2014]) than in the ways the Romans (and before them the Greeks) characterized them in an effort to capture ‘knowledge’ about the desert space and its inhabitants. In fact the naming process itself is in part a way of making these peoples more, not less, foreign and bizarre (“fish-eaters”, “snake-eaters”, and so on).

*P. Eich:* Sie haben den Begriff ‚Normalisierung‘ verwendet. Könnten Sie die Semantik des Terminus noch näher erklären? Unterliegen spezielle theoretische Konzepte?

*G. Reger:* It is true that my presentation at the conference was under-theorized in this matter. In fact, anthropologists and sociologists have long studied the phenomenon I was trying to elucidate under the concept of ‘place-making’. This concept tries to capture precisely the way in which people seek to make a strange place seem or feel more familiar. I have added some discussion of place-making and a present-day example in the version of the paper printed here in the hope of addressing this deficiency.

*S. Fachard:* Comme vous l’avez souligné dans votre contribution, les bains trouvés dans le désert (autour des forts et des

carrières) exigent des commodités qui ne sont pas aisément disponibles dans le désert : l'eau et le bois. Puisque vous avez concentré votre attention sur l'eau, pourriez-vous apporter quelques indices concernant les types de combustibles nécessaires au chauffage des bains et ce qu'ils impliqueraient en termes de transport et de logistique ?

*G. Reger:* This is a very good question to which I do not have a specific answer. Some scrub would probably have been available, but not in quantities sufficient to provide regular fuel for baths. In the case of Bu Njem, we do hear of some traders (Garamantes, it happens) bringing wood. Presumably wood was shipped on donkeys or camels from the Nile valley. In her excellent study of baths in Egypt, B. Redon (2010) 415-418, collects evidence for the use of chaff, ἀχυρόζ, and raises the possibility of using dried dung from animals like donkeys and camels as fuel.

*F. Hurllet:* I would like to comment briefly on a chronological point. Regarding the Roman presence, the shift between the situation in the first century CE and the second century CE is striking. You remind us that Strabo remarks on the peacefulness of the desert and its inhabitants. One century later, the picture is quite different, as your selection of texts shows. Do you have any idea of the reasons for this change? Is there a connection to establish with the working of the main road to Myos Hormos and the exploitation by the Roman of a part of the desert?

*A. Bresson:* Merci de ce très bel exposé. J'aurais une brève question. Peut-on dire qu'il y avait une spécificité des menaces pesant sur les routes du désert oriental du fait de ce que la présence de ces routes et de ces garnisons perturbait profondément les migrations des populations nomades ? Les postes et forts romains ne monopolisaient-ils pas l'accès à l'eau dans les rares endroits où elle était disponible, provoquant la colère de ces nomades ?

*G. Reger:* It is quite possible that increased activity in the Eastern Desert after the mid-first century CE may have contributed to the apparent rise in ‘hostile’ interactions between the indigenous inhabitants and the Romans. Exploitation of the quarries at Mons Claudianus and Mons Porphyritis rose, leading to the presence of larger numbers of outsiders at these outposts and along the desert routes. Your questions remind me of the suggestion of Jean-Marie Lassère that the revolt of Tacfarinas was prompted by Roman plans to build an east-west road in North Africa which would have cut across traditional north-south transmigration routes.

*N. Purcell:* I’m interested in how disconnected the social and economic activities of peripheral peoples in such clearly distinguishable environments were. Were they largely separate, or is it more like the part-societies formed by mobile and sedentary folk in west Asia, on the model described by Briant and (especially) Mike Rowton as “social dimorphism”. What were the links to the Nile valley? Do the terms suggest importantly different attitudes? What was the role of the Arabarch/Alabarch in controlling or recruiting desert populations?

*G. Reger:* I do not have good answers to these very complicated and important questions. Some of the work I cited (notably that of H. Barnard) explores possible interactions between mobile desert populations and settled communities. In some later texts discussed by Cuvigny (2014) we see “barbaroi” apparently settled in the Nile valley and working in trades. And of course the new and still largely unpublished wheat-payment ostraca she studies and I mention above bespeak a transformation in the interrelations between the desert populations and the Roman authorities, a change that, among other things, seems to bring a sharper focus on who the former were and how they might be identified, including the assignment or adaptations of Greek titles like *hypotyranos* for leaders of these groups. But these complex questions deserve much more discussion than there is space for here.

*S. von Reden:* What is the chronology of the development of the Eastern Desert that you are implying? The period of the most dynamic infrastructural development of the Eastern Desert seems to be, according to your evidence of the ostraca, the second century CE. But Indo-Roman trade, and the increase of the importance of Myos Hormos and Berenike related to it, peaks in the second half of the first century CE. So is the Roman effort to install roads and stations in the Eastern Desert related to the development of that trade, or rather to the intensification of the exploitation of the stone quarries of the Eastern Desert?

*G. Reger:* I think the main impetus behind the roads and forts and other infrastructure was the exploitation of the quarries, not the facilitation of India trade, but not everyone agrees. At the same time, the links to Myos Hormos and Berenike existed already when the Romans arrived in the Eastern Desert; those ports, among other things, served as links in that India trade (they certainly did not play a role in the quarry activity!). The Romans maintained a fleet in the Red Sea to help provide security for traders, and the ostraca from Berenike published in *O. Berenike* open a new window on the trade with India, so it is also possible that the infrastructure was intended secondarily as an aid to such trade. In terms of dating the trade, I would just point out that the Muziris papyrus dates to the second century CE and so attests to continuing high-volume imports in the decades well after the composition of the *Periplus Maris Erythrae* (around the middle of the first century CE; see Casson [1989]); the texts of *O. Berenike*, on the other hand, are largely of the first century CE, and S. Sidebotham (2011) 221 places the heyday of Berenike's India trade in the first century CE with possible continuation into the second, but ending with the plague of 166 (the trade rebounded in the fourth century). It does seem to me that the articulation, starting in 76/7 CE under Vespasian, of a network of *praesidia* to replace unprotected wells was a response to the need for security which may have resulted from an increase of the presence of outsiders due to



exploitation of the quarries (see above). Trade had been going on from a much earlier date, which may suggest that whatever stoked increased dangers was not necessarily associated with the caravans moving goods back and forth between the Nile and the Red Sea. But this is a complex problem that deserves more thorough consideration than can be provided here.

*R. Veal:* Was the Eastern Desert more difficult (environmentally or otherwise), and less populated? I got the impression there were large stretches of hostile fairly empty and barren areas.

*G. Reger:* The Eastern Desert has a basement geology that differentiates it from the Western Desert and areas farther west in the Sahara. The Eastern Desert has an aquifer at a relatively shallow depth that can be accessed by digging wells, whereas the deeper aquifer west of the Nile means that water is only available in the depressions that form oases. We see this situation especially with the depressions where the Garamantes lived. So the situations in the Eastern Desert and farther western parts of the Sahara were quite different.



