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## ***Editors' Note: Past and Future of JAC***

The *JOURNAL OF ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS (JAC)* is published annually by the Institute for the History of Ancient Civilizations (Northeast Normal University, Changchun, Jilin Province, People's Republic of China). This year, we are proud to present the 30th volume to the academic audience. First issued in 1986 after the foundation of IHAC only two years before, *JAC* has up to now published over 300 articles, reviews and reports covering the whole range of ancient civilizations from East to West.

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However, in times of a competitive research market seeking for articles of highest quality and innovation, we will introduce a double blind peer-review system from volume 31 (2016) onwards. We are very grateful for the support received from colleagues around the world as we take this important step in strengthening the *JAC* and make it ready for the future. Therefore, we invite all our readers and academic friends to submit their articles to contribute to the future development of *JAC*!

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PERCEPTIONS FROM BEYOND: SOME OBSERVATIONS ON  
NON-ROMAN ASSESSMENTS OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE  
FROM THE GREAT EASTERN TRADE ROUTES

Anne Kolb and Michael A. Speidel  
Universities of Zürich and Bern

### I. Transcontinental Connectivity

Centuries of continuous warfare and successful expansion turned the Roman Empire into the single dominant power in the Mediterranean basin. Yet, although Roman warfare never fully came to an end, the countryside and the two to three thousand cities of the Empire in Italy and the provinces experienced many uninterrupted decades of peaceful prosperity from the beginning of the imperial era onwards. This prosperous Roman world, the *orbis Romanus*, owed much of its success to an extensive network of communication lines by land and sea, through which it was interconnected and accessible. The development of the imperial transport and communication infrastructure reflects both the pragmatic and systematic approaches of the Romans. Building on existing local lines of communication, the Romans took over, expanded or constructed new roads in the deployment zones and in the countries they had conquered. Thereby, they systematically and consistently linked newly acquired territory with the center. In a next step following the establishment of peace – especially under the Empire – Roman building programs improved and further expanded traffic connections in the subjected areas. Taken together, the elements of this network by land and sea combined to an estimated length of around 500,000 kilometers.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, even today this network is often thought of as a closed system, covering only the Roman world. But that was clearly not the case. Travel and commerce were by no means hindered by the confines of the Roman Empire. Even the great military barriers in Britain, on the German frontier and in North Africa were permeable. Roman traffic ways connected with lines of communication into territories well beyond the Empire. In most cases, these routes had been in use for centuries before the Roman conquest. They led by land or sea to the North, South or East, and ultimately connected the Mediterranean with the countries on the North and Baltic Seas, Sub-Saharan Africa, Central

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<sup>1</sup> See recently Kolb 2011/12, 53–69 and Kolb 2013, 107–118. An earlier, shorter version of this paper was presented at the “Impact of Empire” conference at New York 2013.

Asia, India and China. Since the conquests of Alexander the Great and the “discovery” of the monsoon winds in the second century BCE, trade relations between the Mediterranean world and the countries of the Far East intensified,<sup>2</sup> and India and China were firmly integrated into the western concept of the inhabited world, the “oikumene.”

The famous medieval copy of an illustrated imperial Roman “road map” (*itinerarium*), known as the “Tabula Peutingeriana” with its depiction of the entire Roman road system from Britannia to the East, provides a graphic illustration of this notion. For it shows how, in the East, the network of Roman roads seamlessly continues into non-Roman territories. Moreover, the last sheet of this remarkable document includes, for instance, references to *Sera Maior* (presumably China), the Ganges river (*fl. Ganges*), and the well-known ancient seaport of Muziris with its *templ(um) Augusti* on the Malabar coast in South-West India.<sup>3</sup> The “Tabula Peutingeriana” therefore displays a network of routes that linked the Atlantic to the Indian and the Pacific oceans during the Roman imperial period and betrays the comprehensive global connectivity of the ancient world.

A few major trade routes into Asia, Arabia, India and China deserve to be singled out for the purposes of this paper. The so-called “Silk Road” or “Silk Routes” (not an ancient term) consisted of an entire network of trade routes that linked the Mediterranean and China by land and sea.<sup>4</sup> Herodotus already mentioned the northern route connecting the Black Sea with Central Asia.<sup>5</sup> It led via the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea to the Oxus river (Amu Darya) and from there via modern Afghanistan towards India and China. The “Scythian gold,” among other things, might have been brought to the West via this route. The southern route started at Syrian Antioch and led via Palmyra, the Parthian Empire and Samarkand to Kashgar, where it split into a northern and southern branch, leading around the Tarim Basin and the Taklamakan desert. The two branches reunited at the so-called “Jade-Gate,” from where they led to Dunhuang and Xi’an. Ancient Chinese historiographical texts reflect the strategic importance that was attributed to this long distance trade route. According to these texts, the Romans had always wanted to be in direct contact with the Chinese, but the Parthians,

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. Drexhage 1988; Young 2001; Ruffing 2002, 360–378; Sidebotham, 2011; Speidel 2015 A.

<sup>3</sup> *Tab. Peut.* 11.5. For Muziris see also Plin. *NH* 6.26.104; *Periplus Maris Erythraei* (= *PME*) 57; Ptol. *Geogr.* 4.5.14–15; Lukian, *Quomodo historia conscripta sit* 31. For the *templum Augusti* see Speidel forthcoming B; SB 18.13167 (2nd century CE); Harrauer and Sijpesteijn 1985, 124–155. For connectivity in the ancient world see Horden and Purcell 2000.

<sup>4</sup> See most recently Hill 2009; Liu 2010. For an overview see also Olbrycht 2013, 67–87.

<sup>5</sup> *Hdt.* 4.11; 17–23; 101.

wishing to control the intercontinental silk trade, prevented them from doing so.<sup>6</sup>

The so-called “Incense Route,” again a term not for a single route but for an entire network of routes, connected the Mediterranean port of Gaza via Petra, the capital of the Nabataean kingdom, with the southern parts of the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf. From a Mediterranean perspective, the “Incense Route” afforded the import of frankincense, myrrh, spices and other precious goods from South Arabia, India and East Africa. Control of the northern end of the caravan routes turned the Nabateans into middlemen in this trade, and made them rich. The Roman provincialisation of their kingdom in the year 106 CE by the emperor Trajan not only led to a new distribution of wealth and power in the region, but it also entailed the establishment of new institutions and infrastructure that facilitated the further development of long distance trade, including measures to increase security on land and sea and the construction of a direct road from Damascus via Bosra and Philadelphia to Aila on the Gulf of Aqaba.

The “discovery” of the monsoon winds in the second century BCE marked the beginning of a sea-borne long distance trade that established new and upgraded existing links between the Mediterranean and the countries on the Red Sea and Indian Ocean. Initially, this put the Ptolemies in the lucrative position of middlemen (thereby fuelling their rivalry with the Nabateans). Sea routes eventually linked the Ptolemaic and Roman harbors on the Red Sea with the South Arabian kingdoms, East Africa, India and Sri Lanka, Vietnam and China. The Ptolemies, and even more so their Roman successors, fostered this commerce by constructing ports, developing routes and, most importantly, by aiming to establish security along the coasts of the Red Sea.<sup>7</sup> The Roman takeover of the Ptolemaic kingdom of Egypt in 30 BCE sparked a major increase in economic activities on the Red Sea and the sea routes to India. It also led to high revenues for the Roman treasuries from taxing the Indo-Mediterranean trade, as well as to diplomatic contacts with rulers of far-away countries.<sup>8</sup>

To be sure, the connectivity of the Mediterranean basin with other parts of the ancient world neither depended on the existence of Roman roads nor on that of the Roman Empire. This is clearly borne out, for instance, by Ashoka’s thirteenth “Rock Edict” from Alexandria of Arachosia (Kandahar) on the “Silk Road.” This bilingual inscription in Greek and Aramaic from around 250 BCE refers to embassies the Indian Maurya king sent to the Hellenistic courts of Antiochos II Theos, Ptolemy II Philadelphos, Antigonos Gonatas, Magas of Cyrene and Alexander II of Epirus (?).<sup>9</sup> Yet, Strabo’s claim that maritime traffic between

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<sup>6</sup> Hou Hanshu 12: cf. Hill 2009, 27 and Leslie and Gardiner 1996, 51. Wei Lüe 11: cf. Hill 2014 and Leslie and Gardiner 1996, 70. Cf. also Hirth 1885, 42.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Speidel 2015 A, 89–105.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Schneider 1978. See also Merkelbach and Stauber 2005, 33 (with further literature on p. 35). Cf.



Egypt and India increased six-fold as a nearly immediate consequence of the Roman takeover of the former Ptolemaic kingdom of Egypt illustrates the enormous extent to which all aspects of international exchange appear to have increased in the wake of the establishment of the Principate and the extension of Roman rule by Augustus and his successors.<sup>10</sup> Lively descriptions of the effects of this increased global connectivity on people and communities have survived, for instance by Dio Chrysostomus in the late first century CE for Alexandria or by Aelius Aristides in the mid-140's CE for Rome.<sup>11</sup> Dio Chrysostomus even held that the influx of Greeks, Italians, Syrians, Libyans, Cilicians, Ethiopians, Arabs, Bactrians, Scythians, Persians and Indians into Alexandria made them all a "kindred people" (ὁμόφυλοι).<sup>12</sup>

In spite of increased mobility and traffic since the late first century BCE, the effects of intercultural contacts evidently cannot be expected to have produced uniform transcultural knowledge and largely identical perceptions of the Roman Empire along the great eastern trade routes. Instead, we should expect local perceptions of the Roman Empire as a foreign power to have varied greatly according to time and place. It is no doubt mainly due to the great linguistic and methodological difficulties that such issues have not, so far, attracted much scholarly attention. Yet, recent years have witnessed the publication of important and pertinent ancient texts with translations and commentaries by scholars from several different disciplines of ancient world studies. Few of these sources are generally known among students of ancient Mediterranean history, and some of these texts call for interpretations by historians of the Roman Empire. It seems apposite, therefore, to mention and comment on some of the most significant non-Roman assessments of the Roman Empire along the great eastern trade routes.

## II. Friends and Enemies

Among the most famous ancient assessments of the Romans by a foreigner contained in a non-Roman source from the imperial period are no doubt the rock-face reliefs and the trilingual inscription at Naqsh-e-Rustam that glorify the deeds of the Sassanid king Shapur I.<sup>13</sup> As this monument celebrates the king's grand

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also Merkelbach 2000, 126–128. For Hellenistic kings sending ambassadors to India see also Strab. *geogr.* 2.1.9; 15.1.36; Plin. *NH* 6.21.58.

<sup>10</sup> Strab. *geogr.* 2.5.12; 17.1.13.

<sup>11</sup> Dio Chrys. *Or.* 32.36 and 39–40. Arist. *or. Rom.* 11–13.

<sup>12</sup> Dio Chrys. *Or.* 32.36. Cf. also Xen. *Eph.* 3.11.2 describing a rich Indian king who came to Alexandria for sightseeing in the 2nd or 3rd century CE. Although this is only a novelist's tale, the author evidently thought that his audience would in principle accept the possibility of such a scene in real life.

<sup>13</sup> Maricq 1958, 245–260.

victories over Roman troops, his invasions into Roman territories, and his capture of the Roman emperor Valerian, it is not surprising that the Romans are portrayed as rightly defeated aggressors and as violators of international agreements. From the late second or early third century CE Edessa in northern Mesopotamia, two of the earliest Syriac literary texts contain statements that convey a similar sentiment: “The letter of Mara Bar Sarapion to his son” and the “Book of the Laws of the countries.”<sup>14</sup> However, their historical background differs considerably from that of Shapur’s inscription, as the authors of these texts were victims of Rome’s expansion rather than victorious kings. Both Syriac texts probably date to the period between the later second and the early third century CE, when Rome, in successive steps, invaded, occupied, and finally provincialized Northern Mesopotamia and its capital city Edessa on the Silk Road. The “Book of the Laws of the countries” refers to the Romans as an aggressive power that will not refrain “from always conquering new territories,”<sup>15</sup> whereas “The letter of Mara Bar Sarapion to his son” even describes the Romans as arrogant, violent, self-righteous, uncivilized and dishonest aggressors with questionable moral standards. Yet, rather than being mere accusations against Roman aggression, these texts seem to be literary products by members of the former ruling elite that essentially advocated philosophic strategies of how to cope with a cruel fate that led to the loss of power, wealth and status in a period of political transition.<sup>16</sup> In essence, they propose to leave power and wealth behind and to indulge in education (*paideia*) and philosophy, and thus, by taking the moral high ground, to reverse the makings of fate and, in this respect, to outclass the Roman conquerors.

In this, the proposition of the Syriac texts, to some extent, appears to resemble that of the Peshar Habakkuk, a Hebrew text from the second half of the first century BCE preserved among the Dead Sea Scrolls.<sup>17</sup> This interpretative commentary on the Book of Habakkuk repeatedly refers to the *kittim*, a term that is now practically universally taken to designate “the Romans.” Thus, written

<sup>14</sup> “Mara Bar Sarapion”: Merz, Rensberger and Tieleman, forthcoming. See also Speidel 2012, 11–41.

“Book of the Laws of Countries”: Drijvers 2007.

<sup>15</sup> Thus the translation offered by Drijvers 2007, 52–53. Krannich and Stein 2004, 203–229, esp. 225f. (§ 40) translate: “... noch die Römer ständig andere Länder in Besitz zu nehmen ....” Interestingly, Euseb. *Praep. Ev.* 6.10.35 simply renders ... ἢ τοὺς Ῥωμαίους μὴ κρατεῖν ... The emphasis on Roman rule rather than on continuous conquest is even more pronounced in the reworked versions of the Pseudo-Clementines *Recogn.* 9.27, and in Diod. Tars. Κατὰ Ἐμμαομένης 6.45 (for which cf. Ramelli 2009, 134–135). The “Book of the Laws of Countries” also contains a reference to the Roman conquest of Northern Mesopotamia (Drijvers 2007, 56–57): “Recently the Romans have conquered Arabia ...” (Krannich and Stein 2004, 227 (§ 43)): “gestern (erst).” Euseb. *Praep. Ev.* 6.10.41: χθὲς.

<sup>16</sup> Speidel 2012, 26–27 and 39–41.

<sup>17</sup> 1QpHab. For what follows, see e.g. Brownlee 1979; Bernstein 2000, 647–650; Wise, Abegg Jr. and Cook 2005, 83–86; Burckhardt 2013, 59–76, esp. 70–74.

after Pompey's conquest of Jerusalem and the establishment of Roman supremacy over Judaea, the Peshar Habakkuk describes the *kittim* (modelled, of course, on the Chaldaeans of the Book of Habakkuk) as an evil and bellicose foreign power. They are said to be swift and formidable soldiers, inspiring all nations with fear, they wage wars to enrich themselves, they have conquered and pillaged many countries and, with their swords, mercilessly kill men, women, the old and children (even the unborn) alike. Collaborators and opportunists may become wealthy under this regime, but the Peshar predicts that from the hands of the *kittim* they will eventually suffer the same fate they inflict upon others. The text finally affirms that God will rescue those who maintain their faith and continue to live by his law, and that all others will suffer his retaliation on the Day of Judgement, thus (not unlike the Syriac texts mentioned above) predicting the ultimate victory of the righteous.

Further Near Eastern evidence comes from graffiti carved on rocks in an ancient North Arabian dialect, Safaïtic, by nomads from the eastern fringes of the Roman Empire in southern Syria, north-eastern Jordan, and northern Saudi Arabia. These Safaïtic graffiti from between the first century BCE and the fourth century CE often provide vivid glimpses of the daily life of their nomad authors. They include some 30 inscriptions which mention either the author's relations with (or attitude towards) *rm* (which, perhaps, not in all cases refers to "the Romans"), or which are dated to events involving the Romans or their emperor.<sup>18</sup> In general, these inscriptions convey the impression not primarily "of 'insiders' and 'outsiders' of the Roman Empire, but of constant symbiosis and communication – as well as occasional conflict – between the nomads and the settled populations of the local kingdoms and Roman provinces of this region."<sup>19</sup> Thus, there are texts that refer to "the year [in which] Malichus king of Nabataea smote thirty centuries (?) of Roman soldiers," or to "the year of the struggle between Rome and the Nabataeans," and to "the year of the Nabataeans' rebellion against the Romans."<sup>20</sup> None of these texts can be dated with any degree of certainty, yet some scholars have suggested they all belong to the period immediately following the Roman take-over of the Nabataean kingdom in 106 CE. While that cannot entirely be excluded, it is perhaps more (or at least just as) likely that (most of?) these inscriptions refer to hostilities between the Romans and the Nabataeans in the period following Pompey's creation of the province of Syria in 63 BCE. One text refers to "the year Caesar sent reinforcements to the province and put the province in good order."<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> For what follows see Macdonald 2014. Cf. also Scharrer 2010, 272–276.

<sup>19</sup> Macdonald 2014, 145.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 153f.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

This graffito has been dated to the reign of Septimius Severus and, in any event, seems to convey an approving attitude of its nomadic author towards Roman rule in the region. The same seems to be true for the authors of another group of Safaïtic graffiti which refer to military service for Rome in units composed entirely from members of these local tribes. Yet, there is also at least one episode of military brutality against a civilian on record, as well as some texts in which the authors say they were running away from the Romans or from Roman territory.

The authors of these graffiti were likely thinking specifically of Roman soldiers (irrespective of the soldiers' true origins) when they referred to "the Romans." The graffiti therefore probably refer to the relations of these nomads with the Roman army and authorities. It is hardly surprising that texts presenting Rome primarily as a military power originate from the fringes of the empire where military action against the enemies of Roman order (as well as Roman soldiers' abuse of power) would evidently have occurred more often than elsewhere. Yet, as is well known, Rome also had staunch supporters in these regions on both sides of the empire's provincial frontiers. Such friends of Rome did not hesitate to publically advertise their loyalty to Rome and to praise Roman victoriousness. An explicit example of this comes from the Hisma, a remote region in southeast Jordan through which the "Incense Road" ran. It was here that a man named Laurikios carved a graffito in Greek language on a rock:<sup>22</sup>

"The Romans always win. I, Laurikios wrote (this). Hail Zenon!"

Clearly, Laurikios rejoiced in Roman victoriousness, what in the context of this graffito most likely refers to local, small-scale engagements of the Roman army with brigands and other enemies of the Roman order in the region.<sup>23</sup> Zenon might indeed, as has been suggested, be the same man mentioned in a nearby Nabataean graffito (from perhaps around the mid-second century CE), in which

<sup>22</sup> IGLS XXI 138 = SEG 40, 1524 = SEG 57, 1906 = AE 1990, 1016: Ῥωμέοι ἀεὶ νικῶσιν. Λαυρίκιος ἔγραψα χαῖρε Ζήνων. The claim by Alpi 2007, 335–353, esp. 343–344 that the inscription consists of two distinctly different graffiti is neither borne out by the photograph in his fig. 2 on p. 337 nor by his drawing in fig. 5 on p. 342, and therefore remains unconvincing. There is also no need to date the graffito to the 4th–7th century CE based on late Roman and Byzantine "Nika-Aclamations," as suggested by Alpi.

<sup>23</sup> Thus also Scharrer 2010, 276 with further bibliography. The alterity conveyed by Laurikios' use of the expression "the Romans" is, by itself, not a reliable guide to whether or not he counted himself among the subjects of the Roman Empire: For Greek and early Syriac literature of the first centuries CE using the expression "the Romans" to denote historical and contemporary representatives of the Roman state see Speidel 2012, 15; cf. *ibid.*, 27 with n. 55. With particular reference to Roman soldiers in Late Roman and Byzantine literature see Alpi 2007, 349–350. For the Roman army fighting brigands along the trade routes as a possible context for this graffito see esp. SB 1.4282 = I.Pan du désert 87 and O.Krok. 87 from Egypt's Eastern Desert. Cf. Cuvigny 2005, 135.

he is described as a tribune (KLYRK = χιλίαρχης), and as the son of a man with an Arabic name (QYMT).<sup>24</sup> If the term “chiliarchēs” was used in its technical sense, Zenon was an Arab commander of a Roman auxiliary unit of one thousand soldiers. He could read and write Nabataean, read and understand Greek, as well as, no doubt, some Latin. Yet whether or not both men were identical is perhaps less important in the present context than the message these short epigraphic texts permanently conveyed to passers-by. For the latter hardly just included Roman soldiers and members of local communities, but also any brigands in the area (or other enemies of the Roman order) as well as traders and caravans on the “Incense Route.” They were all reminded of the Roman army’s success at keeping up or restoring security in the region. No doubt, Zenon and his fellow members of the Roman army were delighted to read messages of the kind Laurikios left behind.

However, not all foreigners thought of the Roman Empire in terms of a great military power. Ancient Chinese historiographical texts, for instance, have nothing at all to say about the Roman armed forces or their battlefield successes. These texts refer to the Roman Empire by the term “Da Qin” (i.e. Greater China), “apparently thinking of it as a kind of counter-China at the other end of the world.”<sup>25</sup> “Da Qin” is described as a particularly large (and, by implication, powerful) state with many dependencies. Yet, there are no Chinese descriptions of Rome’s army, military capacity or martialness.<sup>26</sup> Rather, these texts simply praise the Romans as “tall and honest” or characterize them as a nation of traders.<sup>27</sup>

Rome’s allied and dependent kings such as Tigranes III and Artavasdes III of Armenia, or Rhoemetalkes I of Thracia no doubt had different concepts of Rome and her ruler in mind when they added an image of Augustus to their coinage.<sup>28</sup> Artavasdes III even included a legend claiming that Augustus was a benefactor (*euergetes*). These kings owed their position to Augustus, and therefore their official appraisal of splendid relations with the Roman ruler was an entirely political statement.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, like most of Rome’s foreign friends, they lived

<sup>24</sup> Jobling 1982, 199–209: *šlm Zynwn br Qymt klyrk bb l’lm* (“Greetings! Zenon son of QYMT, Tribune, with (the) good forever”). Cf. Tanner 1990, 183–193, esp. 184–188. Isaac 1998, 341. For a different view see Alpi 2007, 337, 339, 347. The well-known bilingual (Greek-Nabataean) inscription from Ruwafa in the Hejaz (AE 1977, 834 = SEG 39, 1390; cf. SEG 51, 2290) recording the dedication of a temple to the Emperors Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus in 166/169 CE is not, as often held, from beyond the frontiers of the Roman Empire, but from within *provincia Arabia*. Cf. Bowersock 1983, 156–157, now confirmed by Speidel 2009, 633–635. See also Macdonald 2009, 1–26.

<sup>25</sup> Pulleyblank 1999, 71–79, esp. 71. Cf. also Hoppál 2011, 263–306, esp. 270. Yu 2013, 1–268, esp. 28–29.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Leslie and Gardiner 1996, 260.

<sup>27</sup> Hou Hanshu 11: Hill 2009, 25. Liang-Shu 54: Leslie and Gardiner 1996, 100.

<sup>28</sup> Tigranes III and Artavasdes IV of Armenia: RPC I 3841, 3843; Mousheghian and Depeyrot 1999, 187–188 with table VIII, 169–170; IK 65, no. 472. Rhoemetalkes I of Thracia: RPC I 1708–1710.

<sup>29</sup> For similar cases cf. e.g. Crawford 1985, 273–275; Millar 2004, 229–245.

within the reach of Roman arms, and therefore may not always have felt entirely free to make their own political choices. For, as Eutropius (8.8) ascertains, Rome's influence among her foreign allies rested as much upon veneration (*veneratio*) as on fear (*terror*). In any event, by including Augustus' portrait on their coinage they disseminated a symbol of loyalty to Rome, not a statement of their personal assessment of Augustus or the Roman Empire.

It is therefore, perhaps, surprising to find the portrait of Augustus on a series of Sabaeen coins from the Yemen.<sup>30</sup> South Arabia is not usually counted among the regions that were under Roman control. Yet, the only plausible reason for Sabaeans to strike a portrait of Augustus (or any other Roman emperor) on their coins seems to be that they too intended to send a signal of political loyalty to Rome in the same way that other allied kings and dynasts did in this period.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, the *Periplus Maris Erythraei* relates that the mid-first century "legitimate ruler" (ἔνθεσμος βασιλεὺς) of the Sabaeans and the Himyarites, Charibaël (Χαριβαήλ / Karib'il Watar Yuhan'im, ca. 40–70 CE), referred to himself as a "friend of the Emperors" (φίλος τῶν αὐτοκρατόρων) and that he continuously sent "embassies and gifts" to the Romans.<sup>32</sup> If this choice of words indeed reflects official Roman terminology, as seems likely, it implies that the kings of Saba and Dhu Raydan (= Himyar) had entered a state of political friendship (*amicitia*, cf. below) with Rome and were now among Rome's dependent allies. Further documentary evidence can be shown to corroborate this interpretation. Surely, Sabaeen and Himyarite *amicitia* with Rome was, at least initially, the result of a military expedition, which the Roman general Aelius Gallus led to South Arabia in 26 / 25 BCE. The ensuing alliance between Rome and the kingdom of Saba and Dhu Raydan no doubt significantly contributed towards increased security along the maritime and overland trade routes in the wider region, thus facilitating trade and increasing its volume, which soon benefitted both sides.<sup>33</sup>

If public displays of the attitudes of foreign rulers and dynasts towards Rome were closely monitored and interpreted within the framework of transnational political communication, ordinary citizens from communities beyond the empire's boundaries, it seems, enjoyed a little more freedom in proclaiming their

<sup>30</sup> Coins: BMC Arabia 32–48. Potts 1994, 1–12, confidently identifying the portrait as that of Augustus on p. 214–215; Munro-Hay 2003, 47–48; Huth 2010, xx–xxi and 100–101 ("Roman style bust," "resembling bust of Augustus").

<sup>31</sup> Cf. above n. 28 and 29 as well as e.g. the coins of Ajax, highpriest and *toparch* of eastern Cilicia Tracheia (RPC I 3724, 3726, 3727) or Philip, tetrarch of Gaulanitis (RPC I 4938–4943).

<sup>32</sup> *PME* 23. For embassies from South Arabia to Rome see also Plin. *NH* 12.31.56.

<sup>33</sup> The argument is set out in full in Speidel 2015 A, 105–111. For a discussion of the documentary evidence see Speidel 2015. Cf. also below.

personal political opinion of Rome in their everyday lives. That, at any rate, is what Dio Chrysostomus implies in an episode from the Greek colony of Olbia on the northern shore of the Black Sea, where he passed through during the later first century CE.<sup>34</sup> He described the inhabitants of this colony that was situated on an important salt road as a community of long-bearded, backward Greeks, whose dialect was incomprehensible, but whose beards would have thrilled any philosopher. Only one citizen of this colony, Dio claims, was clean shaven – out of flattery to the Romans. In the eyes of his Olbian fellow citizens such behavior was disgraceful and unseemly for real men. The episode may be greatly exaggerated or distorted, but Dio apparently expected his audience to believe it. Yet, outward appearance and dress was not always intended to convey political statements. Thus, such motives were hardly foremost on the minds of the many people from the southern Red Sea and around the “Horn of Africa” who are reported to have bought (and surely also wore) imported “Roman” style clothes.<sup>35</sup>

### III. Trade and Friendship

To be sure, not all political statements by foreign rulers concerning Rome were motivated by anxiety. Thus, fear of Rome’s military power can hardly have prompted Kujula Kadphises (ca. 30–80 CE), the first Kushan ruler, to strike the bust of a Julio-Claudian emperor on the obverse of a series of coins he minted at Taxila (near modern Islamabad in Pakistan).<sup>36</sup> Even more surprisingly, the reverse side of these coins shows the Kushan ruler in Indo-Scythian dress sitting on what remarkably looks like a *sella curulis*. As seats of this type are not known to have belonged to the contemporary domestic culture of northern India, it is generally held that this image refers to a real Roman *sella curulis*. If correct, it might have been given to one of the numerous Indian missions on record that came to Rome seeking *amicitia*, for giving presents to successful such embassies is a well-documented Roman practice, and there are a number of known cases where the Roman grant of *amicitia* was underpinned by presenting a *sella curulis* (and other gifts) to the new *amicus*.<sup>37</sup> Incidentally, what appears to be the actual remains of such a *sella curulis* have been unearthed during excavations at Taxila where the above-mentioned coins are believed to have been struck.<sup>38</sup>

If correct, the historical context of these coins is probably connected to

<sup>34</sup> Dio Chrys. *Or.* 36.17. Cf. e.g. Braund 1997, 121–136, esp. 126–129.

<sup>35</sup> *PME* 6; 8–10; 12–13.

<sup>36</sup> Marshall 1951, vol. 2, 544; Jairazbhoy 1963, 120; MacDowall 1968, 34–149, esp. 144, n. 4; Mahler 2008, 297–319, esp. 301–303.

<sup>37</sup> Braund 1984, 34–35.

<sup>38</sup> Marshall 1951, vol. 2, 544 (no. 54), and vol. 3, 170 (no. 54).

diplomatic contacts with Rome.<sup>39</sup> Augustus proudly records in his “Achievements” that “embassies of kings from India were often sent to me, such as previously have never been seen in the presence of any Roman leader.”<sup>40</sup> The immediate textual context of this statement within the *Res Gestae* implies that the Indian ambassadors came to ask for “friendship” (*amicitia*) with Augustus and Rome, and that is indeed what Suetonius explicitly states.<sup>41</sup> In fact, whenever ancient reports of embassies from India provide any context or purpose at all, the envoys are always presented as seeking “friendship” (*amicitia*, φίλῖα) with Rome. Surely, foreign envoys hardly travelled all the way to meet the Roman ruler simply to exchange pleasantries. Unfortunately, the term *amicitia* by itself is no guide to the specific type or terms of a treaty (formal or informal),<sup>42</sup> and the Roman narrative sources need not be comprehensive in this respect, as they are almost exclusively concerned with the political and military aspects of treaties. Suetonius held that foreign embassies from far-away countries sought Augustus’ (and the Roman people’s) friendship because of the renown of the Roman ruler’s bravery and moderation. At least in some parts of the ancient Middle East reports of the vast and unparalleled powers of the Roman emperors indeed seem to have left a deep impression with local dynasts.<sup>43</sup> That, at any rate, is what the use of

<sup>39</sup> For diplomatic contacts between Rome and India in the first century CE (with the references) see e.g. Ziethen 1994, 141–197, 150. Cf. also Cooley 2009, 249–251 and McLaughlin 2010, 111–120. Later references in the sources include Cass. Dio 68.15.1 (106 CE); an ancient South Arabian inscription: Beaucamp, Briquel-Chatonnet and Robin 1999 / 2000, 15–83, esp. 70 (ca. 218/219 CE?); HA *Aurel.* 33.4 (270 CE); Euseb. *v. Const.* 4.50 (336/337 CE); Amm. 22.7.10 (361 CE); Malalas 477 (530 CE).

<sup>40</sup> *RgdA* 31. See also Suet. *Aug.* 21.3. In particular: Oros. 6.21.19–20; Cass. Dio 54.9.8; Strab. *geogr.* 15.1.4; Plin. *NH* 8.25.65; Florus 2.34. As only two Indian embassies are independently known to have met Augustus, Cooley 2009, 249–250 concludes that the Roman ruler unduly exaggerated diplomatic contacts with India in order to propagate the idea that his influence won new friends of Rome even in the remotest parts of the ancient world. Yet, even though there can be no doubt that Augustus made the most of the arrival of Indian and other foreign embassies, that by itself is not a compelling reason to question his statement all together, or to believe that the other surviving sources record the entirety or even the majority of diplomatic contacts between India and Rome in the Augustan period.

<sup>41</sup> *RgdA* 31 continues by evoking envoys of the Bastarnae, Scythians, Sarmatians, Albanians and Hiberians, and immediately begins with *nostram amicitiam appetiverunt...*, implying that this statement, which links the two sentences, was also true for the Indian envoys. Suet. *Aug.* 21: *qua virtutis moderationisque fama Indos etiam ac Scythos auditu modo cognitos pellexit ad amicitiam suam populique Romani ultro per legatos petendam*. For a recent assessment of the notion of *amicitia* with respect to Roman empire-building see Burton 2001. For the importance of political *amicitia* for the Indo-Mediterranean trade in the imperial period see Speidel 2015 A, 111–119 and forthcoming B.

<sup>42</sup> For discussions of the correlation between *amicitia* and formal treaties see e.g. Heuss 1933, esp. 55; Timpe 1972, 277–295, esp. 288; Schuler 2007, 51–79, esp. 64–65; Coşkun 2008, 209–230; Kehne 2010, 31–65, esp. 42–43; Zack 2011–2013, 47–119, 61–128, 63–113.

<sup>43</sup> Suet. *Aug.* 21: *qua virtutis moderationisque fama*. The emperor Antoninus Pius is said to have had such unmatched prestige (*auctoritas*) among foreign nations (HA *Ant. Pius* 9.10) that they referred their controversies to him (Eutr. 8.8) and that even the *Indi*, *Bactri*, and *Hyr cani* (*Epit. de Caes.* 15.4) sent embassies to Rome seeking his just decision (*iustitia*). Cf. also the text in n. 53, below.



the title *Kaisar* by the Kushan ruler Kanishka II (ca. 225–245 CE) appears to imply.<sup>44</sup> Whether, as has often been assumed, the name *Gesar* of the hero of Tibet's classic epic derived from the Latin imperial title *Caesar* is perhaps less than certain.<sup>45</sup>

Surely, for *amicitia* to exist or to be recognized as a state of international “friendship” beyond the reach of Roman arms, it needed to satisfy certain expectations on both sides, even if imperial Rome thought of itself as (and behaved like) the dominant power. John Thorley argued that Kushan wealth was based, to a significant extent, on trade with the Roman Empire.<sup>46</sup> Unfortunately, our sources fail to explicitly clarify whether and to what extent the Indian embassies to Rome were commercially motivated. It is suggestive, therefore, that the arrival of the earliest embassies from India under Augustus coincided with an enormous increase in the volume of Indo-Mediterranean trade. At any rate, Herodian, in his *Roman History* from the mid-third century CE, listed some of the improvements which international treaties brought about for long distance traders.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, some of the better known treaties establishing or confirming *amicitia* with Rome may indicate, by analogy, that facilitating trade and increasing its volume was indeed among the intentions that led both Romans and Indians to conclude such agreements of friendship. Thus, the earliest treaties with Carthage (508/507 and 348? BCE), which are generally held to be wholly economic in contents and which according to Moses Finley were among the very few international trade agreements that Rome ever concluded, began, according to Polybios, with the words: “There shall be friendship (φιλία) between the Romans (...) and the Carthaginians (...) on the following conditions: ...”<sup>48</sup> The evocation of *amicitia* in the opening passage of these Roman trade agreements strongly suggests that *amicitia* could indeed be seen to have entailed important economic implications from Rome's earliest history onwards. One such implication concerned piracy, which the early treaties with Carthage apparently aimed to reduce.<sup>49</sup> The link between *amicitia* and the fight against piracy is also borne out by the *lex de provinciis praetoriis* of 100 BCE.<sup>50</sup> For this text, which deals with the provincial organization of Cilicia and Macedonia, the suppression of piracy and the administration of newly conquered territories relates how Roman magistrates could address letters to eastern kings who had friendship and

<sup>44</sup> Thorley 1979, 181–190, esp. 185–186; Kulke and Rothermund 2004, 83; McLaughlin 2010, 128–131.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. e.g. Beyer 1992, 140; Lianrong 2001, 317–342; Schaeffer, Kapstein and Tuttle 2013, 309.

<sup>46</sup> Thorley 1979, 189.

<sup>47</sup> Augustus: Strab. *geogr.* 2.5.12, 17.1.13. Herodian: Hdn. 4,10.

<sup>48</sup> Polyb. 3.22.4 and 3.24.3–13; Serrati 2006, 113–134, esp. 113 and 120. Cf. Finley 1973, 161.

<sup>49</sup> See Ameling 1993, 130–140.

<sup>50</sup> IK 41, no. 31; Crawford et al. 1996, no. 12. Cf. Ferrary 1977, 619–660.

alliance with Rome, instructing them not to support or tolerate piracy but to help the Romans provide safety according to justice and the laws.

A recently published bronze tablet inscribed with the text of a treaty between Rome and the commune of the Lycians from 46 BCE provides further insight.<sup>51</sup> It begins by confirming the state of *φιλία* (= *amicitia*),<sup>52</sup> which, as we know from another recently published epigraphic copy of an earlier treaty, already existed between the two partners.<sup>53</sup> Among other things, the remaining parts of the treaty of 46 BCE contain regulations of substantial economic significance. Thus, the new treaty refers to the previous mutual promise of military support (which evidently included fighting pirates), and then adds a new clause that specifies the relationship between Rome and her free allies with regard to criminal and civil cases. By confirming and spelling out the Lycians' right to be tried for capital offences according to their own laws in their native country, this clause not only endorsed a privilege to their communality but also contributed to the legal security of travelers and merchants (or at least it can be understood to have done so). For, if a dispute arose, those involved could now consult a highly official text, which was on public display. The clauses of this treaty therefore reassured both partners with respect to the efforts they would undertake to establish a safe environment within their respective realms, and they helped to prevent conflicts that could develop out of diverging notions of justice or interpretations of legal concepts. Thus, even though the treaty of 46 BCE also contained a new clause, by which the Lycians acknowledged the superiority of Rome,<sup>54</sup> it also intended to establish a general context that was favorable to trade relations, and thereby also promoted Lycian interests.

Flourishing around the mid-second century CE, the Roman jurist Sextus Pomponius also reflected on the correlation between political *amicitia* and international legal security. Thus, a fragment of his writings which survives in the Digests, reads:<sup>55</sup>

“... if there is neither friendship (*amicitia*) nor hospitium, nor a formal treaty made for the purpose of friendship (*foedus amicitiae causa*) between a particular

<sup>51</sup> AE 2005, 1487 = SEG 55, 1452 = Bull. Ép. 2006, 146. For what follows see the excellent commentary by Mitchell 2005, 161–258. Cf. also Schuler 2007; Sanchez 2009, 363–381; Kantor 2013, 219–224, all with further bibliography.

<sup>52</sup> It also included *symmachia* and *koinonia*.

<sup>53</sup> Earlier treaty: AE 2007, 1504 = SEG 56, 1664. Cf. Schuler 2007.

<sup>54</sup> For the “Majestätsklausel” see Täubler 1913, 64; Polyb. 21.32; Liv. 38.11; I.Knidon 33.

<sup>55</sup> Pompon. Dig. 49.15.5.2: ... *nam si cum gente aliqua neque amicitiam neque hospitium neque foedus amicitiae causa factum habemus, hi hostes quidem non sunt, quod autem ex nostro ad eos pervenit, illorum fit, et liber homo noster ab eis captus servus fit et eorum: idemque est, si ab illis ad nos aliquid perveniat. ...*

people and us, they are not exactly our enemies, but anything, which belongs to us and passes under their control becomes their property, and a free man of ours who is captured by them becomes their slave, and the same happens if anything from them passes under our control ...”

It is not necessary for our present purpose to explore the entire range of legal and historical implications of this passage.<sup>56</sup> It is enough to note that in the mid-second century CE an eminent Roman jurist correlated the physical and legal security of Roman merchants in a foreign country with the existence of political *amicitia* (or *hospitium* or *foedus amicitiae causa*) between Rome and that country. Surely, it is also significant that Pomponius presents this correlation not as a phenomenon of a distant past but rather as a reality of his own days. Roman governments concluding and amending a variety of treaties and agreements within a framework that carried the label *amicitia* can therefore be understood to have been an important and common Roman response to the needs of international long distance trade (though Rome no doubt always kept its own benefit foremost in mind).

Of course this is not to suggest that there could not be or was no trade without treaties or a state of *amicitia*. But the sources referred to above suggest that the existence of *amicitia* reassured merchants and long distance traders.<sup>57</sup> By concluding agreements of political friendship, Indian and other foreign rulers might therefore have hoped to increase the flow of commercial traffic from the Roman Empire into their realms. One might imagine, for instance, that the icon of a *templum Augusti* on the Peutinger map or the assurance of an Indian embassy to the emperor Constantine that their countrymen paid homage to the Roman emperor (of whom they allegedly kept paintings and statues) were somehow connected to such *amicitia* agreements.<sup>58</sup> Be that as it may, Roman merchants involved in the trade with partners at Muziris would surely have rejoiced at the sight of the symbol of a *templum Augusti* on any comparable display or description of southern India. For such symbols no doubt implied a friendly attitude of local rulers towards Roman merchants and may even have hinted at the existence of a resident community or the repeated and regular presence of people from the Roman Empire (both of which are referred to repeatedly in the

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<sup>56</sup> See Zack 2011, 47–119 with the full relevant bibliography. In Zack’s view (*ibid.*, 108), however, *amicitia*-treaties, in Roman legal terms, were irrelevant to the safety of Roman and other ancient merchants.

<sup>57</sup> Compare Casson’s remarks on *hormoi apodeidegmenoi* and *emporion enthesmon* in the *PME*: Casson 1989, 271–277.

<sup>58</sup> Euseb. *v. Const.* 4.50. For evidence of the imperial cult beyond the frontiers of the *Imperium Romanum* see Metzler 1989, 196–200. Speidel forthcoming A.

classical Tamil literature from the first two or three centuries CE).<sup>59</sup> *Amicitia* with Rome should have obliged the local Indian rulers to protect Roman merchants from pirates (which both the Peutinger map and the elder Pliny recorded in the region of Muziris).<sup>60</sup> The *Periplus Maris Erythraei*, perhaps, refers to such a case, for it mentions a situation of post-war turmoil at the Indian harbor of Kalliena, a former ἐμπόριον ἔνθεσμον (“lawful trading-station”), and it informs its readers that Greek ships which by chance approached that harbor were escorted “under guard” to the port of Barygaza.<sup>61</sup>

Evidently, the Indian Ocean was an area where the Romans had to achieve their political and economic goals by diplomacy and negotiation rather than by military superiority. Unfortunately, it is not known how many agreements of friendship between Rome and distant kings along the eastern trade routes existed at any given point in time. Nor is it possible to determine whether such monuments as the *templum Augusti* at Muziris or the Greek inscription on the statue base of a second or third century Roman emperor from the Himyarite capital of Zafar in modern Yemen, recently published by Christian Marek, are indeed products of political *amicitia* with Rome.<sup>62</sup> However, the few cases that are on record imply that long distance trade could (and apparently often did) lead to the establishment of diplomatic contacts and political agreements, which the Romans called *amicitia*. Remarkably however, the presence of Romans and the availability of information on the *Imperium Romanum* did not in all cases incite contemplation of Rome as a political state. Thus, Tamil Sangam poetry has nothing to say in this respect but simply describes the Romans (referred to as “Yavanas”) as merchants (with a particular interest in pepper for which they paid in gold), mercenaries and craftsmen with extraordinarily big, beautiful and excellent ships.<sup>63</sup>

At any rate, it appears that many rulers perceived agreements with Rome (or statements of mutual friendship) as desirable, particularly as an efficient means to facilitate trade. Of course, Roman emperors never hesitated to interpret, accept and promulgate requests by foreign rulers for *amicitia* as signs of submission, for in Roman eyes, accepting Roman domination was the ideal basis for political friendship. Also, at Rome, just as with the great empires of the Near and Far

<sup>59</sup> For western residents in South India see Meile 1940, 85–123; Casson 1989, 24–25; McLaughlin 2010, 18–19 and 55–56. Fauconnier 2012.

<sup>60</sup> Plin. *NH* 6.26.104: *non expetendum propter vicinos piratas*.

<sup>61</sup> *PME* 52. Cf. Casson 1989, 215; McLaughlin 2010, 47. For a different view see Gupta 2007, 37–51, esp. 48–49.

<sup>62</sup> Statue base: Marek 2013, 307–314.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. McLaughlin 2010, 18–19 and 55–57; Sidebotham 2011, 225; Fauconnier 2012, 94–102. Roman merchants in India: see also Dio Chrys. *Or.* 35.22.

East, the influx of a great variety of exotic goods was understood to reflect the Empire's majesty.<sup>64</sup> Conversely, it is not unlikely that Indian kings with good trade relations to Rome (and elsewhere) benefitted not only from the flow of trade as such but also from the symbolic value of popular foreign imports such as wine, coral or gold coins, simply by making them available to their subjects.<sup>65</sup> Unfortunately, it is hardly ever possible to determine the precise symbolic value of any given product, which, in any event, would have varied depending on the recipient's location in society, space, and time. Nevertheless, in ancient China and elsewhere the local value of imported goods directly reflected on the reputation of their country of origin as well as on the significance of their rulers.<sup>66</sup> For when in 166 CE "envoys" of the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius (or Antoninus Pius) arrived at the Chinese court with offers of rhinoceros horn, ivory and turtle shell, the Chinese naturally took these gifts for tribute, but having expected jewels and exotica, they were not impressed and began to suspect that the wondrous accounts they had heard of the Roman Empire were all together exaggerated.<sup>67</sup>

#### IV. Phantasies and Information

The arrival of the Roman "embassy" of 166 CE was recorded in ancient China as "the very first time there was [direct] communication" (i.e. between the two empires), which implies that several more such visits followed.<sup>68</sup> Yet, only two further direct contacts are on record for the third century, both known only from Chinese sources and both concerning Roman visitors to China. Thus, a Chinese account from the sixth century CE using material from much earlier periods (*Liang-Shu* 54), reports the visit in 226 CE of a Roman merchant to the court of the emperor Wu at Nanking. Allegedly this merchant who seems to have arrived via the sea route, left a now lost detailed account of the Roman Empire with the Chinese emperor.<sup>69</sup> Another Roman "embassy" bringing "tribute" is recorded in

<sup>64</sup> Cf. e.g. Ov. *Ars* 3.113–114; Tac. *Ann.* 2.60; Arist. *or. Rom.* 12–13.

<sup>65</sup> Sidebotham 2011, 251.

<sup>66</sup> For a Roman assessment see Tac. *Ann.* 2.60. For Sri Lanka: Plin. *NH* 6.24.85 and Cosmas 11.338. For China: Hou Hanshu 12: Hill 2009, 27.

<sup>67</sup> Leslie and Gardiner 1996, 223; Hill 2009, 27 and 292–293.

<sup>68</sup> Hou Hanshu 12: Hill 2009, 27. For the story, reported by Ptolemy 1.11 of the agents of the Roman merchant Maës Titianus to the distant city of "Sera" (somewhere west of the Pamirs) see Cary 1956; Leslie and Gardiner 1996, 149; McLaughlin 2010, 126–128 and now Heil and Schulz in this volume. For Ptolemy's (7.1) use of reports by a merchant named Alexandros of Roman and Indian trade voyages as far east as Borneo (?) see Berggren and Jones 2000, 26–27 and 74; McLaughlin 2010, 57–59.

<sup>69</sup> Leslie and Gardiner 1996, 100–101 and 158–159. Cf. Hirth 1885, 46–48. The account does not appear to have been the source of the information given in the *Wei Lue* (for which see below), as that text is exclusively concerned with the land route.

other Chinese sources to have arrived in China in 284/285 CE.<sup>70</sup> However, there are no sources that indicate or imply regular direct interaction between the two great empires at the opposite ends of the Eurasian continent during the first three centuries CE. In fact, the account that records the visit of 226 CE (*Liang-Shu*, 54) also states that Roman merchants often visited Fu-nan (Cambodia), Jih-nan (Annam), and Chiao-chih (Tong-King), but rarely travelled to China. Similarly, the *Periplus Maris Erythraei* (64) claims that because China was difficult of access, “people rarely arrive from there, and only few.”

A good number of historical accounts from the Later Han period (23–220 CE) onwards clearly attest to the collection of detailed information on the *Imperium Romanum* by the Chinese.<sup>71</sup> Nevertheless, Chinese conceptions of “Da Qin” (the term, by which early Chinese historiography referred to the Roman Empire) were “confused from the outset with ancient mythological notions” of a utopian empire in the Far West.<sup>72</sup> Such notions were evidently at the very origins of the term “Da Qin,” for it meant “Greater China” and was not a transcription of a foreign name.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, the existence of a “Greater China” at the opposite end of the world conflicted with the ancient Chinese conception of the real world, which held that China (the “Middle Kingdom”) was its cultural center. According to this conception, the farther away a foreign people lived from the center, the more “barbarian” they were believed to be.<sup>74</sup> But, of course, it was unthinkable that the people of “Greater China” should have been the most uncivilized people on earth. Therefore they were portrayed as resembling “the people of the Middle Kingdom, and that is why this kingdom is called Da Qin.”<sup>75</sup> The Romans were described as “tall and virtuous like the Chinese, but they wear western clothes.” An explanation was also provided: “They [i.e. the Romans] say they originally came from China, but left it.”<sup>76</sup>

Such fanciful notions were complemented with information derived from true facts. Ever since Friedrich Hirth, in 1885, published his monograph *China and the Roman Orient* with a selection of ancient Chinese texts containing information on the Roman and Byzantine Empires (including translations and an extended commentary), these records have attracted much scholarly attention,

<sup>70</sup> Leslie and Gardiner 1996, 159–160.

<sup>71</sup> Collected in Hirth 1885; Leslie and Gardiner 1996. See also Hill 2014 and Hill 2009. On the transmission of information to and from China see Kolb and Speidel forthcoming.

<sup>72</sup> Graf 1996, 199–216, esp. 199–200; Pulleyblank 1999, 78; Hoppál 2011, 264; Yu 2013, 69–70.

<sup>73</sup> Pulleyblank 1999, 71 and 77; Hill 2009, 254–256; Hoppál 2011, 269–271; Yu 2013, 1–43. Remarkably, the earliest Chinese texts with references to Rome contain no Chinese transcriptions of the name *Roma* or *Imperium Romanum* or similar: Pulleyblank 1999, 77.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. e.g. Creel 1929; Wang 1999, 285–305.

<sup>75</sup> Hou Hanshu 11: Hill 2009, 23.

<sup>76</sup> Wei Lüe: Leslie and Gardiner 1996, 70; Hill 2009, 255.

though primarily among Sinologists.<sup>77</sup> For these texts provide information on the routes to and the communication with the Roman Empire (and other “Western Regions”), on its geography, its capital, its administration and infrastructure, on dependent kingdoms, on its agriculture and stockbreeding, on textiles, perfumes and herbs, on other natural resources as well as on the population and their daily life. Two texts in particular deserve to be mentioned here, the *Hou Hanshu* and the *Wei Lüe*. The *Hou Hanshu* is the official history of the Later (or “Eastern”) Han Dynasty (25–221 CE).<sup>78</sup> It was compiled mainly by a man named Fan Ye in the first half of the fifth century CE from earlier works, to which important sections from a now lost work (*Xu Hanshu*) by Sima Biao (240–306 CE) were added. These sections include a “Chronicle on the Western Regions,” which is primarily based on a report by Ban Yong to the emperor An in ca. 125 CE and replaced earlier accounts of the “Western Regions.”<sup>79</sup> This report included descriptions of the Roman Empire that stemmed from information the Chinese envoy Gan Ying had gathered during his mission to “Da Qin.” Although Gan Ying never actually reached the *Imperium Romanum*, he is said to have made it to the shores of the Persian Gulf in 97 CE, where he collected as much information on the “Da Qin” as he could.<sup>80</sup> The other early historiographical text containing important information on “Da Qin,” the *Wei Lüe*, is a chapter on “Peoples of the West” from a now lost “Brief Account of the Wei Dynasty,” compiled at an unknown date in the third century CE by Yu Huan.<sup>81</sup> The chapter has survived as an extensive quotation in a work of the fifth century. It both repeats earlier information on “Da Qin” (including much from the *Hou Hanshu*) and supplies valuable new material, which seems to date mainly to the second and early third century CE.<sup>82</sup> Other information collected in these accounts may have been transmitted to China indirectly by merchants or on the rare occasions of direct contact such as the Roman “embassy” of 166 CE which the *Hou Hanshu* records as having been sent from Āndūn, the king of “Da Qin” (i.e. Marcus Aurelius, or, perhaps, Antoninus Pius), or the (now lost) Roman merchant’s account of 226 CE.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Hirth 1885. For bibliography see Leslie and Gardiner 1996, 3–6; Hill 2009, passim; Hoppál 2011, 266–269; Yu 2013, 43–127. For important remarks by an historian of the Roman Empire see Graf 1996.

<sup>78</sup> For what follows, see Hill 2009, xv–xxii with Mansvelt Beck 1990, 1, and Bielenstein 1953, 16–17.

<sup>79</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 1: Hill 2009, 13, cf. *ibid.*, 159.

<sup>80</sup> On Gan Ying’s mission and his much debated itinerary see *Hou Hanshu* 10: Hill 2009, 23 and 481–483. Leslie and Gardiner 1996, 141–148; Hoppál 2011, 299–300; Yu 2013, 5 and 10–17.

<sup>81</sup> See Chavannes 1905, 519–571; Leslie and Gardiner 1996, 65–78; Hill 2014. “About the Text” and “About the Dating and the Background of the Text”: Hoppál 2011, 268–269.

<sup>82</sup> For other (later) ancient Chinese accounts relevant to the Roman Empire and the ancient Mediterranean World see Leslie and Gardiner 1996, 3, 33, 57, 80. Cf. also Hoppál 2011, 268–269.

<sup>83</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 12: Hill 2009, 27, cf. *ibid.*, 289–296. Roman merchant’s account: Leslie and Gardiner

Various problems are connected with the Chinese historical accounts and their interpretation. The compilation of these texts in ancient China was a bureaucratic procedure that involved much copying of earlier accounts and relied on records and archives.<sup>84</sup> Thus, the precise origins and date of the underlying pieces of information and how they found their way to China often remains unknown, although diplomats, merchants and the great eastern trade routes undoubtedly played a fundamental role. The characterization of the Romans in the *Hou Hanshu* as “honest in business: they do not have two prices” or the long list of “products of Da Qin” in the *Wei Lüe* reflects the importance of long distance trade in transmitting information from the Mediterranean to China.<sup>85</sup> The above-mentioned passage on “Da Qin” from the *Liang-Shu* (54) even characterized the inhabitants of the Roman Empire as a people of traders. Long distance trade is indeed a very prominent and recurring topic in the Chinese historical accounts of the Far West. Interestingly, these texts characterize both Roman and Chinese long distance trade (to which they also refer as “communication” between countries) as an essentially national affair, in which diplomacy opens trade routes and markets.<sup>86</sup> This is perhaps not simply to be taken as a specifically Chinese representation of transnational trade, for Roman sources also appear to imply that diplomacy and international agreements were involved in facilitating long distance trade.<sup>87</sup>

A particularly complex issue concerns the identification of topographical and geographical terms and features in the ancient Chinese accounts. The main difficulty is that the transcription of foreign place names from Chinese characters and the reconstruction of their phonological values in the Han period requires a highly specialized knowledge of Chinese historical phonology and, apparently, nevertheless often produces highly controversial results.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, it is not usually taken into account that many places in the Roman East had more than one name, and that the Chinese authors may have transcribed pronunciations of

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1996, 100–101 and 158–159. This account cannot have been the source of information on the land route, as the Roman merchant clearly came by sea.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. e.g. Loewe 1986, 2–6; Leslie and Gardiner 1996, 19–31; Hoppál 2011, 269, all with further bibliography.

<sup>85</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 12: Hill 2009, 27; Hill 2014, section 12. For reports of contacts between China and the West (including Rome) from the second century CE onwards, see e.g. Graf 1996, 200; Leslie and Gardiner 1996, 150–162; Hill 2009, 291–296.

<sup>86</sup> E.g. *Hou Hanshu* 12: Hill 2009, 27: “The king of this country [Rome] always wanted to send envoys to Han [China], but Anxi [Parthia] wishing to control the trade with multi-coloured Chinese silks, blocked the route to prevent [the Romans] getting through [to China].” *Hou Hanshu* 15: Hill 2009, 31: “This region [North-West India] ... communicates with Da Qin.” *Wei Lüe* 12: Hill 2014, section 12: “That is why this country [Rome] trades with Anxi (Parthia).”

<sup>87</sup> Speidel forthcoming B.

<sup>88</sup> On the matter in general, see esp. Pulleyblank 1999; Hill 2009, xix–xx.



place names that (multiple) transmission by non-Greek and non-Latin speakers had significantly distorted.

The matter is clearly important if we want to understand and make use of these texts. The introduction to the chapter on the Roman Empire in the *Hou Hanshu* might serve as an illustration: “The Kingdom of Da Qin is also called Lijian. As it is found to the West of the sea, it is also called the Kingdom of Haixi (= ‘West of the Sea’).”<sup>89</sup> Nearly the same statement was also included into the *Wei Lüe*.<sup>90</sup> It is perhaps not entirely surprising that the legendary empire of “Greater China,” as a real state, also had other, less mythical names, which derived from existing political or geographical entities. However, there is no consensus, which countries or regions Lijiān and Haixi referred to, and it therefore even remains unclear what parts the term “Da Qin” exactly denoted. There are various competing theories concerning the derivation and location of Lijian, including Hyrcania, Alexandria, Petra, Seleucia, Media, and Rai (ancient Teheran).<sup>91</sup> Edwin Pulleyblank, a leading expert of Chinese historical phonology, maintained in his review of Donald D. Leslie’s and Kenneth H. J. Gardiner’s *The Roman Empire in Chinese Sources* that Lijian was the Han transcription for Hyrcania, the region on the southern shores of the Caspian Sea.<sup>92</sup> In his opinion, the name “Lijian” was used in ancient Chinese records to refer to the former Seleucid Empire. Later, according to Pulleyblank, at some time after the absorption of the last (i.e. Syrian) remains of the Seleucid kingdom by the Roman Empire “it was decided at the Han court that Dà Qín corresponded to Lijiān.” Considering that important strands of the over land silk routes led to Zeugma on the Euphrates and to Antioch in the Roman province of Syria, the association of information from Da Qin with a term for Syria would surely be fitting.<sup>93</sup> Recently, John E. Hill also maintained that “Lijian” was a term that referred to former Seleucid territory.<sup>94</sup> Rather disconcertingly, however, and contrary to Pulleyblank’s lengthy argument (which Hill does not refer to in this matter), he claimed that the term “Lijian” derived from the Greek name of the Seleucid Empire. Notwithstanding, Yu

<sup>89</sup> Hou Hanshu 11: Hill 2009, 23.

<sup>90</sup> Wei Lüe 11: Hill 2014, section 11: “The kingdom of Da Qin is also called Lijian. It is west of Anxi (Parthia) and Tiaozhi, and west of the Great Sea.” Cf. also Leslie and Gardiner 1996, 67.

<sup>91</sup> Hill 2009, 256.

<sup>92</sup> Pulleyblank 1999, 73–75. Graf 1996, 203 assumed that “*T’iao-chih* is simply an attempt to transcribe the word ‘Tigris’.” According to Pulleyblank (ibid.), *Tiáozhī* was the transcription of Seleukeia, and both (Wū)Chisān and Zēsān that of Alexandria. Yu 2013, 25 (without taking note of Pulleyblank’s contribution) argues that Lixuan (i.e. Lijiān) is a contracted transcription of [A]lexan[dria]. Hill 2014, section 15 equates Zēsān with Azania on the coast of East Africa, and Leslie and Gardiner 1996, 190–191 identify Zēsān with Cyprus.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. only the itinerary described in the “Parthian Stations” of Isidore of Charax: FGH 781 = Roller 2013.

<sup>94</sup> Hill 2009, 256–257 with further bibliography.

Taishan argued even more recently that “Lijian” (or “Lixuan”) referred to the Ptolemaic kingdom of Egypt, whereas John E. Hill (unknown, it seems, to Yu Taishan) rather more convincingly suggested that the term “Haixi” referred to Egypt.<sup>95</sup> Consequently, the equation of “Da Qin,” “Lijian” and “Haixi,” as well as other attempts to identify place names in the sections of the ancient Chinese records on “Da Qin,” has led to a confusing and still ongoing debate, in which, however, the number of options under discussion does not appear to have changed much since those established by Friedrich Hirth and his immediate successors. Essentially, the proposed solutions for the meaning of “Da Qin” are the Roman Empire as a whole, the eastern regions of the Empire (as already suggested by Friedrich Hirth), particularly Syria and Egypt, or, depending on the context of the narrative, either Roman territory or the *Imperium Romanum* as a whole.<sup>96</sup>

So much confusion and so many contradictory interpretations by specialists of the relevant fields of Sinology might discourage scholars of the ancient Mediterranean world to make use of the ancient Chinese accounts of the Far West.<sup>97</sup> Yet there is, perhaps, an approach that leads to more promising results. For it seems that whatever the terms “Lijian” and “Haixi” may have referred to, they were not fully synonymous with “Da Qin,” but rather designated parts or aspects of it. This is, for instance, implied by statements, recorded in the *Hou Hanshu*, maintaining that one comes “into Haixi to reach Da Qin” or that “in these territories (scl. of Da Qin), there are many precious and marvelous things from Haixi.”<sup>98</sup> Another passage from a different chapter of the *Hou Hanshu* mentions a group of musicians and magicians in 121 CE who claimed that they were from Haixi, which the Chinese who recorded it identified as “Da Qin.”<sup>99</sup> Interestingly, the term “Lijian” does not recur in the sections on “Da Qin” of the *Hou Hanshu* or the *Wei Lue*. “Haixi” is the only concrete geographical aspect of “Da Qin” these texts single out. Hirth’s suggestion that the information on “Da Qin” in the ancient Chinese historiographical texts described not the Roman Empire at large, but only its eastern provinces therefore seems just as reasonable as Hill’s proposal that “Haixi,” situated at the “Roman” end of the great sea route, was the ancient Chinese term for Egypt.

Other passages can be understood to confirm these theories. For the *Hou Hanshu*, commenting on the government of “Da Qin,” records:

<sup>95</sup> Yu 2013, 5 and 41–42; Hill 2009, 251–254. Hoppál 2011 refrains from identifying “Lijian” or “Haixi.”

<sup>96</sup> Leslie and Gardiner 1996, xxi–xxvi and 232; Hill 2009, 254–256; Hoppál 2011, 269–271; Yu 2013, 1–42.

<sup>97</sup> Thus, for instance, Fibiger Bang 2009; Scheidel 2009.

<sup>98</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 12: Hill 2009, 27. Cf. Leslie and Gardiner 1996, 52. *Hou Hanshu* 10: Hill 2009, 23. Cf. Leslie and Gardiner 1996, 47.

<sup>99</sup> Leslie and Gardiner 1996, 42; Pulleyblank 1999, 75; Hill 2009, 291. Cf. Hoppál 2011, 270; Yu 2013, 22.

“Their kings are not permanent. They select and appoint the most worthy man. If there are unexpected calamities in the kingdom, such as frequent extraordinary winds or rains, he is unceremoniously rejected and replaced. The one who has been dismissed quietly accepts his demotion, and is not angry.”<sup>100</sup>

The equivalent passage in the *Wei Lüe* reads:

“The ruler of this country is not permanent. When disasters result from unusual phenomena, they unceremoniously replace him, installing a virtuous man as king, and release the old king, who does not dare show resentment.”<sup>101</sup>

This statement is alternatively thought to refer to the second century CE imperial practice of appointing a successor to the throne by adoption, the *Adoptivkaisertum*, or to refer to the Republican system of elected consuls, or to be nothing more than a fabulous story of an ideal country far-away.<sup>102</sup> However, other parts of the same passage suggest a completely different solution. In these, the king is said to have regularly left his palace to hear cases, and, according to the *Hou Hanshu*:

“a porter with a bag has the job of always following the royal carriage. When somebody wants to discuss something with the king, he throws a note into the bag. When the king returns to the palace, he opens the bag, examines the contents, and judges if the plaintiff is right or wrong.”<sup>103</sup>

The parallel passage in the *Wei Lüe* reads:

“When the king goes out, he always orders a man to follow him holding a leather bag. Anyone who has something to say throws his or her petition into the bag. When he [i.e. the king] returns to the palace, he examines them and determines which are reasonable.”<sup>104</sup>

The passages in both texts also contain references to governmental archives and to a group of counselors.

It is very tempting to understand these comments as referring to Roman provincial governors rather than to Roman emperors. For it is not difficult to recognize central aspects of a Roman governor’s duties: his round trip through his province hearing cases, the well-known system of collecting petitions, preparing responses and making use of archives, as well as discussing matters of state with his *consilium*. Consequently, the former quote concerning the replacement of

<sup>100</sup> Hou Hanshu 11: Hill 2009, 25. Cf. Leslie and Gardiner 1996, 49.

<sup>101</sup> Wei Lüe 11: Hill 2014, section 11. Cf. Leslie and Gardiner 1996, 70.

<sup>102</sup> Leslie and Gardiner 1996, 49, n. 62 with further bibliography; Hill 2014, n. 11 and 18; Yu 2013, 619. Cf. also Hoppál 2011, 276–282 with unconvincing speculations on Rome and Syrian Antioch.

<sup>103</sup> Hou Hanshu 11: Hill 2009, 25. Cf. Leslie and Gardiner 1996, 48.

<sup>104</sup> Wei Lüe 11: Hill 2014, section 11. Cf. Leslie and Gardiner 1996, 71.

kings may perhaps not refer to true kings either, but again to Roman provincial governors. In all events, that would go well with the notion conveyed by the Chinese sources that the country had no permanent ruler but a system (though not entirely understood by the Chinese who recorded it) by which “worthy” and “virtuous” men were selected to replace their predecessors. One might object that the Chinese texts explicitly refer to the “king” of “Da Qin,” not to governors, and therefore seem to be concerned with the Empire at large and with its capital Rome. However, reports of the powers and splendors of Roman provincial governors, not least those of the *praefectus Aegypti* who resided in the palace of the former Ptolemaic kings and ruled the country in their stead (*loco regum*), might well have led commentators from the Far East to mistake such governors for local kings. Moreover, the *Hou Hanshou* and the *Wei Lüe* claim that “Da Qin” had established several tens of minor “dependent kingdoms,” which might be understood as a reference to the Roman Empire’s provinces or to eastern allies.<sup>105</sup> If correct, some details of Roman provincial administration and power structures must indeed have reached China during the first two centuries CE. However, it appears that Chinese knowledge of the Roman Empire was defective and largely restricted to information from the eastern provinces, Egypt (“Haixi”?) in particular. This example is therefore again revealing of the extent to which the channels that transmitted information (in this case, it seems, merchants mainly from Egypt) impacted on the perceptions of the Roman Empire in distant countries.<sup>106</sup>

In some other cases, however, the information on the Roman Empire included in the *Hou Hanshu* and the *Wei Lüe* seems to have had Chinese rather than Roman origins. For at least in one instance it seems that cultural and administrative realities of the ancient Chinese Empire contaminated the historical accounts of the Roman Empire. Thus, knowledge of local Chinese institutions appears to have affected the short descriptions of the Roman imperial system of transport and communication. Both the *Hou Hanshu* and the *Wei Lüe* refer in surprising detail to the rest stops of this system, to the distances between them and to their appearance: “At intervals they have established postal relays, which are all plastered and whitewashed... Each ten *li* (4.2 km) there is a postal stage, and each thirty *li* (12.5 km) a postal station.”<sup>107</sup> The purpose of this Roman institution was also recorded by the Chinese: “Relay stations were established in

<sup>105</sup> Splendors: Tac. *Hist.* 1.11.1; Strab. *geogr.* 17.1.12. For a recent discussion and further bibliography, cf. e.g. Jördens 2009, 11–15; Pont 2009, 185–211. Dependent kingdoms (or provinces?): *Hou Hanshu* 11; Hill 2009, 23. Cf. Leslie and Gardiner 1996, 47. *Wei Lüe* 11 (the reference here is to dependent kings): Hill 2014, section 11, and Leslie and Gardiner 1996, 71.

<sup>106</sup> This issue is discussed in Kolb and Speidel forthcoming.

<sup>107</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 11 and 12: Hill 2009, 26 and 27. Cf. Leslie and Gardiner 1996, 47 and 52. For the respective passage in the *Wei Lüe* (11) see Hill 2014, section 11, and Leslie and Gardiner 1996, 70. Cf. also Hoppál 2011, 282.

strategic positions allowing orders to travel quickly between the main postal stations at all seasons.”<sup>108</sup> These statements have been understood to refer to the *vehiculatio* or *cursus publicus* of the Roman Empire, as it was indeed among the purposes of this Roman institution to transmit official communications quickly, and as the description of its infrastructure in the Chinese accounts appear to be accurate enough.<sup>109</sup>

However, distances of 10 *li* (4.2 km) between postal stages and thirty *li* (12.5 km) between the larger postal stations are not confirmed by Roman sources. Although Roman itineraries do list small and large stopping places, they are recorded at intervals of 6–12 miles (ca. 9–18 km) and 25 miles (37 km), which correspond to around half a day’s and a whole day’s journey by foot respectively. That amounts to two or three times the distance indicated by the Chinese sources.<sup>110</sup> In particular, the very short distances of 4.2 km were not in use in the Roman Empire. Perhaps there was confusion between postal stations and local inns, which probably lay at rather close intervals in the vicinity of cities. Yet, another perhaps more plausible solution might be that the Chinese authors’ knowledge of their own postal system contaminated their account of “Da Qin,” for these texts insist that the Roman and Chinese postal systems were nearly identical: “They have ... postal stations just as we have them in China.”<sup>111</sup> It is particularly suggestive, therefore, that Chinese sources from the Qin Empire mention short distances of 2.6 miles between the postal stops, which precisely equals the distance of 10 *li* (4.2 km) as recorded in the *Hou Hanshu* and the *Wei Lüe*.<sup>112</sup> The perceived identity of these important institutions both in China and in “Greater China” (“Da Qin” / Rome) therefore seems to have encouraged the Chinese authors and compilers who could neither find the correct information in the available documents on “Da Qin” nor ask anyone who knew to insert “missing data” from familiar contexts on their own.<sup>113</sup> This may have happened in more than one instance.

Perhaps the most significant notion that emerges from this admittedly very cursory overview of disparate and lacunose evidence is the enormous geographical distribution of detailed information (however accurate) of the Roman Empire throughout the ancient world.<sup>114</sup> Evidently, this was a consequence of global

<sup>108</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 28: Hill 2009, 55.

<sup>109</sup> On the subject in general see Kolb 2000.

<sup>110</sup> Kolb 2000, 212–213.

<sup>111</sup> *Wei Lüe* 11: Hill 2014, section 11. Leslie and Gardiner 1996, 70. See also Hirth 1885, 44 (Chin-shu) and 70; Leslie and Gardiner 1996, 81.

<sup>112</sup> Chang 2007, 54, who also mentions intervals of 5.2 miles (8.4 km).

<sup>113</sup> For the postal service of ancient China, see Olbricht 1954, 36; Loewe 2006, 106–118.

<sup>114</sup> Cf. also the overview of relevant evidence in McLaughlin 2010, 16–21.

connectivity, long distance trade and the impressive reputation of the *Imperium Romanum* and its rulers. Many contemporary observers throughout the ancient world collected, contemplated, compared, assessed, and made use of information on imperial Rome. For modern scholarship to make further use of the surviving evidence, close collaboration between scholars of the Classical World and the respective specialists of other civilizations is needed above all. Such collaboration, we believe, promises rewarding results for all fields involved and would significantly contribute to the complex contemporary outside perception of the Roman Empire and its impact on the ancient world at large.

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