

# DESERT ▽ PATROL

STEPHAN ▽ BERRY

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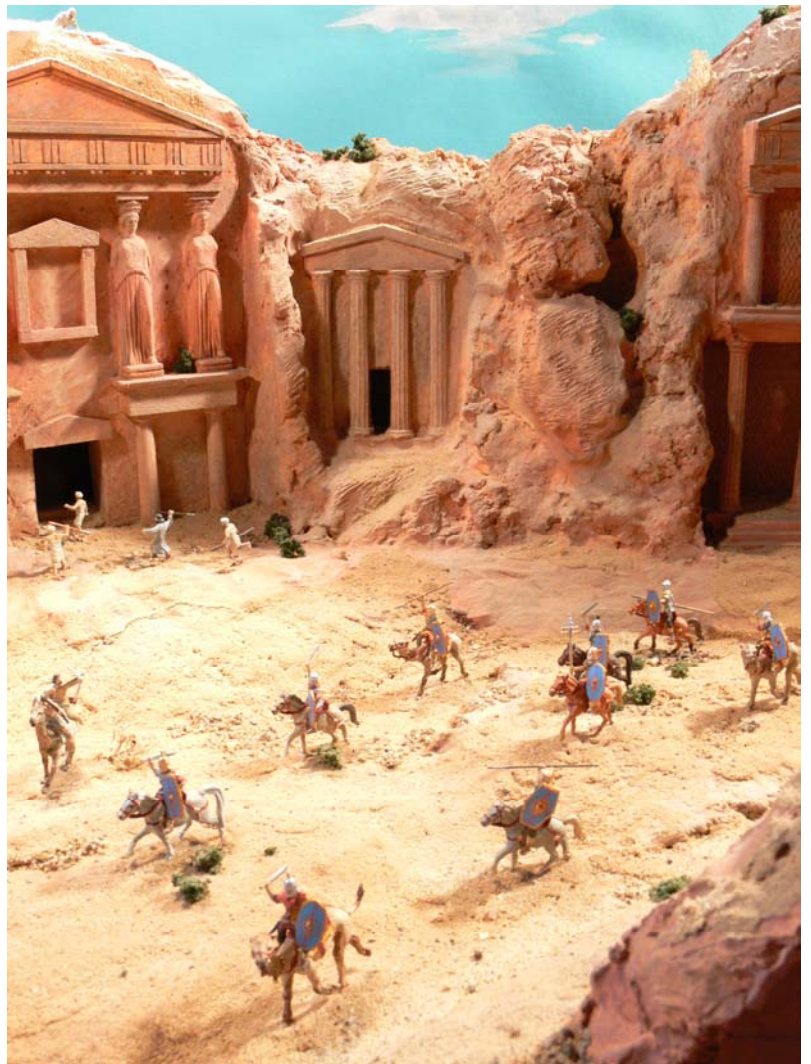


A group of Roman troopers chases some Bedouins in the mountains near Petra, the ancient capital of the Nabataean kingdom, sometimes in the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. The cavalry patrol is a mixed unit of men riding both horses and camels. Is it a serious incident? Obviously not, because some of the Romans remain in the background, looking quite relaxed – clearly they know their Bedouins and how to handle them ...

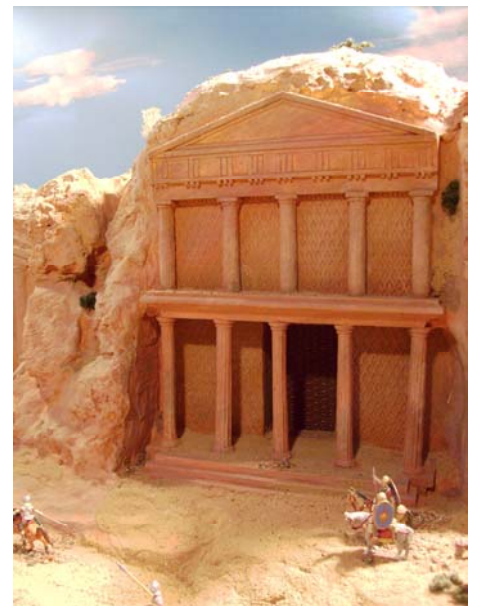




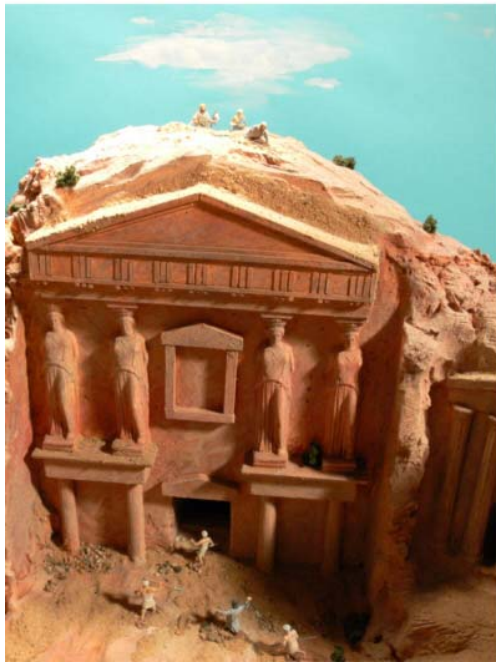
Nabataea was one of the several states that had formed out of the leftovers of Alexander's empire. Its area covered much of the modern Kingdom of Jordan, together with parts of Israel, Syria, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Of the city of Petra itself, not much remains today. However, the grave monuments carved into the brightly colored sandstone in the valleys around Petra are still extant. They are a major tourist attraction today and they even had a prominent role in the movie "Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade". These monuments were built between the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC and the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD and show the influence of Hellenistic and later also Roman culture on the Nabataeans.



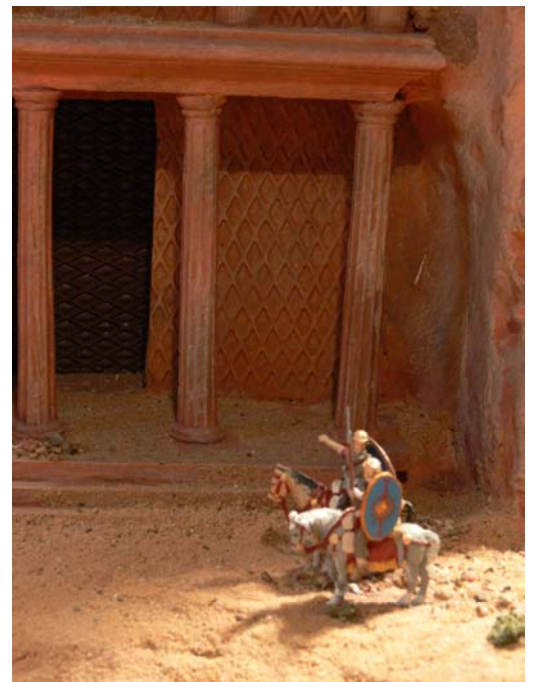
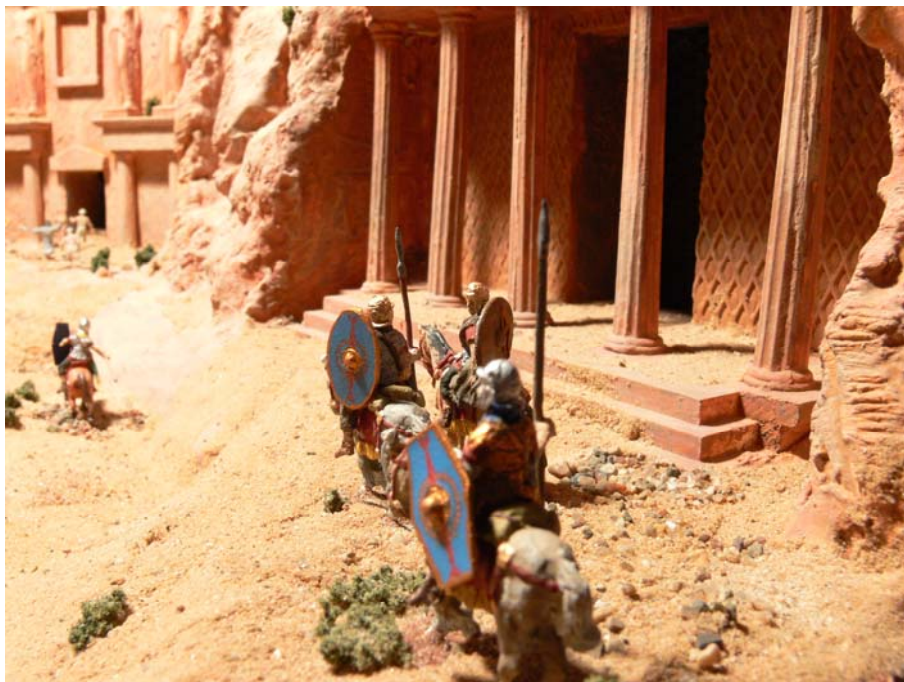
Caravan trade along the "Incense Road" was the main source of wealth in the Nabataean state. The exact circumstances that led to the annexation of the kingdom by the Roman Emperor Traian in 106 AD are not known; some military operations occurred, but all in all it was more a peaceful takeover of political control rather than a major war. Like the Nabataean kings before them, Roman authorities of the newly formed province Arabia were interested in the security of the trade routes, and for this end they maintained military patrols in the area and escorts for the caravans.







One might consider camelry a really “un-Roman” branch of arms, but this would be a rash conclusion: The Roman troopers shown here represent men of the *ala dromadariosum*, a cavalry regiment that is attested for the army of the province Arabia. This ala actually consisted of camelry together with “normal” cavalry. In terms of ethnic origin, one should not imagine these soldiers as “genuine Romans”; they were recruited mainly from the area and some troopers of the *ala dromadariosum* have even left inscriptions in Nabataean language. Nevertheless, I have used typical Roman auxiliary cavalry figures for reconstructing them, but depicting them with near-eastern dress and equipment would also be conceivable (to all figure manufacturers who read these lines: there is no set of Imperial Roman mounted archers of the 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD yet!). It should be noted that camels occurred in military contexts elsewhere in the Roman world, too: Quite astonishing is the finding of camel remains in camps which are located in southern Germany – in terms of climate not a typical “camel country”, I would say.





As the military historian Kate Gilliver has stressed recently, Roman soldiers within a unit were *similar*, but not *identical* in appearance: the standardization of clothing and equipment, which is the norm today, was unknown, and there would be a great deal of minor variations between individual soldiers. The weapons were property of the soldiers themselves, and some of them afforded highly decorated items, while others had to be content with rather plain ones. Weapons could be inherited from the father to the son, they could be sold by veterans to new recruits, and upon transfer to another unit, the soldiers took of course their weapons with them. In the result, there was a mixing of new and older, sometimes even outdated weapons, creating overall similarity rather than strict uniformity in the modern sense.





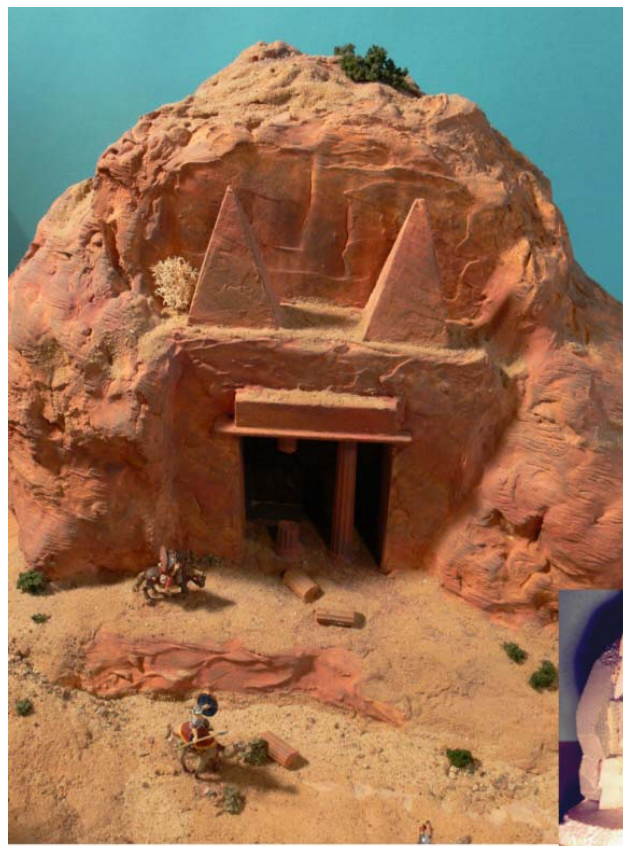


I have tried to create this impression in my 1:72 scale diorama by using slightly different coloring patterns for the individual figures, and also by mixing figures from different manufacturers/sets. The Roman troopers are from Art Miniaturen JS 72/0015 *Roman Cavalry Resting*, Fine Scale Factory AR7 *Roman Cavalry*, Hät 8066 *Imperial Roman Auxiliary Cavalry* and Hät 8067 *Imperial Roman Praetorian Cavalry*. The shield transfers were printed on self-adhesive paper labels using an inkjet printer; this method has been presented by Roland Kupski, see for instance <http://www.hat.com/Othr6/Kup15.html>. The Bedouins are a motley crew with figures and figure conversions based on Caesar Miniatures H014 *Biblical Era Hebrew Warriors*, Caesar Miniatures H023 *Biblical Era Arab Camel Riders and Bedouin*, Hät 7013 *Bedouins* (reissue of Airfix 01719 *Arabs*), and Italeri 6055 *Arab Warriors* (reissue of Esci 238 *Muslim Warriors*). Camels are from Caesar H023, Hät 7013, and Italeri 6010.

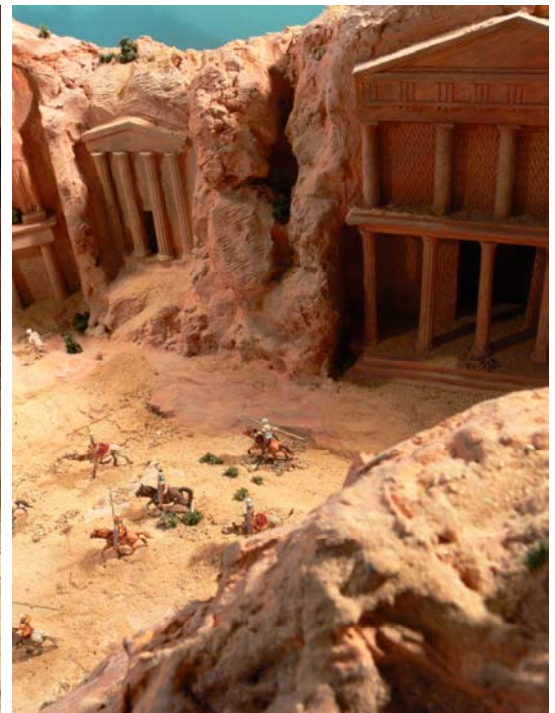




The monuments and the surrounding rocks were constructed using styrofoam cores with lots of plaster, some wooden parts, and the following ceramic castings made of Porcelin (also known as Stewalin or Ceramin) from Kai Fuhrmann Figuren (<http://fuhrmann-figuren.de/>): GRB-1 *Column*, GRB-2 *Caryatid*, KF 93031 *Column*, KF 93038 *Stairs*, KF 93067 *Gable*. I must admit that I did not strive for an exact reconstruction of any particular monument; rather, the buildings in the diorama are inspired by the real Nabataean architecture, but the final result was also influenced by the availability of architecture parts in 1:72.



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#### Links & further reading:

Amadasi Guzzo M.G. and Equini Schneider E. (1998) *Petra*. Hirmer, München.

American Museum of Natural History: <http://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/petra/>

Gilliver K. (2007) Display in Roman Warfare: The Appearance of Armies and Individuals on the Battlefield. *War In History* **14**: 1-21.

Nabataea.net: <http://nabataea.net/petra.html>

Netzer E. (2003) *Nabatäische Architektur*. Philip von Zabern, Mainz.

Nicolle D. and McBride A. (1991) *Rome's Enemies (5): The Desert Frontier (Men-at-Arms 243)*. Osprey Publishing, Oxford.

Speidel M.P. (1977) The Roman Army in Arabia. *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* **II.8**: 687-730.

Wise T. and McBride A. (1981) *Ancient Armies of the Middle East (Men-at-Arms 109)*. Osprey Publishing, Oxford.

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