

ENCOUNTER ON THE SILK ROAD

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The trade routes collectively called the “Silk Road”, which connected Europe and the Far East, had existed for many centuries before, but they reached a zenith in the early second century AD.





At this time, the whole pathway was under the control of only four large powers: The Roman empire, the Parthian kingdom, the Kushan empire and imperial China. This facilitated commercial exchange on a level that was achieved again only more than a millennium later, when a similar territorial unification existed under the Mongol empire.



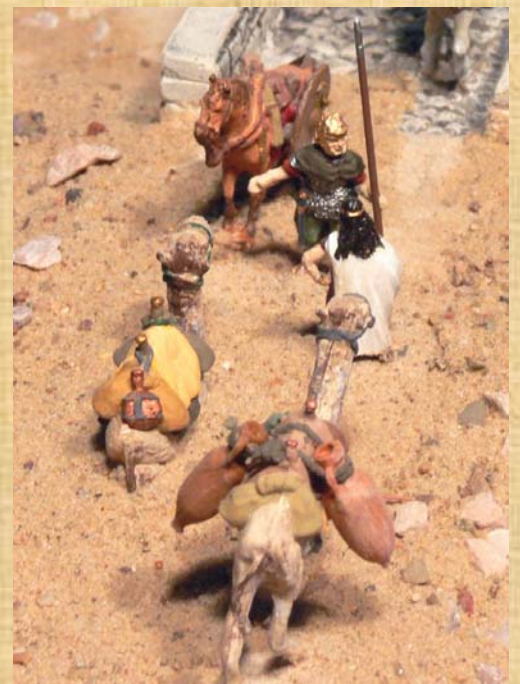


On Roman territory and in the broad border zone between Rome and Parthia, there was a network of roads and ship routes that connected a number of cities and harbors, such as Antiochia, Damascus, Hatra, Carrhae, Berytos, Tyros and Palmyra. The diorama shows an encounter on one of these roads, perhaps somewhere in the vicinity of Palmyra.





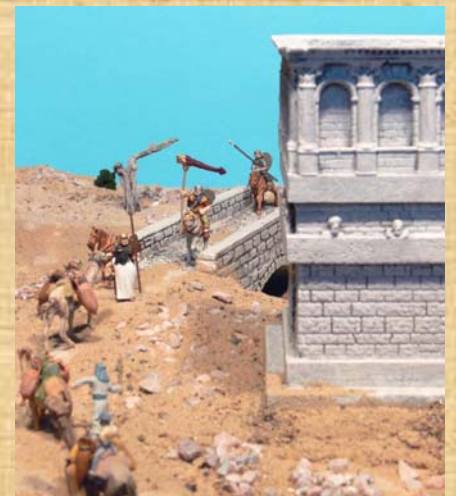
The Roman cavalry patrol is based on figures from Strelets 099 and Art Miniaturen JS 72/0074. The draco standard became popular among Roman cavalry units in the second century, so the standard bearer fits nicely into this scenery.



The city of Palmyra maintained some units, which were counted as part of the imperial Roman army; they were apparently militia units who primarily served for maintaining the security on the roads. In addition, the caravans had their own armed guards; here I used an archer from Hät 8144.



Due to the high costs of land transportation, only valuable items were traded along the Silk Road. Typical cargo, besides silk, was jewels, myrrh, frankincense and other resins, spices and drugs, transported in amphorae as shown. The camels are from Hät 8193 and Italeri 6124, with amphorae from Nikolai ACC 04.



In sharp contrast to the situation in the Near East after the spread of Islam, in the ancient orient women had a comparatively good legal position and financial independence. Thus it was quite normal for women to have their own business enterprises, and I chose to present a female owner of the caravan (personnel comes from Caesar Miniatures H014 & H023).



Grave monuments along the roads were typical in antiquity; a whole Valley of the Graves at Palmyra can still be visited today. Erecting tower graves is a characteristic near eastern tradition, as is the integration of sculpted human heads into the facades. However, these indigenous elements were freely combined with others of Graeco-Roman origin, like the arches shown here. (Arches and the bridge over the wadi are ceramic casts from Kai Fuhrmann KF 93074 & KF 930040; the tree is from Grey Funnel Line DZ 72-004).



Further reading:

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Seyrig H. (1950) Palmyra and the East. *Journal of Roman Studies* 40: 1-7.

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