



## Political Conditions in the Northern Arabian Peninsula and its Influence on the Trade of the ancient Yemen from the (4<sup>th</sup> Century BC – 2<sup>nd</sup> Century AD)

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### Abstract:

Procedures for studying the current situation in the northern Arabian Peninsula between the fourth century and the second century AD. These conditions affected the trade networks in ancient Yemen. This study used the historical research method. The study indicates that the region was located at the crossroads of ancient trade routes, making it a stage for the dominance of successive empires such as the Seleucids, Ptolemies, Romans, Parthians, and Nabataeans. These successive victories led to the conquest of the northern Arabian Peninsula by the Taurus dynasty, which led to the flourishing of the trade movement in the south (the ancient south). However, as the situation in the north deteriorated and the pomegranate took control, this led to a turbocharged shift from the land route to the maritime route via the Red Sea and the Arabian Gulf. The study reached the most prominent conclusions: the transformation of the eastern Indian Ocean into a maritime route via the Red Sea due to the new era and the monsoon winds. This transformation continued in the process of the economic foundations of ancient Yemeni Maliki, which was based on frankincense, forcing it to shift towards agriculture.

**Keywords:** Northern Arabian Peninsula, Seleucids, Ptolemies, Ancient Yemen kingdoms, Trade.

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## الأوضاع السياسية في شمال الجزيرة العربية وتأثيرها على تجارة اليمن القديم من القرن الرابع قبل الميلاد إلى القرن الثاني ميلادي

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### الملخص:

تتناول الدراسة الأوضاع السياسية في شمال شبه الجزيرة العربية في المدة من القرن الرابع قبل الميلاد إلى القرن الثاني الميلادي. والتركيز على تأثير هذه الأوضاع على شبكات التجارة في اليمن القديم. وقد استخدم في هذه الدراسة منهج البحث التاريخي. وتشير الدراسة إلى أن المنطقة كانت تقع على مفترق طرق التجارة القديمة، مما جعلها مسرحًا لهيمنة إمبراطوريات متعاقبة مثل السلوقيين، والبطالمة، والرومان، والبارثيين، والأنباط. وقد أدت صراعات هذه الإمبراطوريات إلى تعطيل الطرق البرية في شمال الجزيرة العربية، مما أدى إلى ازدهار حركة الطرق التجارية في الجنوب (اليمن القديم)، لكن ما أن استقرت الأوضاع في الشمال وسيطر الرومان على زمام الأمور، تحولت الطرق التجارية البرية إلى الطريق البحرية عبر البحر الأحمر والخليج العربي، وتوصلت الدراسة إلى عدة نتائج من أبرزها تحويل تجارة المحيط الهندي إلى موانئ البحر الأحمر المصرية بسبب الهيمنة الرومانية والرياح الموسمية، وتسبب هذا التحول البحري في تآكل الأسس الاقتصادية للممالك اليمنية القديمة، التي كانت تعتمد على تجارة اللبان، مما أجبرها على التحول نحو الزراعة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: شمال الجزيرة العربية، السلوقيون، البطالمة، اليمن القديم، الطرق التجارية.

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© نُشر هذا البحث وفقًا لشروط الرخصة Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)، التي تسمح بنسخ البحث وتوزيعه ونقله بأي شكل من الأشكال، كما تسمح بتكبير البحث أو تحويله أو إضافته إليه لأي غرض كان، بما في ذلك الأغراض التجارية، شريطة نسبة العمل إلى صاحبه مع بيان أي تعديلات أجريت عليه.



## Introduction

The Arabian Peninsula, a crossroads of civilizations and a nexus of transcontinental trade, underwent profound geopolitical transformations between the (4<sup>th</sup> century BC - 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD). During this period, the northern regions became a contested arena for imperial powers-including the Seleucids, Ptolemies, Romans, and Parthians-while the kingdoms of ancient Yemen, thrived as intermediaries in the lucrative incense and spice trade. This study examines how shifting political dynamics in the north, shaped by imperial rivalries and the rise of Arab tribal confederations, reverberated across the peninsula, reshaping trade networks and economic fortunes in the south.

The strategic location of the northern Arabian Peninsula's has bridged the Mediterranean world with South Asia, making it a focal point for competing empires. The Seleucid Empire (312–64 BC), inheriting Alexander the Great's eastern territories, sought to dominate overland routes connecting Mesopotamia to the Levant and the Arabian Gulf. Their capital, Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, emerged as a hub for goods flowing from India and China, while their rivalry with the Ptolemaic Kingdom of Egypt centered on control of the Incense Route, network of caravan paths transporting frankincense and myrrh from Yemen to Mediterranean markets. Meanwhile, the Nabataean Kingdom (4<sup>th</sup> century BC- 106 AD) capitalized on this competition, establishing Petra as a critical entrepot and securing dominance over north-south trade corridor.

The kingdoms of ancient Yemen, known in Greco-Roman sources as "Arabia Felix" ("Fortunate Arabia"), relied on their monopoly of aromatic resins and access to maritime routes linking India to the Red Sea. Cities such as Qana (in modern Yemen) and Gerrha (in eastern Arabia) flourished as nodes in this network, channeling spices, textiles, and precious stones to northern markets. However, the political instability in the north- including the Seleucid-Ptolemaic wars, Roman expansion, and Parthian incursions-disrupted these flows, forcing southern polities to adapt. For instance, Roman campaigns under Aelius Gallus (24 BC) and the eventual annexation of Nabataea (106 AD) redirected trade toward maritime routes, diminishing the role of Yemen's kingdoms as overland intermediaries.

This research synthesizes archaeological, epigraphic, and literary sources-from Ancient Yemen inscriptions to Greco-Roman accounts-to argue that the interplay of northern imperial ambitions and local tribal agency fundamentally altered the economic landscape of pre-Islamic Arabia. By tracing the rise and fall of caravan cities, the redirection of trade routes, and the eventual dominance of the Romans and Parthians, this study demonstrates how \geopolitical strife in the north catalyzed both the zenith and decline of ancient Yemen's commercial golden age.

### 1-The Significance of the Northern Arabian Peninsula

The important geographical location of the Arab peninsula was the cornerstone to make direct and indirect relations between Ancient Yemen and Empires and kingdoms of the ancient world. Since the



researcher is concerned to study the commercial relations between the south Arab peninsula and West India, he will try to expose the political condition in these countries.

Some disputes and fighting took place in the northern part of the Arab peninsula and this affected the political, commercial and economic life. One may assume that the political, commercial and economic situations were affected by these disputes, whereas only the economic status of different countries was influenced due to such events. In addition, the commercial activities were very much affected by such events and problems that might happen at any point of the trading road around the world.

The commercial activities are based on two important components; producer and consumer and their attitudes and civilizations that may determine the developing or declining some caravans cities (Rostovtzeff, 1932). Since the Arabian peninsula was the connector between east and west, and was the ending point of most trading roads coming from India, China and south Arab kingdoms, some lights will be thrown on the disputes that took place there and its impact on the commercial activities between the east as producer and the west as consumer. Different dominating powers tried to control over the trading roads some of these groups are Seleucia in Asia and Mesopotamia, Ptolemaic in Egypt, Levant, and Mediterranean, and Arabian Kingdoms of Nabataeans and Palmira in Jordanian Plateau and the Levant.

## 2- Emergence of the Macedonians as Power in the East

The Macedonians under their leader Philip II appeared in the middle of the fourth century (382-336 BC) (Palagia, O, 2010,) (Daniel, 2007) and united the Greek states became their king (Heckel, 2012). After Alexander death (356-323 BC), his son becomes king of Macedon (Palagia, O, 2010,). He was able to reunite the Greek states and defended his land from the Eastern attacks (Siculus, 1989). He could bring the peace to his land and fight to the Empires of Achaemenid (Arrian, 2014) (Yahya, 1979). The Empires of Achaemenid were controlling middle Asia and north India, ancient nearest and Egypt for many centuries. At the time of Empire Darius III (380 – 330 BC) who was the last king of Achaemenid Empire from 336 to 330 BC, a couple of battles took place between him and Alexander the great during which Empire Darius III was defeated (Arrian, 2014). The first victory was made in 334 BC near *Granicus* River in Asia by Alexander. All of these battles ended with the death of Darius III in 330 B.C (Bosworth, 1994) (Van. R. J., 2007) (Davis, 1999).

### 2-1-End of the Alexander Campaign in the East

Alexander continued his victories until he arrived at the kingdoms in Asia Minor which were belonging to *Darius III* (M'crindle, 1893). After controlling these kingdoms, he headed to the south and obtained lots of tribes and places whom he met on his way towards Indus River. In his last battle *Hydaspes* with *Porus* who was the king of *Paurava* in 327 BC (Adkins. L., 1998), King *Porus* was arrested and then was appointed by *Alexander* as the king of all Indian lands belonging to *Alexander* (Avari, 2007) (Waldemar, 2008). At this point in time, *Alexander* decided to go back to *Babylon*, and showed their willingness to go back to their homelands



(Grant, M., 1982). On their way home, he faced a lot of obstacles that caused loss of his soldiers (Waldemar, 2008) (Makkawi, F, 1980). After a long and difficult journey, he arrived in Babylon in 324 BC and died because of fever in Babylon at the age of 32 years (Walbank, F. W. , 1989) (M'crindle, 1893).

## 2-2-Death of Alexander

The sudden death of Alexander caused the appearance of three new kingdoms in the east after the battle of *Ipsus*, (Waterfield, R, 2012) namely, Seleucia kingdoms in Mesopotamia, north Syria, Armenia, Anatolia and north India, Ptolemy kingdom in Egypt, Palestine, south Syria and Cyprus Island, and Macedonia kingdom in Macedonia and Thrace (. Sabin, P. Wees, H. V. Whitby, M. , 2007) (Braund, D. , 2003). After the Alexander death the Hellenistic Era started from 323 to 30 BC (Alcock, S. E, 1994) (Yahya, L. A, 1997) (Nushi, I, 1976).

## 3- Hellenistic Era (Alexander Successor Era)

They were the rival generals, families and friends of Alexander the Great who fought for control over his empire after his death in 323 BC. The Wars of the Successors mark the beginning of the Hellenistic period. After the Battle of *Ipsus* (301 BC) (Walbank, F. W. , 1989) (Baker, R. F, 1997) (Spence, I. G, 2002), Antigonus was killed, but his son Demetrius took a large part of Macedonia and continued his father's dynasty. After the death of Cassander and Lysimachus, following one another in fairly rapid succession, the Seleucids (Syria) and Ptolemies (Egypt) controlled the vast majority of Alexander's former empire.

## 4- The Era of the Seleucids 312-64 BC.

The kingdom of the Seleucids, named after the founder of Seleucus I (312-280 BC.) who was called Nicator (Hitti, P, 1957). He did not prompt any position when dividing the states after Babylon conference but he took his share of government in Babylon after the conference of Triparadisus after the death of Perdiccas (Doherty, P, 2013).

### 4.1-The Seleucus I wars

The last years of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC have witnessed many wars waged by Seleucus I to have control, and saved his kingdom, but he was surprised by *Antigonus I* the king of Macedonia who had the campaign to subjugate Asia Minor and Mesopotamia. He managed in 315 B.C. to enter *Babylon*, the capital of the Seleucids. Seleucus run away to Egypt, but he returned to *Babylon*, with the help of *Ptolemy I* in 312 BC and he announced the beginning of his own jurisdiction (al-'Adhmy, A. D, 2001). *Lysimachus* (306-281 BC), became an ally to the Seleucids and thanks to this alliance they had a victory over *Antigonus I* in the Battle of *Ipsus* in 301 BC (Walbank, F. W. , 1989) (Baker, R. F, 1997) (Spence, I. G., 2002). He represented the main threat to *Alexander* friends in the nearest, which was the last battle witnessed elimination of the dream of bringing Alexander's empire again. *Seleucus I* could manage to include Armenia and northern Syria, to become the largest country was founded on the ruins of the kingdom of Alexander the Great (Davis, 1999).



Seleucids did not make any change in the administrative system which was in place during the reign of Alexander the Great (Waterfield, R, 2012). But they had a limited change to cancel the previous calendar, and they considered that 312 BC, was the date of their kingdom and the beginning of their history and used for recording their events (Baquer, T. , 1973).

#### 4.2- Change of the Capital of the Kingdom

In order to renew the kingdom structure, *Seleucus I* created the city of Seleucia, on the right side of the *Tigris* River, and 63 km away from *Babylon*. This city became the capital of the Kingdom (312-300 BC), and when King Seleucus moved to his new Capital, many of the inhabitants of *Babylon* came with him (Pliny, 1999) (Strabo, 1854). After this, Seleucia city became famous, people from different corners of the earth came to it, this city one of the most important commercial cities, where the different trade routes of land and sea meet together in this city, it was selected for its economic importance. It was located on the trade caravans that pass in Mesopotamia (Farazat, M. H, 1991), and remained the capital of the kingdom of the Seleucia for the period of twelve years ( Ring,T. Salkin, R. M. & Boda, S. L, 1996).

The early years of the third century BC were the most powerful stage in the era of the kingdom of the Seleucids, when they were able to extend their influence and control over large areas of Asia Minor. The weakness of the local governments and the power of their young kingdom helped them to do so (Hitti, P, 1957). After the entry of northern Syria under the rule of Seleucus I, he started to build a new city on the Orontes River called it Antioch on the name of his father. He moved there in 300 years BC and declared it a new capital, the seat of government. It was known as Antioch (Fant, C. E & Reddish, M. G, 2003). The reason for changing the capital was its proximity to the coast of the Mediterranean Sea for its strategic, economic, and political importance. And then it became a port to promote the trading with the lands of the Mediterranean, and its proximity to the area of conflict with other powers. All this make it easier for their forces to move quickly in case of wars. In addition, Greek communities living in these areas, was also the reason (Musti, D, 1984).

#### 4.3- Seleucus I Towards to India

With all these victories made by Seleucus I Nicator in the West, he wanted to broaden his kingdom to India by eliminating the independent kingdoms that appeared between 315-305 BC, along with the state of Chandragupta Mauryan, where these kingdoms made their money from gold, silver and zinc to show its independence (Mitchiner, M, 1975) (Diakov, F. & Kovalev, S, 2000) (Musti, D, 1984). But the failure of Seleucus to control these cities, he concluded an agreement with Chandragupta Maurya, during which the marriage took a place as a sign of good intention in which Seleucus I got a gift rewarding up to 500 elephants (McCrinkle, W, 1877). He used them in the wars later on (Hammond, G. L. & Walbank, F. W, 2001) (Strabo,



1854) (Musti, D, 1984). He went to Macedonia in 281 BC to control Thrace and then he was killed in the Battle of Corupedium (Walbank, F. W. , 1989) (Drekmeier, C, 1962).

The Kingdom of the Seleucids was weak during the period of the successors of *Seleucus I* when some areas were lost especially in the reign of *Antiochus II* (263-247 BC.), when the region of Parthia (*Khorasan*) got independence in 248 BC. under the leader Arsacid. Arsacid founded the state of Parthian and took over many areas and attached them to his kingdom (Bickerman, J, 1983) (Gardner, P, 1877).

#### 4.4- Period of Antiochus III

At the time of Antiochus III (223-187 BC) the Seleucid state regained its power and control over the area lost earlier. He had the fourth Syrian war against Ptolemy IV at the Battle of *Rafah* in 217 BC (Bar-Kochva, B, 2002). He gained a victory in which the Ptolemy who was able to control some parts of "Syria Coele" (Dušek, J, 2012) Antiochus III went towards the north and east, where he managed to re-control some parts of Anatolia down to Armenia, and all of Asia Minor, including coastal areas. The Kingdom controlled the territories reaching up to the borders of Thrace (Neilson, C. D, 1938) (Farid, 2012), which led to their entry in fighting with the Romans in the period between 191-188 BC. It ended with a loss of *Antiochus III* in the Battle of *Magnesia* in 190 BC. After that he was forced to accept the agreement and surrender each country in Asia, locating behind the *Taurus* Mountains (McDonald, A. H & Walbank, F. W, 1969). It was ended with the killing of the king in 186 BC (Paton, W. R, 1992).

After the death of *Antiochus III*, Territory was independent and limited its borders to the Mesopotamian and western Iran. Now the Roman Emperor and the Kingdom of Parthia began to control some parts of the Kingdom of the Seleucids in the absence of powerful rulers. After the rule of *Antiochus IV* (174-164 BC), the situation began to change in favor of the Seleucids, when they entered the war with the Ptolemaic, known as the Syrian war sixth in 170 BC in which Ptolemies were defeated and the Seleucids could start to dominate a big part of Egypt, but it did not last long. The Romans interfered and sent an envoy to Antiochus IV to inform them to leave Egypt and Cyprus (Dunstan, W. E, 2010), without any conditions. Antiochus preferred to withdraw from Egypt to save himself from opening a new war with the Romans at such time (Paton, W. R, 1992).

The situation in the east of the kingdom was unstable. Antiochus IV went in a campaign in 165 BC, to the country of Anatolia and brought it back under the Seleucids control (Siculus, 1989). With the death of Antiochus IV, conditions were again deteriorated because of the conflicts and fights between the family members, where their enemies could benefit from such conflicts to eliminate them (Musti, D, 1984). In 143 BC., the conditions became worst and this gave an opportunity for Parthia who controlled Babylon and sent the Seleucids out. But they had gathered their strength and regained Babylon again, and the war was continued between the two parties until Parthian could control Babylon. In 126 BC, Mesopotamia has stifled



Seleucids to the rule of Parthian (al-'Adhmy, A. D, 2001). The rule of Seleucids was limited in Syria, where they were fighting a war for survival but that did not last for long. In the era of Pompeii, Romans recovered Syria to become a Roman province in 63 BC (Van. R. J., 2007) (Musti, D, 1984) (Sartre, M, 2005).

#### 4.5- The Trade Activity in the Seleucids Period

Seleucids gave great importance to the trade of both land and sea, but the trade coming through land had greater importance at the beginning because of the appropriate conditions in terms of the excellent location, the area space as the Kingdom controlled over vast areas in Asia Minor, Mesopotamia and the Levant (Ray, H. P, 2003) . All these conditions helped to develop an active commercial movement (Abu al-Yosr, F, 2002), accompanied by the emergence of commercial cities, which became significant in economic terms (Al-Salhi, W. I, 1986). With the expansion of the Kingdom and the control of security, a number of trade routes flourished, between the capital Seleucia on the Tigris, and the trade routes coming from India, and China (Ziadah,N, 1975).

Seleucids increased their commerce and trade by linking all parts of the Kingdom, and its maintenance, they had made a great effort to ensure the security of these roads and established some forts to protect them from the dangers that exposed to commercial convoys, which led to the prosperity and it became a strong source to bring the goods from the east to the west (Musti, D, 1984).

#### 4.6- The Land Trad Routes in the Seleucids Empier.

The trade land routes helped Seleucid's kingdom to increase an economy, which was there many routes pass through the kingdom, as follows:

##### 4.6.1- The Royal Route:

**First Route-** which moved towards the west to the Mediterranean, passing those of Ashman existing in the valley of the Tigris, and up to *Jarablos*, then *Aimar*, and then to *Aleppo*, it passed to *Alalakh*, and *Ugarit*, or even towards the south of *Hama* and then to *Qatna*, and then heading to the Mediterranean coast, and continued towards the south to Gaza, and ended with the Nile Deltawhere many commercial cities appeared on this road (Mark, L , 1999) (Jack, E. R, 1984) (Al-Helou, A, 1999).

**Second Route-** This trade routes coming from East Asia, and India converged in the capital of Seleucia on the Tigris River (Salles, J. F, 1996), and keep moving to Antioch, and then to Aleppo to meet the road coming from Egypt, and then to Damascus. Although the ways across the *Levant* were closer to the Mediterranean ports, it was more dangerous because of Ptolemaic control. Seleucids were obliged to use longer roads to save their goods from the Ptolemaic, They used the Euphrates large (Al-Helou, A, 1999), which began from *Seleucia*, north to *Nineveh* in front of the city of *Mosel*, then cut the steppes of the island from east to west- the land between *Tigris* and *Euphrates*- passing a number of cities, including a *Shaher-Bazaar*, to *Tal-Halfa* and then to *Harran*, then passed the *Euphrates* at *Jarablos*, or at *Masknah*, passing from *Aleppo*, or close



to it, and ended at the valley of the *Orontes* River where it had some sub-roads to the Mediterranean coast, and central Syria. Some branches came out from the main road to different places such as *Cilicia*, *Anatolia*, and *Nineveh* reached Armenia and eastern Anatolia, and continued across the *Tigris* until *Diyarbakir*, then passed the Taurus Mountains through the narrow passages (George, R, 1986).

#### 4.6.2- Northern Commercial Routes

This road was passing through cities of Kabul and Balkh, and continued to the mouth of the river Oxus (River Jayhoun), then crosses the Caspian Sea to the Black Sea, but the location of this road from the centre of the Kingdom decreased its importance (Al-Abed, M. R, 1993).

#### 4.6.3- -Silk Road

The term Silk Road is a name from 19<sup>th</sup> century a relatively new one, not a label that was used by the ancient Civilization and nomadic peoples who interacted along these transeregional routes in ancient time. The name comes from the German term *die Sedenstrassen*, which means (Silk Route) by explorer Ferdinand von Richthofen (Benjamin, C, 2018) ( Pickworth, D, 2003). It is one of the most important trade routes in ancient history, which began from East Asia (China), passing the deserts, plains and mountains in Asia to Mesopotamia, Levant and then to the Mediterranean countries (Pliny, 1999) (Beaujard, P, 2010). Seleucids attempted to erode all difficulties in trade coming from the countries around them, to go through their country, in order to take advantage of them (Keswani, D. G, 1980). He worked to consolidate their business relationships with the Mediterranean islands to find markets for goods coming from the east, with emphasis on the production of the Seleucid cities which led to a large area of the diversity of their territories, climate, and hence to the diversity of commercial materials produced locally, as well as commercial interest in materials brought in by traders from different countries (Diakov, F. & Kovalev, S, 2000).

#### 4.7- The Seleucids Commercial Sea Routes:

As a result, Seleucids were forced to search for new roads to trade. They found only the sea route through the Arabian Gulf, which represented one of the most important marine trade routes coming from India and the ancient Yemen Kingdoms (Tarn, W. W, 1966). With the beginning of the interest of Seleucids in trade in the Gulf, this led to the rise in commercial competition with the Ptolemaic. Seleucids gained control of different cities in the Arabian Gulf such as Alexandria Charax (*Maysan*) (al-Bakr, M. A, 1986) (Tarn, W. W, 1966), which was also one of the most important ports there. They also launched military campaigns on the commercial cities on the west coast of the Gulf and tried to control the port Gerrha, which was one of the most important trading ports in the Arabian Peninsula but they failed to do so (Rostovtzeff, M., 1941) (Al-Naim, N. A, 1992) (Tarn, W. W, 1966) (Strabo, 1854)

Trade was moved from Gerrha westward to Petra and Palmyra and then to Gaza on the Mediterranean (Salles, J. F, 1996), this was the reaction to what Ptolemaic did to the establishment of many of the important



commercial centers, in the western regions of the Arabian Peninsula, along the eastern coast of the Red Sea, in order to control Eastern trade (al-Nasri, 1984). Transformation of trade routes that were passing in their lands to the west across the Syrian desert to the coast of the Mediterranean Sea (Al-Salibii, K, 1984), this was the reason for the emergence of new business centers including the city of Palmira, which emerged as a rival business in the area since this era (Al-Helou, A, 1999), and the Seleucids trade became more weak, with the advent of the Romans in the east, and controlling the trade in the Mediterranean after their victory over Carthage (Breasted, J. H, 1916), and closing the trade of Seleucia, where the Romans became the dominating power of the caravan trade routes in Mesopotamia and the Levant (Al-Helou, A, 1999). Syria turned out to be a Roman state in the era of Pompey (64 BC) (Sartre, M, 2005) (Musti, D, 1984) (Ball, W, 2002).

#### 4.8- The Seleucids Commercial Goods

One of the most important products was Seleucids wine, cooking oil, cheese, dried figs, prunes, products, linen, and wool, perfume, and cosmetics, and ointments, and sooths. (Hitti, P, 1957) While the commercial materials that were brought by traders from neighbouring countries, such as papyrus from Egypt, and glass from Sidon, gum, and timber from Asia Minor, and leather from the Syrian coast. Other products such as wood perfume smell and cotton yarn, spices, ivory, rubies were brought from India, silk from China, and the Arab Gulf was extracted pearls, and incense from the ancient Yemen (Al-Helou, A, 1999).

All these goods contributed to reap large profits which increased the state's income. (Rostovtzeff, 1932) The political situation changed with the mid-second century BC, due to the succession of weak kings. All these led to the large number of internal and external conflicts, which influenced the boom, and weaken the Seleucids' trade. The business conditions changed when the weakness began in the kingdom, especially after the defeat of the Seleucids in the battle of magnesia (190 BC) (McCrinkle, W, 1877) (Siculus, D, 1989) (Musti, D, 1984) (Makkawi, F, 1980) (Walbank, F. W, 1969). This led to the competition with other trading powers, such as Palmyra and the Nabataeans in the southwest of the kingdom, and the Romans from the northwest, and the emergence of the Parthians in the east, who took descend from the highlands to the plains.

#### 4.9- Decline of the Seleucids Empire

The main factor of its weakening Seleucids Empire was not from outside but from inside. The capital of the empire was in first time at Seleucia and later at Antioch. The moving of the administrative centre to the extreme west of the empire alienated its far eastern provinces (Fant, C. E & Reddish, M. G, 2003).

Therefore, the Seleucid Empire lost about half of its territory when the Greco-Bactrian and Parthian kingdoms declared themselves independent in 250 BC (Oppenheim, A. L, 1986). The Seleucids were always in conflict with the kingdoms, especially the Ptolemies in Egypt. However, they lost a lot of the battles over the east and west, losing of these battles mean loss of new parts of the kingdom's territory. Thus interruption to



the passage of commercial caravans in their territory was not to last and the Seleucids began the conflict with the Romans, which was controlling most of the Mediterranean areas (Dunstan, W. E, 2010).

The Seleucids allied themselves with the Aetolian League in Greece against the Romans. However, they were defeated twice at Thermopylae and at Magnesia (190 BC). They were forced to make a humiliating peace with Rome where all their European holdings were ceded to the Romans and all of their holdings in Asia Minor were ceded to Pergamum, which was a close ally of Rome (Spence, I. G., 2002) (McDonald, A. H & Walbank, F. W, 1969).

At the same time, the Parthians began to take Persian territories that were almost unchallenged. The Seleucids were never able to retrieve the lost land. Frequent civil wars further weakened the empire, making it impossible for the Seleucids to defeat the growing power of the Parthians. By the turn of the first century BC, the Seleucids were reduced to Antioch and a few other Syrian cities. However, Seleucids attempted to restore rule in Syria but Pompey at the end turned Syria into a Roman province (Hayes, J. H. & Mandell, S, 1998). All of these reasons led to weakening their ability to benefit in the field of economy. With the deterioration of the situation in the north, the disruption of commercial caravan routes and turning it into other areas had increased the importance of the commercial goods, which were coming from south of Arab Peninsula.

##### 5- The Ptolemaic Era

The State of the Ptolemaic belonged to the commander Ptolemy I, who was one of the most accomplished leaders of the army of Alexander the Great. He succeeded by virtue to the western part of the kingdom of Alexander the Great, which included parts of the Levant and Egypt. Ptolemy-I founded a new kingdom lasted for three centuries, and took Alexandria as their capital. They spent a lot of money in order to prepare for the army (Grainger, J. D, 1999). The Ptolemaic period until the early era of *Ptolemy IV*, was considered a strong period of Hellenistic civilization during which the city of Alexandria became one of the greatest cities of the ancient world (McKenzie, J, 2006).

Ptolemaic was benefited from the important location of Egypt, which mediated the ancient world, which was the confluence area of east-west trade. Ptolemy started to extend his kingdom to control over important areas by fighting (Gagarin, M, 2009), important battles in three directions:

First direction includes the Ptolemy's battles he fought for controlling the Mediterranean, which was a strategic pint for his kingdom in the direction of the north, where he was able to extend his influence in this important area, but in a non-permanent form. And the hegemony continued for Ptolemy kingdom until the battle of *Rafah* took place, during the reign of Ptolemy IV with Seleucids, the victory was for Ptolemy. After that, the Ptolemaic kingdom extended its influence and controlled most over of the Mediterranean coast, which became a subsidiary of Eastern Ptolemaic Egypt (Dušek, J, 2012) (Farid, 2012).



The second group includes Syrian wars which were fought by the Ptolemies against Seleucids in the Levant, and Coele-Syria (Strabo, 1854) which lasted for long periods of time. These wars did not lead to a permanent control for any of them, but led to troubling both of them to make them easy prey for the Romans who were able to eliminate them at the end of the first century BC.

Thirdly Kings of the Ptolemaic waged wars to impose their control over the trade coming from south of the Arabian Peninsula, thus wars were against Nabataeans who considered themselves the owners of the north Arabian Peninsula trade, In contrast, the Nabataeans have good relations with Sabaeans in south Arabian, this relation helped Arabs to continue to control the land trade routes, from south to north. These wars had a direct impact on State of the Nabataeans, and other Arab tribes in the Levant, which was located on the property of the kingdom of the Seleucids (Makkawi, F, 1980).

Ptolemies started to give attention to the business side, promoting trade with the Red Sea ( Robin, Ch. J, 2015). They sent missions to the Red Sea coast of the leadership of Ariston in order to identify the commercial movement in the sea and in order to control it (Hourani, G. F, 1958). They arrived as well as up to the coast of the South West of the Red Sea. They discovered the island of *Al-Zobarjad*, and brought gold and gemstones from it (al-Nasri, 1984). After controlling the Red Sea ports they had set up business on the east and west sides to control the trade Arabs and southern India (Pliny, 1999) (al-Nasri, 1984).

Ptolemies tried to eliminate all the obstacles in the way of trade coming from the south, where they set up many of the settlement business on the coast of the Red Sea, and repaired many roads linking the Nile River and the Red Sea, including the road linking the port of *Berenike* on Red Sea, and the city of *Qeft* on the Nile (Ziadah,N, 1975). Thus the Ptolemies were able to impose their control on the Red Sea ( Nielsen, D. & et at, 1958).

Consequently Ptolemies' external trade was developed and Alexandria became one of the most important commercial centres at the time (Bagnall, R. S & Rathbone, D. W, 2004) (Abu al-Yosr, F, 2002). North coasts of the red sea came under the control of *Ptolemy II*. He began to work out the relationships with strong powers against Nabataeans, so that he strengthened his relationships with the city of *Dedan* (al-Ula), which was one of the most important commercial stations of the trading road (incense road) coming from the south, and linking it to the nearest coast. All these led to the shifting the incense trade to Egypt through the Red Sea, instead of Petra (Mahran, M. B, 1993), and they now controlled the commercial ports, which Nabataeans relied, on their trade including, the port of *Eilat*, and the port of *Leuke Kome*, and imposed their control on the eastern side of the "Dead Sea", that was represented, the most important area, for the production of bitumen, which was adopted by the Nabataeans in their trade (Strabo, 1854).

This led to the recession and the collapse of the Nabataeans trade. The Nabataeans were not satisfied with this bad situation that made them suffer, which led them to stop the Ptolemies commercial ships and



looting as a reaction. As a result the Arabs supported the political conflicts that had a centre in the Levant as well as the Seleucids against Ptolemaic. They had been involved with ten thousand fighters besides Antiochus III in the siege of Gaza in 212 BC.

## 6- The North Arabian Peninsula in the Romans and Parthians Period

### 6.1- The Conditions in the Era of the Romans

The Romans emperor was considered one of the most important emperors in the ancient world. Romans had some phrases such as the Royal Era; from the year of establishing the city of Rome, i.e. 753 BC under the rule of the king Romulus until 508 BC (Byrd, R. C, 1995), and the Republic era; started after the national revolution in Rome 508 BC till 31 BC, during this time Rome was extended to include many places of the ancient world (Dunstan, W. E, 2010). It led to the anarchy, conflicts, and civil wars. The most famous war was between Octavian and Mark Antony, who were the two Caesars of Rome in which Octavian Augustus won who established himself as the royal emperor in 27 BC (Dunstan, W. E, 2010) (Byrd, R. C, 1995).

The economic situation before the arrival of Romans was almost stable in the northern regions of the Arab countries. The dominant powers in the region were the Seleucids and the Ptolemies. Both of them had their own trade routes in which no one could conquer the route of the other. And these caravans' cities were continued along the trade routes to flourish until it became a source of strength for some of these kingdoms that were available at that time (Al-Salhi, W. I, 1986).

Rome was benefited from the weakness of successors of Alexander in the Northern Arabian Peninsula and Egypt. They started to look for more sources of income to regain their economic interests due to their last wars (Dudley, D. D, 1964). Roman extremely desired to control the commerce of the East or to compete their rulers and share their wealth they received in case if they were not able to control it completely. They knew how much this wealth was valuable which was saved in the stores of the kings of South Arabia and India.

After the Romans consumed the trade coming from the east and spent large amounts of money in order to get these goods ( Robin, Ch. J, 2015). Their situation changed and they became the ones who run this trade routes to control it. Romans repeatedly tried to impose their control over Mesopotamia but the Parthians tightened their grip on the bulk of the trade routes that pass in this region. The military campaigns of Roman were going on but to no avail, even though it was up to the waters of the Arabian Gulf, but they cannot stay for long periods of time. Parthians forces were attacking back quickly to get them out of Mesopotamia. So, the Romans settled in the near east to work with all facilities for the passage of trade in Roman states (Zuhdi, B, 1963), where road was paved through which the convoys passed in the area under their control which became more security and stability in its territories that led to ease the passage of trade caravans between the states of the empire dramatically, resulted in increasing the richness of those states and then Rome (Stoneman, R, 1994).



Romans were eager to find a good relationship with those around them to facilitate the movement of trade where the influx of many of the ambassadors of the kings of India carrying expensive gifts to the court of Rome in order to facilitate Indian products to reach Romanian markets took place, and the Romans got what they were looking for of commercial materials, hoping to reduce taxes on their merchants in India (Al-Nadwi, M. I, 1970).

## 6.2- The Conditions in the Era of Parthians

The Seleucids kingdom started to collapse before the Roman expansion in Asia Minor and Mesopotamia. The Parthians took the place of Seleucids in the provinces of the eastern states (Butcher, K, 2003), and faced the Roman expansion in the region (Oppenheim, A. L, 1986).

The region of Parthia "*Khorasan*" got independence in 248 BC, under the leader Arsacid, He found the state of Parthian and took over many areas and attached them to his kingdom (Bickerman, J, 1983) (Gardner, P., 1877). They inherited all the commercial experiences known in the Near East (Farazat, M. H, 1991), and expanded in Mesopotamia at the expense of the kingdom of the Seleucids. In the reign of King *Mithridates II* (123-88 BC), the kingdom reached the peak of its expansion. It stretched from the Black Sea in the north, to Gerrha on the Arabian Gulf in the south, and in the east expanded into Central Asia. It touched with the civilization of China, and entered with them in the process of trade, which was (highlighted) Most notably by the silk trade (Farazat, 1989).

Parthians site between the trade of China and India to the east, on the hand, and the trade with the western countries on the other hand was proved very beneficial to Parthians themselves (Pernia, H, 1979). And the vast spaces enjoyed by the Kingdom of the Parthians, this expansion led to climate variability, and thus the diversification of agricultural, commercial, and industrial crops took place which had helped to increase the income of the Kingdom from the taxes, Which was imposed on the land trade route, coming from the east, south-east, and from the Mediterranean sea (Pernia, H., 1979).

Parthians' kings were very attentive to the importance of trade, so they rushed to improve their relations with states, and kingdoms, which controlled the trade routes in the eastern part. They built some cities in order to strengthen the control of the roads that passed on the outskirts of the kingdom. One of those cities is the city of Welgachet, which was built in 60-70 AD in the reign of King Lagash I (52-90 AD) to compete with the city of Seleucia on Tigris (Al-Salhi, W. I, 1986). This improved the movement of trade caravans towards the east, to bring in commercial goods, which were not available in Mesopotamia. Some of these goods were fur, manufactures ferrous, precious metals, precious stones, cotton textiles, and silk which was the most important product (Farazat, 1989). This way i.e. the Silk Road, Parthians could have brought the silk to the Near East, despite the fact that the Romans did not know about the silk until the first century A.D., when it



was dramatically demanded and then became the most important luxury goods to the Roman people (Thag, G., 1999).

Parthians were influenced by the Seleucids in minting the Greek coins which lasted into the reign of King *Mithridates I* (171-138 BC), who began to issue private currency for the Parthians kingdom instead of the Seleucids currency but it was similar to it (Gera, D., 1998).

## 7- The Kingdom of Nabataeans

Wars in the north of the Arabian Peninsula played an important role in the emergence of the Arab tribes in the north of the Arabian Desert as the absence of security in those areas helped the tribes to do so. The roads were open to the fertile land in Mesopotamia, and the Levant (Abdul Hamid, S. Z., 1976). This encouraged Arab tribes living in the outskirts of the desert areas to crawl toward the north, and thus settled around the wells, and worked to serve the trade caravans passing through those areas, and providing security to such caravans. These tribes were the first stage in the formation of Arab kingdoms (Ali, S. A., 1981).

Nabataeans were Arabs and they were deployed in the vast expanses of the desert north of the Arabian Peninsula and Syria, and the south of Palestine since the sixth century BC and continued the pattern of their nomadic life unchanged for two centuries. They began to change their life pattern gradually. They were started to work in agriculture, which was not accepted, because they had gone to a new life in violation of a nomadic life and had the culture contrary to that of Arabs. They also practised transferring trade i.e. they were active in the transport of goods coming from the south of the Arabian Peninsula to areas of the Near East, (Siculus, 1989) the Mediterranean Sea, and Egypt for a period of five centuries 312 BC to 106 AD (Abdullah, A. A., 1995).

They took the city of Petra, as their capital. This city had an excellent location, which has a significant impact in determining the kind of activity that was practised by the population, and the nature of their relationship with the major powers that were contending for controlling the regions of the ancient Near East (Strabo, 1854).

The first historical reference of the Nabataeans dated back to the fourth century BC, when Antiochus the governor of Syria sent a campaign to the country of Nabataeans in 312 BC (Kennedy, D., 2004). The purpose of this campaign was to control their country and turned the trade routes coming from the Arabian Gulf, and ancient Yemen Kingdoms to Syria to Ptolemy in Egypt (Muhaisin, Z. H, 2004) (Lancaster, H., 1971) (Zidane, G., 2006). But this campaign did not achieve the purpose. Antiochus sent another campaign under the leadership of his son for the revenge of the Nabataeans (Abbas, E., 1987) and this campaign was also failed, and then negotiation was worked out to leave them for a sum of money, slaves, and gifts (Mahran, M. B, 1993).



During the campaigns, the first mention of the Nabataeans was found. The power of the Nabataeans was increased with the passage of time, and their political influence was expanded to include large areas of the north-west of the Arabian Peninsula. Their control was widening to reach near the borders of the kingdoms of the successors of Alexander. The following section will review the relationship of the Nabataeans with the new political powers that controlled Syria and Egypt, and its impact on the Nabataean Kingdom and old Trade (Alpass, P. , 2013).

### 7.1- The Relations between Nabataeans and Ptolemies

Third century BC witnessed various unstable relations between the Nabataeans and the Ptolemaic, because of the conflict that was between the Seleucids and the Ptolemies to impose control over Coele-Syria (Dušek, J, 2012). These conflicts were known as the Syrian wars. Nabataeans took advantage of the situations to form their political entity, and their expansion of non-disputed areas (Noushi, I. , 1998).

After the Syrian wars, Ptolemy II (285-247 BC) attempted to control the trade coming from the south of the Arabian Peninsula, and the elimination of the Nabataeans (Siculus, 1989) (Rostovtzeff, 1932), without entering with them in the war. He could take over the areas that produce bitumen in the Dead Sea, which was one of the most important sources of their wealth (Strabo, 1854), and turned then to control the cities of the Nabataeans. This trade was coming from the Arabian Peninsula (Pliny, 1999). He also worked to strengthen his relationship with the city of *Dedan* in the Arab peninsula. They developed some ports on the Red Sea on the east coast, in order to receive the trade and prevent it from reaching the Nabataeans, and diverting it to Egypt (al-Bakr, M. A., 1980). They also established some ports on the eastern coast of Egypt. The most important port was called Berenike (*Um Alkatif*), and *Cafe* city on the Nile (Noushi, I. , 1998) (Mahran, M. B, 1993) (Ziadah, N, 1975). Ptolemy II also decided to open the old canal, which linked the Nile with the Red Sea (Pliny, 1999) (Tarn, W. W., 1929) (Jones, A. H. , 1987) (Mahran, M. B, 1993), It now had become a great importance in the transfer of trade from the Red Sea via the Nile to the Mediterranean coasts, without the need to pass through the territory of the Nabataeans.

All of these measures were enough to weaken the economy of the Nabataeans, since the trade was the source of their primary income. They had a strong reaction, as; they attacked the Ptolemaic ports on the eastern shores of the Red Sea and looted the commercial goods (Lloyd, A. B. , 1977). They did piracy against the Ptolemaic commercial ships at the Red Sea (Siculus, D, 1989), causing a lack of stability that scared the owners of the commercial vessels. But these acts did not affect the trade to the mainland under the Ptolemaic hegemony in the region (Hourani, G. F, 1958). Ptolemaic responded to the activities of the Nabataeans by preparing a large fleet that was able to destroy Nabataeans' ships which were sailing in the sea searching for commercial ships to hit (Pliny, 1999) (Strabo, 1854).



But the situation began to change in favor of the Nabataeans especially after the victory achieved by the Seleucids over the Ptolemies in the sixth Syrian war, in the reign of Antiochus IV (175-164 BC) (Hitti, P. K., 1972). In this war, Nabataeans helped Seleucids in order to weaker Ptolemies to maintain this trade (al-Nasri, 1984) (Ross, 2004). However, the Romans intervened and forced Antiochus to withdraw unconditionally and return to Syria (Bevan, S. , Litt, E. R. D. & Hon, L. L. D., 1930). With the beginning of the first century BC, the Ptolemaic Kingdom was started to decline because of the internal conflicts between members of the ruling family. It gave an opportunity for the emergence of the power of the Nabataeans again. Nabataeans king *Harith* III (86-62 BC) expanded their influence towards the east and south to the city of *Dedan* and the *al-Hijr*, and regained its former glory, and they made Agra as their port and the base for moving their armies. They also controlled the western coasts of the Arabian Peninsula, and they destroyed the port of Ptolemaic *Ampelone* (Pliny, 1999). They built the port of *Leuke Kome* (Tarn, W. W., 1929), on the eastern side of the Red Sea, which was the main port for the Nabataeans (Strabo, 1854), which prevented business to access *Dedan* city "*al-'Ula*" who were in good relation with Ptolemaic (al-Nasri, 1984) (Al-Salibii, K, 1984) (al-Ansari, A. M & Abu al-Hassan, H. A. , 2002).

When the Ptolemaic lost their control over the east coast in the Red Sea, they shifted to control the western coast of the Red Sea, and the Ptolemaic influence started to get wither away after being defeated by the Seleucids and exiting from Syria. The Ptolemaic continued to lose until the end of their rule and then Egypt turned into a Roman province in 30 BC In this time, the Nabataeans trade was more famous and they were also in the good political situation, as the first century BC. was considered as the brightest period of Nabataeans trade.

The end of the first century BC, witnessed a major shift in the world of commerce, where the discovery of trade routes in the Red Sea by the Ptolemaic led to the shift in trade from the land route to the sea route. This led to the deterioration and weakness of the economy in the Kingdom of the Nabataeans, but they did everything in their power to return the trade to the road. This work by Nabataeans contributed not only to keep the trade route but helped to sustain and flourish trade and civilization of the kingdoms of the south of the Arabian Peninsula, whose economy was based mainly on land trade.

## 7.2- The Relations between Nabataeans and Seleucids

When the Seleucids controlled Syria after defeating the Ptolemaic, and expelled them from Palestine, and the coasts of the Mediterranean, the Arab Nabataeans supported the Seleucid to eliminate Ptolemaic. On the other hand Seleucids encouraged Nabataeans to attack Ptolemaic ships in the Red Sea (al-Nasri, 1984) (Ross, 2004).

Nabataeans policy was changed when the state of Seleucids was weak. Nabataeans gave more attention to southern Syria, and the northern Red Sea and their influence increased in Syrian. They had the



opportunities to stir up unrest and revolutions in Syrian territory, where King *Haritha I* (169-146 BC), offered assistance to Maccabees Jews, to revolt against King Antiochus IV in 168 BC (Abbas, E. , 1987) (al-Nasri, 1984).

In the time of the Nabataean King *Rab'el I* (88-87 BC), new Syrian territories were annexed to his kingdom taking advantage of the weakness of the Seleucids. He entered a violent war at the time of Antiochus XII near the village of *Cana* which was located on the coast of *Yaffa*. In this war, Nabataeans came out victorious and the commander of the Syrian forces was killed (Abbas, E. , 1987). The disagreement still existing on historians in determining the identity of Nabataean King who won this victory; some of them said that it was King *Rab'el I* but others said that it was King *Haritha III* (*Aretas III*). The King *Haritha III* (87-62 BC), took an advantage from the emergence of Rome on the Near East, and the decline of the influence of the Seleucids. *Haritha III* arrived at Damascus in the year 85 BC (Alpass, P. , 2013). At the request of the people of Damascus who wanted to get rid of internal conflicts and raids of plunder that were taken place in their city by the surrounding tribes (Taylor, J. , 2001). The city remained under Arabs rule for a period of fifteen years, until the arrival of the King *Tigran (140-55 BC)*, who occupied the city and expelled Nabataeans from the city 70 BC (Abbas, E. , 1987).

### 7.3- The Relations between Nabataeans and Roman

When the king Nabataean *Harith III* was expanding his influence at the expense of the Maccabees, and the siege of the city of Jerusalem, Romans appeared in the East under the leadership of by Pompey who could put Asia Minor under the authority of Rome. *Aristobulus II*, the leader of the Maccabees took an advantage of the situation and sent a request for help from *Marcus Scaurus* (Callaway, 2011), the Romanian commander who was sent by Pompey to Damascus. *Scaurus* sent his order to *Harith* to lift the siege of Jerusalem and return to his country; otherwise he would be punished by Romanian troops. The Nabataean leader decided to return without entering into a war with Pompey (Hayes, J. H. & Mandell, S, 1998).

Pompey captured *Damascus* and converted the rest of the Syrian cities into a Roman province (64 BC) (Sartre, M, 2005) (Van. R. J., 2007) (Musti, D, 1984) (Ball, W, 2002). The Nabataeans stayed in the same situation until Pompey left Syria in 62 BC appointing *Scaurus* as its ruler. In *Scaurus* time, the things started to change, as he led the first campaign to the city of Petra, intending to impose control, but he stood helplessly because of the strong and natural setting of the city. So he decided to burn the surrounding areas. He ultimately left the city when king *Harith* of Petra paid him the sum of three hundred talents (Schürer, E. , 2014).

Nabataeans found that the payment of these funds was in order to maintain their freedom from being controlled by the Romans that swept the entire land adjacent to them. Nabataeans considered it a real victory for them (Lancaster, 1971). Pompey issued a new currency in Rome depicting the subordination, submission of loyalty and obedience of King *Harith* ( Clain-Stefanelli, E. E. & Clain-Stefanelli, V. , 1975). Very soon Nabataeans had to enter into a military confrontation with the Romanian troops. Petra was attacked by the



commander *Aulus Gabinius* in 55 BC (Ajlouni, A. , 2003). the reason behind this campaign was the richness of the Arab people. He defeated the Nabataeans (Abbas, E. , 1987). Things were changed at the end of the first century BC, with the emergence of the internal conflict in Rome between Julius Caesar and Pompey to control of the reins of power. There were some battles between the two sides in Alexandria attended by the Nabataeans at the time of King *Malik I* (59/58- 30 BC) and sent help to the *Julius Caesar* in 48 BC and *Julius Caesar* came out victorious (Ajlouni, A. , 2003).

Because of the emergence of the power of the Parthians, there was a kind of military balance in the region. Their emergence on the Levant, and their control over Syria, and Jerusalem helped them make such balance. Nabataean King tried to make an alliance with them, as he thought that they would save them from the Romans and their followers i.e. Jews in the region. The situation was changed when the Roman armies controlled over Syria again. They also imposed a tribute on the Nabataeans to have an independent life and to ensure the freedom of their trade (Mahfal, M. , 1999). This relationship came to an end in the favour of Romans and then the Romans were able to appoint governors and kings of Petra, as it happened during the reign of the King *Harith IV* (Ajlouni, A. , 2003).

Now there was a kind of cooperation between the Nabataeans and the Romans; this was because of the subscription of Nabataean Minister Silas in the Roman campaign under the leadership of *Aelius Gallus* in 24 BC, on the south of the Arabian Peninsula to control the production areas of incense (Strabo, 1854). Egypt entered into the possession of the Roman Empire, so that the Nabataeans came within the framework of the Roman territory, which was between the state of Syria and Egypt. The situation of Nabataeans continued to be unstable and struggling for survival. The Romans decided that the survival of independent Petra was a big problem and they must solve it. The Romans also wanted to monopolize the old trade.

In the last days of Petra, the trade was as good as it was before, due to the transformation of overland trade routes to the sea routes. But its accession to the Roman state had become a necessity imposed by the political situation in the region. The Roman commander Trajan (98-117 AD) entered Petra in 106 AD and now it was an important part of the Empire, as it was used in later periods to monitor the movements of nomads and responding to their continuous attacks (Fagan, B. M. & Beck, C., 1996).

The Nabataean Kingdom's weakness and the deterioration of the political situation led to the deterioration of the economic situation in the kingdoms of the south of the Arabian Peninsula. It was due to shifting the overland roads from the mainland to the sea. The Romans became the controllers of the trade routes coming from India and East Africa, especially after the *Hippalus* discovery of the monsoon, which caused a revolution in the world of ancient trade. The Roman's commercial ships were sailing from Egyptian ports on the Red Sea to India directly, without having to wait for the south Arabian Peninsula trade coming from land which ended with the passage of days. As a result, the Arabian Peninsula ports became important



and were famous such as *Qana* port which became an important transit port on the new trade route (Pliny, 1999) (Ziadah, N, 1975).

## 8- The Impact of the Political Situation in the Northern Arabian Peninsula on the Trade of the Ancient Yemen Kingdoms

As a result, the period from the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BC, witnessed the economic growth in India and Central Asia. The exchange grew between India and Mesopotamia, helped by the active policy of the Seleucids in the Arabian Gulf. Following a military clash, there were diplomatic relationships between the Mauryan Empire and the Seleucids. Moreover, a royal edict of Ashoka mentions Ptolemy Philadelphus, which the existence of contacts between India and western world It enabled the expansion of the trade with the western world. The Mauryan period witnessed a steady expansion of trade with the western world and the exchange of emissaries between Mauryan and Hellenistic king. Contacts were also attested by Agatharchides, Diodorus, Strabo, then the author of the Periplus and Pliny the Elder on one hand and in the Sangam Tamil literature on the other (Beaujard, P, 2010) (Salles, J. F., 1996).

The second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> BC witnessed the development of a Greco-Bactrian kingdom around 250 BC that also demonstrates the vitality of the roads in Central Asia. The emergence of a new stage when there was a hegemonic shift to the Western with a declining west of the Mesopotamian and Egyptian powers, weakened by ceaseless wars. The power centre of the Near East moved westward, Rome became the first power in the world when Carthaginian threats were eliminated by the Romans (Breasted, J. H., 1916). It could clearly be seen in the victory over the Antiochus III, Seleucid Emperor in Magnesia in 190 BC (Bar-Kochva, B., 1976), and by Antiochus IV's consent to the orders of the Roman ambassador, who instructed him to leave Egypt and Cyprus in 168 BC (Beaujard, P, 2010). The Roman state controlled Greece, western Anatolia, and Cilicia in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC and Syria, Palestine, and Egypt in the 1<sup>st</sup> BC.

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> BC economic recession and the weakening of states were accompanied by growing insecurity on land and sea throughout western Asia and the Mediterranean and the situation grew worse at the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. The emergence of the Parthians Empire as power in central Asia and Near East at *Mithridates I* time 171 BC (Fagan, B. M. & Beck, C., 1996) (Kia, A., 2015), blocked the trade roads which were coming from east towards Mesopotamia and the political instability in Bactria-Margiana probably made the Indian-Red Sea route more attractive than that of the Arabian Gulf from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC. These two sea areas had clearly been in competition since the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC (Thompson, W. R., 2005).

In view of the above mentioned literary evidence, there is no archaeological or literary evidence for maritime trade between India and Rome prior to *Trajan* emperor. It is believed that prior to Trajan the Romans did not proceed beyond the mart of ancient Yemen Kingdom, because where the Malabar goods were available, brought by the Arab traders (Parthasarathi, 2015).



The Indian trade with western world was greatly facilitated with the discovery of the use of monsoon, which made it possible ships trading with the Indian to travel there directly. But that discovery led to the destruction of the economy of the Yemen kingdoms. At the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. this source of trade was faded away and the centres and the capital cities of the kingdoms were shifted from Edge of the desert to the Central Highlands. Then they started to give more attention to agriculture as the main source for the survival of those kingdoms after Romans' dominance over the Indian trade of the sea. All those factors indicate that the Indian trade had not been affected by the political situations in the north of Arabia, the reason of which was the availability of various options that ensured its continuity. Some of those options are:

Then starting of war between the Saluki and Ptolemaic in Mesopotamia and Levant, and the emergence of new power like Romans and Parthians in the scene which led to the interruption

1. On the land of Mesopotamia and Levant war had started between Seleucus and Ptolemaic which led to the emergence of new powers known as Roman and Parthians. These conflicts caused disturbance to the commercial land route coming from India and China that passed through Mesopotamia and Levant (Panhwar, M. H, 1981). Consequently, commercial routes changed to the south to the maritime route passing through the western ports of India towards the Arabian Sea until it reached the ports of Yemen (Qana port) in the south of the Arabian peninsula. Afterwards, from Qana port, goods are moved and distributed via land route (Incense Road) to Petra, Gaza, and Egypt.

2. However, when the war was started in Egypt and west of Mediterranean, the commercial routed return to the land route (coming from northern India to central Asia to the west of Mesopotamia). There was also another route (maritime route) which went through Arab Sea to the Arabian Gulf (precisely, Gerrha port) then via land route to the city of Palmyra. On the other hand, Indian trade had another destination (China) where an era of prosperity is witnessed during the rule of Han dynasty which extended from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 1<sup>st</sup> century BC.

The impact of the political situation in northern Arabia had Yemen has been divided into two periods. The first period was stretched from the 1st millennium century BC to the 1st century BC in this era, conflicts and wars were concentrated in the northern parts of the Arabian Peninsula which means that there was no direct effect on the trading activities in Yemen. On the contrary, it was a period of prosperity to the kingdoms of old Yemen. In other words, starting wars caused interruption in the land commercial route (silk route), so the route redirected south towards Afghanistan to Punjab then through Indus valley towards ports of western India where goods were shipped to the ports of Yemen (Qana). This commercial route helped to construct the civilization of old Yemen which counted mostly on caravan trading as well as local products such as frankincense and myrrh. Because of this prosperity and wealth, ancient Yemen was named by Greek and Roman as Arabia Felix.



In the second period, kingdoms of ancient Yemen were affected directly by the war which led to economic collapse. The emergence of Romans over Ptolemaic, their control over Levant and Egypt, their expansion towards the east until they had control over Seleucid and the emergence of Parthian Empire in central Asia and their expansion towards north-western borders of India were other reasons for their economic collapse.

Egypt, Levant and a large part of Mesopotamia became under the control of Roman Empire which by this took control over the trade routes (land and maritime) that came from China and India passing through Mesopotamia to the eastern ports of Mediterranean. The Roman Empire sought to control the commercial land coming from the south of the Arabian Peninsula to Gaza (Silk Road). It equipped a military campaign 24 Led by *Aelius Gallus* to eliminate the kingdoms of Yemen, which controlled the land trade, but this campaign did not succeed and returned without achieving any results. When the Romans realised that they could not control the kingdoms of a harsh desert nature, they started to activate maritime trade through the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea and went directly to India without the need of Yemeni merchants. This was achieved with the discovery of monsoons that facilitated access to India. In a short period of time, the change to the maritime trade route from India to Egypt through the Red Sea without the need to stop in Yemeni ports led to the gradual collapse of the economy of Yemen's ancient kingdoms. Consequently, capitals of these kingdoms turned from the land-trading road that passed through the edge of the desert to the highlands, where agriculture became their important source in the coming period.

#### Conclusion:

The political conditions in the northern Arabian Peninsula from the 4th century BC to the 2nd century AD had a profound impact on the trade dynamics of the ancient Yemen Kingdom. The region's strategic location as a bridge between the East and the West made it a focal point for competing empires, including the Seleucids, Ptolemies, Parthians, Nabataeans, and later the Romans. These powers sought to control key trade routes, leading to conflicts that reshaped commercial networks and influenced the economic prosperity of ancient Yemen.

#### Key Findings

##### 1- Shifts in Trade Routes Due to Political Conflicts.

- The constant wars between the Seleucids and Ptolemies disrupted traditional land routes, forcing merchants to seek alternative paths, including maritime routes through the Red Sea and Arabian Gulf.
- The rise of the Parthians further complicated trade by dominating Mesopotamia, pushing commerce towards ancient Yemen Kingdoms ports like Qana and Gerrha.

##### 2- Impact on ancient Yemen Kingdoms.

- Initially, the conflicts in the north benefited the southern kingdoms (such as Saba, Ḥaḍramawt, and Qataban) by diverting trade through their territories, enhancing their wealth and influence.
- However, the Roman expansion and their direct maritime trade with India (post-discovery of monsoon winds) marginalized the ancient Yemen Kingdoms middlemen, leading to economic decline.

##### 3- Role of the Nabataeans

- The Nabataeans thrived as intermediaries between the south and the Mediterranean, but their eventual annexation by Rome in 106 AD marked the end of their dominance over the incense trade.

- Roman control over Petra and the Red Sea routes further diminished the southern kingdoms' role in long-distance trade.

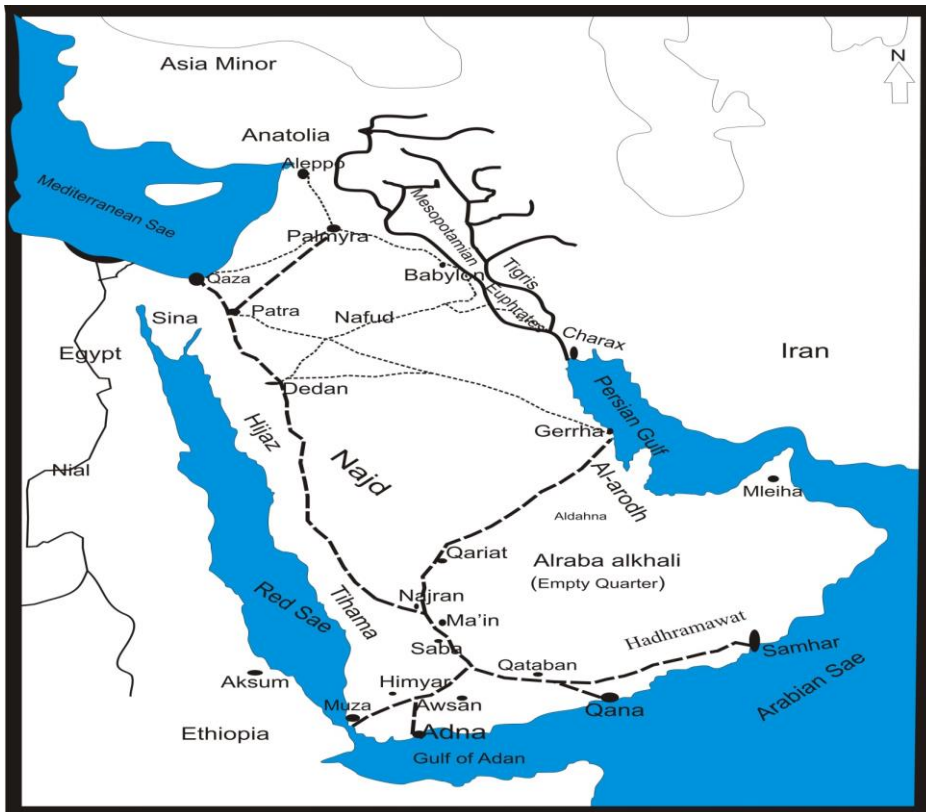
#### 4- Transition from Trade to Agriculture

- With the decline of overland trade, the southern kingdoms shifted their economic focus to agriculture, moving their capitals inland to more fertile highland regions.

#### Final Assessment

The political instability in the northern Arabian Peninsula acted as both a catalyst and a disruptor for the ancient Yemen Kingdoms trade networks. While early conflicts redirected commerce through southern routes, bringing prosperity, the eventual Roman and Parthian dominance marginalized the region. The southern kingdoms' inability to adapt to the new maritime trade paradigm led to their gradual decline, marking the end of an era where the incense and spice trade defined their wealth and power.

This study underscores how geopolitical shifts in one region can reshape the economic and political landscapes of neighboring civilizations, demonstrating the interconnectedness of ancient trade and empire-building.



Map (1) Map of Trade Route (Alraeeeni, M. H., 2019)



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