

At the Emperor's Service: The Armies of Dependent States and Peoples as a Military Factor in the Early Imperial Period

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Abstract: The armies of the dependent allies of the Roman Empire have thus far received little attention in scholarship. The paper will look at their contributions to the defence of the imperium, to suppressing rebellions and to offensive operations. Three case studies (Commagene, Nabataea, Cherusci) will be analysed regarding the numerical strength, equipment and organisation of their militaries and their operational history as Roman allies in the first century AD. The analysis demonstrates the value of allied armies in a range of campaigns and suggests that such forces were vital to military success in all parts of the early empire.¹

Vespasian's cause was now joined also by Sohaemus (of Emesa) with his entire kingdom, whose strength was not to be despised, and by Antiochus (of Commagene) who had enormous ancestral wealth, and was in fact the richest of the subject princes (*inservientes reges*). Presently (Herod) Agrippa (II) (...) quickly crossed the sea and joined the cause. (His sister) Queen Berenice showed equal spirit in helping Vespasian's party: she (...) commended herself to Vespasian for all his years by the splendid gifts she made him. All the provinces (...) (in the East) took the oath of allegiance; but their governors had no armed forces, since Cappadocia had as yet no legions. A grand council was held at Berytus. (The governor of Syria, C. Licinius) Mucianus came there with

¹ The article is loosely based on a paper I delivered at the International Ancient Warfare Conference in Bonn on 22 June 2023. I want to thank the LVR-Landesmuseum Bonn for hosting us, Lennart Gilhaus (Berlin) for the organisation of the conference and Carlos Espí Forcén (Murcia) for the moderation of my session. Furthermore, I am indebted to several people for their feedback before, during and after the conference, especially Alastair Lumsden, Daniel Emmelius (Essen), Jan-Martin Ott (Bochum) and Fabrizio Biglino (Torino). All remaining errors are my own.

all his legates and tribunes, as well as his most distinguished centurions and soldiers and also the picked troops of the army of Judaea. This great concourse of foot and horse, with princes who rivalled one another in splendid display, made a gathering that befitted the high fortune of an emperor.²

In this account of the events of July 69 AD, Tacitus lists the forces that supported Vespasian in the civil war. His army was deployed in the Levant during the Jewish revolt and had been joined by the garrison of Egypt,³ but Tacitus stresses that the other provinces in the East were bereft of troops. Therefore, it was crucial for Vespasian to secure the military support of those states that were bound to Rome by *amicitia*.⁴ Tacitus was seemingly not too happy with this decisive role of foreign armies, as his expression *inservientes reges* (“servant kings”) shows – elsewhere, he uses the official terminology *reges socii* (“allied kings”).⁵ Perhaps begrudgingly, however, Tacitus admitted that the strength of the Emesan army was considerable, and that the dynasts brought the necessary financial means as well as their own soldiers to the table. To win the throne, the Flavians needed these *amici* to protect their back, to secure their supply lines and to enlarge their army. The significance of Rome’s dependent allies in the East for Vespasian’s later success can therefore hardly be overstated.⁶

Nevertheless, the analysis of the imperial army has traditionally, and unsurprisingly, focused on the nature and deployment of the legions.⁷ Less, though still considerable attention has been afforded to the auxiliaries.⁸ The factor of the allied

² Tac. *Hist.* 2.81, transl. Moore 1925. *Accessere cum regno Sohaemus haud spernendis viribus, Antiochus vetustis opibus ingens et servientium regum ditissimus. mox per occultos suorum nuntios excitus ab urbe Agrippa, ignaro adhuc Vitellio, celeri navigatione properaverat. nec minore animo regina Berenice partis iuvabat, florens aetate formaque et seni quoque Vespasiano magnificentia munerum grata. quidquid provinciarum adluitur mari Asia atque Achaia tenus, quantumque introrsus in Pontum et Armenios patescit, iuravere; sed inermes legati regebant, nondum additis Cappadociae legionibus. consilium de summa rerum Beryti habitum. illuc Mucianus cum legatis tribunisque et splendidissimo quoque centurionum ac militum venit, et e Iudaico exercitu lecta decora: tantum simul peditum equitumque et aemulantium inter se regum paratus speciem fortunae principalis effecerant.*

³ Under the prefect Tiberius Alexander: Suet. *Vesp.* 6.3.

⁴ On the terminology see now Gieseke 2026.

⁵ Tac. *Hist.* 4.4; for the argument Wilker 2022, 476.

⁶ Millar 1996, 162 calculates that the dependent rulers supplied 18 000 men, a third of Vespasian’s whole army.

⁷ The bibliography is too exhaustive to be treated here, but dedicated handbooks recording the recruitment, equipment and histories of the Roman army through the ages, like Bishop / Coulston 2006, or to individual legions, such as Berry / Pollard 2015, attest to the great interest, which pertains to a wider public. Other studies are devoted to topics like the legions in Germania (Fischer 2020), the political significance of the legions (Eich 2014), the history of the imperial army (Fischer 2012) or the structure of the whole army including the auxiliaries (Goldsworthy 2003).

⁸ The topic was first systematically tackled by Cheesman 1914. More recently, Campbell 2009 provided an overview of the *auxilia* from an archaeological perspective. Such research is nowadays also included in works on the Roman army as a whole such as Goldsworthy 2003 or Southern 2007. Other researchers, like Haynes 2013, have concentrated on the political role of the *auxilia* in the integration



armies has, however, often been overlooked or scholars derided their strength as much as ancient authors had.⁹ To date, there is no dedicated study of the armies of all the Roman 'client states' or of the armies within a particular region (during the Principate).¹⁰ The closest work in this regard is by the military researcher Edward Luttwak, who focused on the 'grand strategy' of the Roman Empire.¹¹ He argued that the dependent armies played a localised role in a macro-strategy for the defence and expansion of the empire. Yet, Luttwak and those who followed him¹² asserted that such 'client states' only ever functioned as temporary buffer states that could 'civilise' and pacify regions and thus prepare them for eventual annexation.¹³ In this view, the dependent allies were never meant to be permanent entities and their armies were intended to provide low-cost border forces which were perceived as inferior to the legions.¹⁴ Though the dependencies' military support for Rome was usually decided *ad hoc*, their forces could become a crucial factor. During the Julio-Claudian period, allied forces were entrusted with defending the eastern flank of Asia Minor against Parthia, while, in Germania, Roman campaigns were always supported by native forces.¹⁵ Even

of the provinces. Cf. Speidel 2016 for the genesis of the permanent imperial *auxilia* units. For archaeological debates around the *auxilia* see Wheeler 2015.

⁹ E.g., Graf 1978, 7 thought Nabataea was annexed by Trajan because the kingdom was militarily incompetent, echoing the sentiment of Strabo (16.4.24C781) that most "Arab" kings had no expertise or even interest in warfare [συνέβαινε δὲ τοῦτο τοῦ μὲν βασιλέως τοῦ Ὀβόδα μὴ πολὺ φροντίζοντος τῶν κοινῶν καὶ μάλιστα τῶν κατὰ πόλεμον (κοινὸν δὲ τοῦτο πᾶσι τοῖς Ἀράβων βασιλεῦσιν (...)). Cf. Joseph. *AJ* 14.2.3. Later, Graf 1994, 265 criticises the same view because it was still prevalent. Similarly, Lindner 1980, 55 was convinced that early Nabataean armies could only have been irregular troops that tried to ambush their enemies.

¹⁰ In the companion Erdkamp 2007, only one of 29 contributions (Stickler 2007) is dedicated to an analysis of allied troops, and it is exclusively concerned with Late Antiquity.

¹¹ Luttwak 1976.

¹² Cf. Bowersock 1983, 82; Marek 2016, 338–343; Chaniotis 2018, 242–245.

¹³ Somewhat like the role traditionally perceived for the early *coloniae* in Italy, though more recent research has shown that here, too, such a grand strategy on behalf of the Romans is unlikely. Cf. Bradley 2014. Luttwak, however, also included (imperial) *coloniae* in his argument of a grand strategy: Luttwak 1976, 19.

¹⁴ As Eich 2009, 563 correctly observes, Luttwak uses "legions" as a metaphor for the aircraft carriers of the contemporary USA. Hence, they are only to be used if it really is necessary, and cheaper alternatives are to be preferred where possible. He praises the flexibility of such troops (e.g., Luttwak 1976, 30, 111–112) but argues that they were not sufficient once a population became more Romanised and expected a higher standard of security (cf. Luttwak 1976, 75–78). Thus, the forces of the 'client states' are clearly constructed as being inferior to legions. Most researchers have objected to Luttwak's interpretation of a grand strategy that included the dependent states, however. See, for instance, Isaac 1990; Millar 2004; Kropp 2013; Halamus 2018.

¹⁵ Tacitus (*Ann.* 6.32; *Hist.* 2.81) emphasises that no troops were stationed in Cappadocia when it was made a province in 17 AD. On this question, also see above 187 and below 191. Joseph. *BJ* 2.5.1 (66–68) underlines how common and how important reinforcements from dependent dynasts were; cf. Braund 1984, 184; Facella/Kaiser 2010 19. Ugulava 2022, 270 n. 8, 273, 280 stresses that this is even true for allies with only loose ties such as the kingdom of Caucasian Iberia, which shared the responsibility of



more significant is their role during the Year of the Four Emperors, when numerous Eastern allies such as Judaea, Emesa or Commagene helped the Flavians to win the war and the throne.¹⁶ Some of these states fielded armies in excess of 10,000 men and the Romans especially appreciated the provision of specialised forces like heavy cavalry, horse or foot archers.¹⁷ Even minor dependencies functioned as important cogs in the imperial system and saved the empire further expenses for its military.¹⁸ Finally, some rulers went as far as having their troops trained or equipped in the Roman style in an attempt to increase quality and reputation.¹⁹ Others founded military colonies in the model of Rome and the Hellenistic monarchs.²⁰ The paper will therefore compare the military strength, equipment and tactical roles of the forces of the dependent states of the Roman Empire in the First century AD with contemporary imperial legions and regular auxiliaries, in regard to their size, equipment and tactical roles. It asks why and when the *amici* of Rome provided their troops and how reliable they were when considered as quasi-imperial forces that would aid in the defence of the empire, in the preservation of internal order and in offensive campaigns.²¹

Within the restricted space of the article, I briefly analyse three cases, portray the make-up of their forces, estimate their size and provide an overview of the operational history during the peoples' time as Roman allies. Based on the quote, it

protecting the Caucasus, Pontus and Cappadocia against the Parthians with other states such as Commagene – on them, see 191–193 below. Cf. Wolters 1990, 212–215 on Germanic troops.

¹⁶ See again Tac. *Hist.* 2.81. Tac. *Hist.* 2.25.2 mentions Epiphanes, the son of Antiochus IV of Commagene, as supporting the troops of Otho, who was still acknowledged by Vespasian at this point, against Vitellius. He will have taken his Macedonian corps with him most likely, on which see 192–193 below. On the importance of allied troops for the Julio-Claudians and Flavians cf. Wilker 2022, 464.

¹⁷ E.g., Joseph. *Vit.* 24.115–116 emphasises that Herodes' military colonists were skilful horsemen. Strab. 11.3.3C500; 4.5C502 claims the Caucasian Iberians could levy several tens of thousands of men from the neighbouring Scythians. On Nabataean archers and cavalry see 195 below. Cf. Konrad 2017, 264 for the argument that such specialist troops were an attractive selling point for the dependent rulers when dealing with the Romans.

¹⁸ For example, according to Joseph. *AJ* 13.16.3 (418) the Ituraeans were strong enough to keep their Judaeans neighbours in check, and according to *BJ* 2.18.9 (501), Emesa could send Rome 4000 troops; cf. Konrad 2022, 190. On the Emesans, also see Tac. *Hist.* 2.81.1 quoted above. Still, some of the dependencies had only weak forces which could not achieve much on their own: see Tac. *Ann.* 6.41 for the example of Archelaus II of Cilicia.

¹⁹ Cic. *Att.* 6.1.14; *Phil.* 11.33; *BAlex.* 34.4 (Deiotarus' Galatians); Vell. *Pat.* 2.109.1 (Maroboduus' Marcomanni); Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 71.1–2 (Herod's Judaeans). Cf. Braund 1984, 116. Konrad 2017, 278 argued such reforms would have been counter-productive, for the troops of the *amici* were useful particularly due to their different specialisation (a point mentioned above and in n. 14). However, the introduction of heavy infantry similar to legionaries would have added to, rather than completely replacing, the existing troop types, and such military reforms would have proven the qualification of the respective rulers.

²⁰ See Isaac 1990, 328 for the example of Herod.

²¹ For instance, sending troops that fought alongside the Roman forces obviously meant recognition in the imperial centre and was a show of loyalty. Cf. Hekster 2010, 55.



would be convenient to analyse Emesa, Commagene and Judaea. Yet, in order to gain a more representative insight into the armies of the Roman allies, I will only look at Commagene in the beginning and subsequently depart from northern Syria to compare the situation with the Nabataeans at the southern border and the Cherusci in the far north.

Case I: Commagene

The Kingdom of Commagene controlled a strategically important area on the Euphrates between Anatolia, Armenia, Mesopotamia, and Syria.²² In 63 BC, king Antiochus I accepted the overlordship of Rome when Pompey was marching through the region. Though Commagene was annexed upon the death of Antiochus III in 17 AD, Caligula re-established the realm in 38 AD under the latter's son Antiochus IV. Finally, in 72 AD, Antiochus was charged with high treason and the area was permanently incorporated into the Roman province of Syria.²³ Due to its location, Commagene played an important role in the imperial defence in the East where, after the civil wars, no legions were stationed in Cappadocia and the Romans thus depended on the royal troops to protect the eastern entrance into Anatolia and the vital crossing of the Euphrates at Zeugma.²⁴

It is difficult to gauge the size of the Commagenian army, but we have some numbers to work with. At the outbreak of the Roman-Jewish War, Antiochus IV sent 2,000 horsemen and 3,000-foot archers, and when Titus assumed command, 1,000 of each were still in Judaea.²⁵ These units represented a fraction of the royal forces, which must have been much larger if they could dispatch a 2,000 men cavalry contingent. The position is supported by Josephus' notice that, in contrast to their father, the two sons of Antiochus IV resisted the Roman annexation in 72 AD and defeated the invading force before their father voluntarily capitulated.²⁶ Since the sons operated against the wishes of the king, they would probably not have had the majority of the royal army with them. Their opponent in the battle, Caesennius Paetus, governor of Syria, commanded Legio VI Ferrata with its c. 5,000 men, several additional *cohortes* and *alae* and considerable reinforcements from Aristobulus of Chalcis and Sohaemus

²² This is accentuated by Joseph. *BJ* 7.7.1 (219–229).

²³ See Facella 2010 for an analysis of its history as a Roman dependent ally.

²⁴ Ugulava 2022, 280 on Tac. *Ann.* 6.32; *Hist.* 2.81. Facella 2006, 232–235, 245 highlights the crucial significance Commagene held after acquiring Zeugma (Seleucia-Apamea). Ish-Shalom 2021, 163, meanwhile, also points to the eastern allies as defenders of this border since Cappadocia had no legions.

²⁵ Joseph. *BJ* 2.18.9 (500); 3.4.2 (68).

²⁶ Joseph. *BJ* 7.7.2 (230–237). Josephus does not explicitly say they won the battle, but indicates they would have defeated the Roman invasion army if the king had not voluntarily gone over to the Romans.



of Emesa.²⁷ It is therefore conceivable that the entire force numbered up to 10,000 men. Even if the Commagenian victory was only a skirmish between both sides' cavalry contingents, it speaks for the quality and quantity of the royal troops, which we can probably put at a number well beyond 10,000 accordingly – the size of two legions, if perhaps not their fighting strength.

Aside from horsemen and the renowned archers,²⁸ Josephus mentions a regiment armed and trained in the Macedonian manner, by which he may mean pikemen fighting in a Macedonian phalanx.²⁹ Yet, according to him, its commander, prince Antiochus Epiphanes, one of the sons of Antiochus IV, also threw javelins.³⁰ How can these statements be reconciled? Certainly, with the name of the corps, either Epiphanes or Josephus thought of an Alexander imitation, but that does not mean Josephus made it up, considering Titus himself was a witness to the events and could have objected to the report.³¹ In order to understand how the Commagenians may have fought, we must at first realise that their fighting styles did not merely rest on local and Near Eastern traditions, since Commagene had been part of the Seleucid Empire until the mid-2nd century BC.³² In the Seleucid army, the elite soldiers of the *argyraspides* had been used both as phalangites and as assault infantry, and alongside them, flexible infantry units such as the *thyreophoroi* or *thorakitai* existed.³³ Writing in the second century BC, Polybius informs us that (the Seleucid king) Antiochus IV re-armed half of the 10,000 *argyraspides* as Roman style sword-armed heavy/line infantry.³⁴ In the case of Commagene, we are presented with another elite regiment, and it seems likely that these “Macedonians” fulfilled a similar, dual purpose role as the *argyraspides* did – though we cannot determine if some or all of these men carried similar equipment to Roman legionaries. They supported the Romans in the assault on Jerusalem, a situation which was unsuitable for a pike-armed phalanx, and therefore opted to use javelins and swords or spears. What made them so valuable would have

²⁷ Joseph. *BJ* 7.7.1 (225); cf. Hartmann 2015, 318, n. 50 for the Roman forces.

²⁸ For their reputation: Hartmann 2015, 316 n. 45.

²⁹ Did they include any actual Macedonians? Kasher 1985, 286 thinks it is purely a military term, but Macedonians did live in Commagene in the Late Hellenistic and early imperial period; cf. Brijder 2014, 168. Facella 2021 demonstrates that Hellenistic, Graeco-Macedonian settlement existed in the region, but from an archaeological point of view, the newcomers quickly fused with the locals. The same is probably true of the Macedonian regiment: The name would have referred to their training, equipment and tactical function, but its existence was probably the result of Macedonian settlement and the inclusion of Commagene in the Seleucid Empire. On the latter point, see 192–193.

³⁰ Joseph. *BJ* 5.11.3 (460–465). [...] καὶ περὶ αὐτὸν στίφος Μακεδόνων καλούμενον [...] (460).

³¹ For the *imitation Alexandri* and Josephus' narration cf. Facella 2006, 330–331.

³² Diod. Sic. 31.19a.

³³ Bar-Kochva 1976, 58–66 (*argyraspides*); 144–145 (*thorakitai*); Du Plessis 2022, 128–130 (*thureophoroi*).

³⁴ Polyb. 30.25.3; Bar-Kochva 1976, 60–61.



been their flexibility to fight both as closely packed phalangites or spearmen and fast-moving storm troopers.³⁵

This army made crucial contributions to a number of wars the empire waged during the 1st century AD. Commagenians fought in Armenia in 54 and 58 AD, with Antiochus IV gaining new territory after the conclusion of the war.³⁶ He also dispatched several thousand men to support the Roman forces in Judaea during the 60s AD, where they ultimately assisted Titus' successful siege of Jerusalem in 70 AD.³⁷ Most remarkably, Antiochus Epiphanes is mentioned as fighting for Otho and against Vitellius in Italy in 69 AD, and, perhaps, he was accompanied by his 'Macedonians'.³⁸ This episode testifies both the important role the Flavians assigned to their allies and the commitment of the Commagenians to fight for their Roman *amici*.

Despite the sudden extinguishment of the Commagenian monarchy in 72 AD, the kingdom can be characterised as a loyal and powerful ally of Rome due to its actions. Its troops fought both in regional conflicts and distant theatres of conflict so that Antiochus IV may have offered the military support himself and probably never had to be convinced by force to contribute men and weapons. He, his predecessors and sons invested into a modern army to strengthen their kingdom and their rule, and they purposefully deployed it to support the Romans on repeated occasions. The aims of the Commagenian policy were probably twofold: On the one hand, they maintained a great interest in preserving stable peace in the region because they profited from the long-distance trade routes across the Euphrates. On the other hand, they may have simultaneously wanted to demonstrate their loyalty towards the empire so as to preserve their autonomy. The sudden end of the monarchy on the basis of a weak accusation of treason proves that the latter was very much necessary.³⁹ Antiochus and his sons later lived in Rome, and Antiochus' grandson Philopappus became consul: it seems, therefore, as if their great (military) contribution was not forgotten.⁴⁰

Case II: Nabataea

The Kingdom of Nabataea was the most powerful state on the south-eastern, Arabian border of the Empire. Its ruler Aretas III became an *amicus populi Romani* in 63/62 BC, not long after Commagene.⁴¹ Nabataea remained an allied, dependent state for

³⁵ For the Romanised equipment and tactics of the forces of other allied kingdoms see 190 above.

³⁶ Tac. *Ann.* 13.7.1, 37.3 (troops); 14.26.2 (new Armenian territories for Commagene).

³⁷ Joseph. *BJ* 2.18.9, 3.4.2 (Jewish War); 5.11.3, Tac. *Hist.* 5.2.1 (siege of Jerusalem).

³⁸ Tac. *Hist.* 2.25.2, cf. Facella 2006, 330 and Hartmann 2015, 316 n. 45. At this point, the Flavians still acknowledged Otho as the rightful emperor.

³⁹ Cf. Facella 2006, 331–337 and Hartmann 2015, 314–325 on the circumstances of the annexation.

⁴⁰ See *ILS* 9200; Braund 1984, 173 and Facella 2006, 339–358.

⁴¹ Joseph. *AJ* 14.5.1 (80–81).



more than one and a half centuries until the greater part of its territory was annexed by Trajan in 106 AD.⁴² Though less important in potential conflicts with Parthia than Commagene, Nabataea, too, formed part of the Roman border zone in the East, and it protected the access to Egypt's wealth.⁴³ Nabataea's real significance, however, lay in its control over the trade routes to Southern Arabia, the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf; and the expertise of the locals in traversing the desert and negotiating with its (semi-)nomadic inhabitants made them irreplaceable to the Romans.⁴⁴

Yet, the Nabataean kingdom was also a major military player in the region. Over thirty years ago, Bowsher published a seminal article on the subject, which still holds true in many regards.⁴⁵ To begin with, he was rightly sceptical of the earliest numbers we have, recorded by Hieronymus of Cardia during the last years of the 4th century BC.⁴⁶ According to the ancient historian, the ethnos of the Nabataeans at this time only numbered 10,000 individuals, but could raise 6,000 to 8,000 men-at-arms.⁴⁷ Hieronymus either exaggerated the size of their army or downplayed the number of the whole people or both, befitting his image of the Nabataeans as warlike, free roaming nomads on the fringes of the known world.⁴⁸ Certainly, the 10,000 strong Nabataean cavalry at the battle of Cana in 87 BC and the 50,000 Nabataeans under arms in 65 BC that we read about in Josephus' *War* are exaggerated.⁴⁹ More reliable figures are the 1,000 Nabateans mentioned on Aelius Gallus' expedition,⁵⁰ and the 5,000 men infantry and 1,000 cavalry Titus received from Malichus II in 66 AD.⁵¹ Caesar also had a force of Nabataean horsemen with him in Egypt and Varus was supported by a sizable Nabataean army in 4 BC.⁵² After the annexation, 4,000–5,000 Nabataeans served in Roman auxiliary units. On the basis of these numbers, Parker

⁴² See, e.g., Halamus 2018, 229–231.

⁴³ Most researchers agree that the *amici* were not internal or external to the empire, but usually formed the border themselves; e.g. Braund 1984, 91–95, 182; Braund 1988, 91–92; Facella / Kaizer 2010, 24–26; Hartmann 2015, 304; Baltrusch 2022, 246. For Nabataea's position as a Roman ally see the evidence in Hackl/Jenni/Schneider 2003, the arguments by Funke 1989, Ish-Shalom 2021, 161–162 or Schleicher 2022 (with a focus on the economic development).

⁴⁴ As is proven by the expedition of Aelius Gallus to Southern Arabia, who relied on the Nabataean Syllaeus as a guide – the Romans themselves lacked any sufficient knowledge; cf. Isaac 1990, 403.

⁴⁵ Graf 1994 shall also be mentioned here and will be referenced in the following.

⁴⁶ Cf. Alpass 2013, 26–27 on the origins and the veracity of the account.

⁴⁷ Diod. Sic. 19.94.4 (10,000 Nabataeans), 19.95.5 (8,000 soldiers), 19.100.2 = FGrHist 154 T 6 (6,000 warriors), cf. Bowsher 1989, 19.

⁴⁸ For the argument: Graf 1992, 51–53.

⁴⁹ Joseph. *BJ* 1.4.7 (101) (Battle of Cana against Antiochus XII in 87 BC); Joseph. *BJ* 1.6.2 (126) (50,000 men in 65 BC); cf. Bowsher 1989, 19; Hackl / Jenni / Schneider 2003, 69.

⁵⁰ Strab. 16.4.23C780.

⁵¹ Joseph. *BJ* 3.4.2 (68). They made up 10% of the whole Flavian army, as Graf 1994, 272 rightly emphasises.

⁵² Joseph. *AJ* 17.10.9 (287); *BJ* 2.5.6 (76). Aretas' support was “οὐκ ὀλίγην” (*AJ* 17.10.9).



estimated the whole army to encompass 10,000 men,⁵³ but a slightly bigger size seems more plausible, since otherwise Malichus II would have parted with over half of his army when ordering 6,000 men to assist Titus.⁵⁴

The region was famous for camel riders,⁵⁵ but in contrast to Strabo's claim that they did not breed horses, the usage of horsemen in warfare is also well attested.⁵⁶ As we have seen, different Nabataean kings often sent cavalry contingents to their Roman allies, who must have valued them highly. Among the 6,000 Nabataeans that fought in the Roman-Jewish War, meanwhile, most were archers, and these played a crucial role in the siege of Jotapata in 67 AD.⁵⁷ All of these troops seem to have increasingly adapted to Graeco-Roman modes of warfare: Besides traditional weapons like bows, short swords and axes, the Greek *thyreos* shield, originally introduced to the East by the Galatians, appears from the early 1st century BC, alongside the *linothorax*, the characteristic Greek linen corselet.⁵⁸ On one of his coins, Aretas IV (r. 9 BC to 40 AD) is shown in Roman style boots, with a round shield, cuirass, sword and spear, similar to the standard equipment of many Roman auxiliary cohorts.⁵⁹ The re-equipment of Nabataean soldiers will have been accompanied by a professionalisation of the army structure, and though their exact function is often unclear, Greek offices like *hipparchoi*, *eparchoi* and *strategoi* are attested from the first century BC – later, *centurio* seems to have become a rank in the royal forces, too.⁶⁰ Finally, Trogus speaks of an elite force of 700 men that will have been the royal guard,⁶¹ and there may also have been a selected corps of cavalry.⁶² Thus, the Nabataean army, like that of Commagene, combined native traditions with Greek and Roman military innovations and encompassed various different units that could either replace or compliment the

⁵³ Parker 1986, 118.

⁵⁴ This is especially true because troops would have been needed to remain in the eastern parts of the Nabataean kingdom, which stretched several hundred kilometres along the coast of the Red Sea and into the interior of the Arabian Peninsula, as is attested, e.g., by Strab. 16.4.24C781–782. Graf 1994, 274 – also citing Parker – implies that the Nabataean army was considerably larger than just 10 000 men.

⁵⁵ Isa. 60.6; Hdt. 7.88–89; Joseph. *AJ* 13.13.5 (375); *BJ* 1.4.4 (90).

⁵⁶ Strab. 16.4.26C784; Bowsher 1989, 22 and the memorial relief from Kerak (Bowsher 1989, fig. 2.1). Graf 1994, 269 highlights that Nabataean cavalry was long undervalued by modern scholarship, too.

⁵⁷ Joseph. *BJ* 3.7.9 (168); Bowsher 1989, 22.

⁵⁸ *Thyreos* and *linothorax* appear on the Trophy tomb from Maghar al Nassara and The Tomb of the Roman Soldier (no. 239) from Petra; Bowsher 1989, 25.

⁵⁹ Cf. Bowsher 1989, pl. 2.4 (26); the obverse of a bronze coin from 16 AD, Meshorer 1975, 57; *SNG ANS* 1438–1439; Barkay 2019, Type 187. Hübner / Weber 1997, 114 think the image portrayed a statue of the king in the southern *temenos* of the Qasr al-Bint.

⁶⁰ See Bowsher 1989, 20–21; Graf 1994, 274–290; Hackl / Jenni / Schneider 2003, 66; cf. Parr 1965, 531. Petrantoni 2021, 131 with n.12 for instance argues that *strategos* was an infantry general and *hipparchos* the cavalry general, while Graf 1994, 278–279 is convinced the *strategoi* fulfilled a dual military and civil role, just like their Ptolemaic counterparts.

⁶¹ Iust. 39.5. He calls them “sons of Nabataea”, but the name is obviously a metaphor.

⁶² Cf. Hackl / Jenni / Schneider 2003, 69.



legions and *auxilia*.⁶³ Perhaps surprisingly, the Nabataeans also had a strong maritime tradition: Agatharchides (2nd century BC) and Strabo characterise them as skilled pirates who threatened Ptolemaic trade in the Red Sea in the 2nd century BC,⁶⁴ and it is possible that a navy in the Red Sea was retained during the early Principate.⁶⁵

Nabatean troops repeatedly fought alongside the legions: Caesar, Aelius Gallus, Varus and Titus were all supported by Nabataean reinforcements. Aretas IV sent troops to support Varus during the Pentecost uprising in 4 BC, and Josephus acknowledges their contribution in capturing several fortresses.⁶⁶ He also emphasises that Aretas had made the call to deploy his army on his own volition, not as a consequence of Roman orders.⁶⁷ The Nabataeans are conspicuously absent from the conference at Berytus in 69 AD, but this may simply have been due to the fact that a significant part of their army was still fighting the Judaeans, and since the rebellious area directly bordered on their own territory, their commanders may have preferred to remain in the field.⁶⁸ Far from being the unwarlike ‘barbarians’ Strabo describes, the Nabataeans possessed one of the strongest militaries among the allies of Rome, and therefore one of the most formidable forces among all the smaller states in the Roman and Parthian sphere of influence.⁶⁹ Additionally, a series of impressive fortresses secured the borders of the realm.⁷⁰ Ultimately, the expansion and urbanisation of Nabataea during the early Principate and the fact that it was annexed so late with grand military force emphasise its strength and show its army helped to retain its autonomy against both external foes and Roman interference.⁷¹ Thanks to its greater geographical isolation and its even stronger control of overland trade routes,

⁶³ Hackl / Jenni / Schneider 2003, 69 also note that the Nabataean army, like that of the Hasmonean kingdom, was typically “Hellenistic”.

⁶⁴ These events are also dated to the 3rd century BC by some scholars and the debate cannot currently be solved: for an overview see Wenning 2013, 17.

⁶⁵ Diod. Sic. 3.43.5 = Agatharchides F90a Burstein; Strab. 16.4.18C777. For the function of this account cf. Dijkstra 1995, 297–307. After the battle of Actium, the Nabataeans burned Cleopatra’s fleet on the shores of the Red Sea (Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 69.3; Cass. Dio 51.7.1), but no ships of their own are mentioned. It is not inconceivable that they still possessed their own fleet, however, and since Malichus I had supported Augustus and the kingdom expanded in this period, it is unlikely the Romans would have forbidden them to do so. According to Eutr. 8.3.2, Trajan established a Red Sea fleet after annexing Nabataea, which supports the argument.

⁶⁶ Joseph. *AJ* 17.10.9 (287–290).

⁶⁷ Joseph. *AJ* 17.10.9 (287).

⁶⁸ Tac. *Hist.* 5.2.1 attests they sent troops to support the siege of Jerusalem one year later, in 70 AD.

⁶⁹ Strab. 16.4.24C781. Kennedy 1996, 730–732, who also opposes Strabo’s interpretation, arguing that Nabataea had a considerable army and that its military had an excellent record. Graf 1994, 270 rightly points at their successful repulsion of the Antigonid forces in 312 BC to show that they had a long martial tradition.

⁷⁰ Hackl / Jenni / Schneider 2003, 69.

⁷¹ See Hackl / Jenni / Schneider 2003, 429 & Kropp 2013, 43, n. 306 for the possibility of an annexation by force. Cf. Schleicher 2022 for urbanisation and economic transformation during the first century AD.



the kings of Nabataea were able to pursue a more independent policy than the monarchs of Commagene. This was especially true under Aretas IV, who also risked a direct clash with Roman forces in 37 AD after annexing parts of Judaea.⁷² It goes to show that the kings enjoyed considerable autonomy when it came to deciding if they would dispatch reinforcements to the Romans in a war or not, and they were thus not simply an instrument of Roman politics, but an almost independent, though allied military factor in the East.⁷³

Case III: The Cherusci

We now depart from the Levant and turn to the cold and wet forests of the north. Here, one of the most important allies of Roman power were the Cherusci. Though they are known for their successful resistance against Roman power under Arminius, they had a long history as *amici populi Romani*. They were added to the list of Rome's friends for the first time in 11 BC, but this relationship had become strained. By 9 AD, Tiberius forced them back into this position.⁷⁴ The alliance obviously only held until that year, when Arminius famously betrayed the Romans. In the following, Augustus despaired, Germanicus went out for revenge and Tiberius leaned back and enjoyed the show – rightly predicting that inner-Germanic strife would rid Rome of the threat. And indeed, Arminius was murdered by his own relatives in 21 AD.⁷⁵ This is how the story of the Cherusci is usually presented, but it did not end there: twenty-six years later, in 47 AD, the Cheruscian elite asked Rome to send them a new king, since they apparently had no one of royal blood left. Claudius agreed and installed the aptly named Italicus, son of Arminius' brother Flavus as the new ruler of the Cherusci.⁷⁶ Despite quite a few setbacks, Italicus eventually secured his position and was succeeded by a Chariomerus, possibly his son.⁷⁷ Chariomerus was driven out of his kingdom by the Chatti in the

⁷² On this incident, see Ish-Shalom 2021, 162. He only escaped Roman revenge for his attacks on Roman towns, however, because Tiberius died just when the legions had been assembled to strike back: Joseph. *AJ* 18.5.1–3 (113–125) with Millar 2004, 172. Some of the Nabataean commanders during these operations are known from epigraphy, as shown by Hackl / Jenni / Schneider 2003, 212–215.

⁷³ This practical approach is also highlighted by Hackl / Jenni / Schneider 2003, 51, while Graf 1994, 304–305 concludes that the testimony of Strabo and Josephus is more doubtful than the military value of the Nabataeans.

⁷⁴ Liv. *Per.* 140 dates the first subjugation to 11 BC, and Vell. *Pat.* 2.105.1 says the Cherusci returned (*recepti*) under the Roman overlordship in 4 AD. However, see Will 1987, 45–46 for the Cherusci in the years 11–9 BC: though the Romans defined them as subjugated, they may not have behaved like *amici* at all (yet).

⁷⁵ Tac. *Ann.* 2.26 (Tiberius' prediction), 2.88 (death of Arminius).

⁷⁶ Tac. *Ann.* 11.16.

⁷⁷ PIR C 714, with Coşkun 2019 on the question of Chariomerus' origin.



time of Domitian, later returned, but eventually suffered a crushing defeat which spelled the end for the Cherusci.⁷⁸

The ancient sources do not provide precise numbers for the forces the Cherusci could muster, but the *clades Variana* is the best described case. Varus had three legions under his command, augmented by six auxiliary cohorts and three cavalry *alae*, altogether some 15,000 to 20,000 men.⁷⁹ The Cherusci were supported by their own dependent allies (ὀπήκοοι),⁸⁰ probably the Fosi,⁸¹ as well as by the Bructeri, Marsi and (some of the?) Chatti.⁸² Though they obviously knew the territory better and attacked the Romans at the right time, the Germanic force must still have been sizable to accomplish such a complete victory against some of the most experienced troops in the Roman army, who were much better armoured than the warriors of Arminius.⁸³ McNally estimated the Cherusci contingent to have numbered c. 8,000 men, with a further 15,000 or so Germanic allies.⁸⁴ In the following years, further allies joined the coalition and their combined forces proved too strong to overcome for either Germanicus or the Marcomanni under Maroboduus, but of course the Cherusci never had that many men at their disposal in their time as Roman *amici* before 9 AD and after 47 AD. With some justification, we can propose that Cherusci and Fosi together could muster somewhere between 5,000 and 10,000 men, since they must have contributed the largest contingent to the fight against Varus, and Arminius would scarcely have risked battle against a much more numerous foe.⁸⁵

This is especially relevant because the Cherusci and their allies were not as well equipped as the Romans. Our main source, Tacitus, claims that, in general, Germanic

⁷⁸ Cass. Dio 67.5; Tac. *Germ.* 36.2. They are not mentioned anymore after the 90s AD, at least. Wolters 1990, 260 thinks that Tacitus refers to their self-destruction through civil wars rather than the Chatti invasion(s), but both may be the case. I have to agree with Wolters (id., 259) in regard to the question of the “destruction” of the Cherusci: It is unlikely that the people were literally purged, rather, they seem to have lost most of their lands and would have become integrated into other ethnic groups over time.

⁷⁹ Vell. Pat. 2.117.1; cf. Suet. *Tib.* 17,1; Strab. 7.1.2C292 (three legions).

⁸⁰ Strab. 7.1.4C291.

⁸¹ Tac. *Germ.* 36.3.

⁸² Tac. *Ann.* 1.60.3 (Bructeri); 2.25.1 (Marsi); 12.27.2 (Chatti). For the interpretation cf. Wolters 1990, 225. Since the Chatti usually appear as staunch rivals of the Cherusci, not all of the Chatti may have supported Arminius. At the same time, Segestes (Tac. *Ann.* 1.55.3) and Inguiomerus (*Ann.* 1.60.1) had to be forced to support the revolt in 9AD so that not even all of the Cherusci may have taken part in the campaign.

⁸³ Vell. Pat. 2.119.2 praises the soldiers under Varus’ command as the best in the Roman army. Since Velleius enjoyed a long career in the army himself and had little reason to glorify Arminius’ achievement, his statement can probably be trusted. On the armament of the Cherusci see 198–199 below.

⁸⁴ McNally 2011, 26.

⁸⁵ Steuer 2021, 675–676 estimates both armies to have consisted of around 18 000 men, but thinks (on p. 690) that the Cherusci can only have contributed 3000–6000 of those.



foot soldiers and horsemen alike mainly fought with spears and javelins. Most lacked body armour, swords or helmets, but all of them carried wooden shields.⁸⁶ The scarcity of swords can also be seen in the archaeological record and fits Tacitus' statement that iron was rare in Germania.⁸⁷ Due to such a lack of available metal, helmets were apparently also the exception and restricted to the elite.⁸⁸ Four principal tactics of these Germanic warriors appear in the sources: Famously, Tacitus describes that their infantry usually formed a wedge like formation, the *cuneus*, and he emphasises that the Cherusci were particularly skilled at charging the enemy, presumably in this formation.⁸⁹ Secondly, in defence, as Nefedkin has reconstructed, the Cherusci (and other Western Germani) seem to have fought in a close formation with long spears or lances pointing out towards the enemy, and javelinmen throwing their missiles from behind this phalanx-like formation (dense body of spearmen).⁹⁰ Such an elaborate tactical setup would have allowed them to hold the line in extended field battles. Furthermore, like other 'northern barbarians', the Germani are said to have been experts at ambushing, with the Cherusci being the best among them.⁹¹ They obviously made great use of this in the opening phases of the battle of Teutoburg Forest, and though Roman authors will have been interested in painting the Cherusci as treacherous 'barbarians', the ambush as such has been widely accepted by modern historians.⁹² Finally, their cavalry often appears as javelin throwing skirmishers who could perform difficult manoeuvres.⁹³ Such light cavalry would have been well-suited to defending the flanks of the *cuneus* or the phalanx. All in all, then, the strengths of

⁸⁶ Tac. *Germ.* 6.1–3; 6; cf. *Ann.* 2.14.2. Unfortunately, the victorious Germani left few objects for the modern archaeologists in the area of Kalkriese, now the most probable site of Varus' defeat; Rost/Wilbers-Rost 2018, 512. Tac. *Hist.* 2.88 adds that some Germani wore the skins of wild beasts. Finally, Todd 2009, 36 sees the chainmail finds at Hjortspring as rare imports from the Celtic world and thus an exception to the rule of lacking body armour.

⁸⁷ Todd 2009, 36; Steuer 2021, 662, 688, 795; Tac. *Germ.* 6.1. In the vicinity of Kalkriese, no infrastructure for major ironworks from the 1st century BC or AD has been found; Rost/Wilbers-Rost 2018, 484. Jankuhn 1976, 108 (cf. Steuer 2021, 663) underlines that the weaponry and tactics of the Germani were beginning to change towards the use of more armour and iron, but this transformation was only really materialised in the 2nd century AD; Todd 2009, 36 adds that swords only became widespread in the third century AD. On the debate about the possible, yet unlikely usage of wooden swords by the Cherusci and their allies under Arminius: Pieper 1999; Roskoschinski 2011; Cosack 2012.

⁸⁸ Steuer 2021, 661. At least very few swords and helmets have been found so far, but of course the absence of evidence is not always evidence of absence.

⁸⁹ Tac. *Germ.* 6.6 (*cuneus*); *Ann.* 2.17 (Cherusian charge). For a reconstruction of the *cuneus* see Steuer 2021, fig. 55 (on p. 668).

⁹⁰ Nefedkin 2016; the long lances are mentioned in Tac. *Ann.* 1.64.1 and *Hist.* 2.88. See also Steuer 2021, 663.

⁹¹ Tac. *Ann.* 1.63.1; 64.1 (Cherusci); see, e.g., Polyb. 3.52 for the alpine Celts in the view of Polybius.

⁹² See now the new account by Ball 2023, particularly 133–147.

⁹³ Speidel 2004, 129–130.



the Cherusci lay in adapting to the terrain with their light troops, a solid wall of long spears in defence and a fast skirmishing cavalry.

Thus armed, the Cherusci soldiers would have been a useful addition to the legionary troops, but we only have indirect evidence for them ever fighting alongside the Romans. Both Domitius Ahenobarbus in 1 AD and Tiberius in 4 AD were allowed to cross the Elbe, which likely marked the eastern border of Cherusci territory.⁹⁴ They had obviously granted the Romans military access and it is conceivable that Cheruscan scouts and smaller contingents guided the Romans, at least until they reached the Elbe. No regular auxiliary cohort from the Cherusci is attested at any one point, but Cheruscan levies could have fought together with Roman troops between 11 BC and 9 AD, and individuals like Arminius or Flavus certainly joined the Roman army.⁹⁵ Arguably, the most important military function of the Cherusci as Roman *amici* was that their territory could serve as a bridgehead for operations against their neighbours, especially the Chatti, traditional enemies of both Cherusci and Rome.⁹⁶ This, I argue, also happened during Domitian's war against the Chatti, which is usually dated to the first half of the 80s AD.⁹⁷ Schönberger already suggested in 1969 that the first Chattian invasion that drove the Cheruscan king Chariomerus out of his land may be placed in 84 AD, and he was more recently followed in this opinion by Johne.⁹⁸ Johne and Wolters added that the final defeat of the Cherusci may have taken place in 90 AD.⁹⁹ Jones objected to the original argument by stating that Dio's report of Chariomerus' reign is impossible to date, yet he fixes a second war between Rome and the Chatti to

⁹⁴ Dio 53.10a.2 (Ahenobarbus); Vell. Pat. 2.105.1 (Tiberius). For the territory of the Cherusci: Will 1987, 44–45.

⁹⁵ Tac. *Ann.* 2.9 (Flavus). On the controversial discussion of Arminius' position in the Roman army: Will 1987, 47–51; Moosbauer 2009, 70; Wolters 2008, 97. On Germanic levies supporting the Roman campaigns in Germania: Wolters 1990, 212–215. Ball 2023, 135 assumes Germanic auxiliaries joined Arminius' revolt and that Arminius may have trained others of his warriors in the Roman fighting style, thus improving their skillset.

⁹⁶ In 50 AD, the Chatti even asked Rome for peace because they feared an attack by Italicus' Cherusci: cf. Tac. *Ann.* 12.28, who emphasises the hatred between Cherusci and Chatti. The Chatti appear as Roman adversaries in every major war Rome had to fight in Germania, and never as allies.

⁹⁷ Cass. Dio 67.5; Tac. *Germ.* 36.2 (Cherusci). For the dating of the first and major Chatti war, Jones 1973 suggested 82–83 AD against Syme 1928, 42, who thought the hostilities only broke out in 83 AD. Meanwhile, Evans 1975; Visy 1978, 42; Baatz 1982, 73–75; Johne 2014, 318 and Luttwak 1976, 103 allocate it to the years 83–85. A second war against the Chatti can likely be dated to 89 AD: Jones 2002, 150. Visy 1978 showed that smaller incursions by the Chatti had probably already taken place in 81/82 AD (cf. Front. *Strat.* 1.1.8), but were successfully repulsed, so that the decision to go to war in 83 AD was Domitian's alone.

⁹⁸ Schönberger 1969, 158; Johne 2014, 219, 318.

⁹⁹ Wolters 1990, 259; Wolters 2008, 174; Johne 2014, 318.



89 AD which gives us some context for the proposed destruction of the Cherusci in the following year.¹⁰⁰

Year	Event (Roman)	Event (Cherusci)
AD 81	Domitian becomes emperor	Chariomerus already king as son of Italicus (?)
AD 82/83	War between Rome and Chatti breaks out	Chariomerus offers military support or is asked for it
AD 84	Romans hope on Cherusci to open new front against Chatti	Chatti invade and drive Chariomerus into exile
AD 85	First War between Domitian and the Chatti ends	Chariomerus in exile
Early 89 AD	Saturninus revolts against Domitian, supported by Chatti	Chariomerus has returned to his position as king of the Cherusci
Mid-Late 89 AD	Romans defeat Chatti Domitians sends money	Chariomerus threatened by Chatti, asks Domitian for military support
90 AD	Rome and Chatti keep peace	Chatti invade Cherusci territory, kill Chariomerus and occupy land

Tab. 1. Suggested chronology for the reign of Chariomerus, king of the Cherusci

Cassius Dio emphasises that Chariomerus was ejected from Cherusci territory (in 84 AD) *because of his amicitia with Rome*.¹⁰¹ It seems therefore possible that Chariomerus actively supported Domitian in the war against the Chatti, possibly with his own warriors. To eliminate the threat of a second attack from this direction, the Chatti invaded his kingdom in 84 AD and forced him into exile.¹⁰² He returned at some

¹⁰⁰ Jones 1973, 86 & Jones 2002, 150. In this regard, most researchers have always agreed, as Visy 1978, 49 demonstrates.

¹⁰¹ Cass. Dio 67.5.

¹⁰² See the similar interpretation by Baatz 1982, 74. While Baatz suggested Domitian encouraged Chariomerus to attack, the opposite may also have been true: By invading the Chatti first, Chariomerus



point before 89 AD, but was soon threatened again: according to Dio, his allies (within or outside his people) abandoned him, and subsequently, Chariomerus asked Domitian for a formal military alliance (*foedus*). Yet, the emperor rejected the request and only sent him money.¹⁰³ In doing so, Domitian assured Rome's dominance vis-à-vis its dependent *amicus*, but he may also have had more practical reasons: He had successfully concluded his own campaign against the Chatti in 89 AD and subdued a revolt by the governor of Germania Superior, Lucius Antonius Saturninus, so that opening new hostilities in 90 AD only to save a 'barbarian' king would not have seemed worth the effort.¹⁰⁴ The defeated Chatti had lost valuable land in the south and, knowing that they had overcome Chariomerus before, may have decided to take all the land they needed from the Cherusci – which would certainly help to explain why they kept the peace with Rome for several generations afterwards.¹⁰⁵ As Tacitus relates, by the end of the first century AD, the Cherusci had virtually ceased to exist: Chariomerus had lost his last fight.¹⁰⁶

The military value of the Cherusci contrasted with that of Nabataea and Commagene, primarily owing to the dynamic nature of both politics in Germania and the Roman military policy in the area.¹⁰⁷ Yet, in their time as *amici*, the Cherusci may well have formed a vital cog in the Roman management of the area and the Romans had learned the hard way about their qualities in war. As a capable military entity, they were able to wield considerable influence in Germania, and, for the Romans, they served as a bulwark against the Bructeri and Chatti, for whom peaceful cooperation with Rome seemed to be no option.¹⁰⁸

could have tried to prove his loyalty in the hope of participating in the share once the Romans had won the war. In any case, the Chatti struck first and ruined the plan. Alternatively, the Romans may have considered using the Cherusci territory as an area of troop concentration, but Domitian launched his invasion from Mogontiacum and through the territory of the allied Mattiaci in the Wetterau; Cf. Baatz 1982, 72–73; Will 1987, 58–59.

¹⁰³ Cass. Dio 67.5.

¹⁰⁴ Cass. Dio 67.11.1–2 (Saturninus revolt). Suet. *Dom.* 6.2 is referring to Saturninus' 'barbarian' allies, with which the Chatti must be meant, hence the war was ongoing at this point; cf. Baatz 1982, 81. Wolters 1990, 259 adds that the lack of a border between Roman and Cherusci territory made a direct military intervention difficult and Chariomerus could have used the money to buy new support within the Cherusci. Thus, Domitian's reaction was not purely negative for Chariomerus. Finally, the Cherusci were probably much weaker at this point than in the first half of the century: Wenskus 1981, 434 already concluded that they had lost some part of their territory to the Angrivarii by the time Chariomerus appears in the sources. This made them less valuable as Roman allies.

¹⁰⁵ The next mention of the Chatti is only in the 160s AD, when they raided Roman territory: *HA Marcus* 8.7.

¹⁰⁶ Tac. *Germ.* 36.2. See also above n. 78.

¹⁰⁷ E.g., Kehne 1989, 426 asserted that the Germani did NOT defend the borders of the empire.

¹⁰⁸ The Bructeri also fought Varus (see 198 above), and Tacitus (*Germ.* 33) gleefully remembers how they were massacred by their neighbours. The younger Pliny (*Ep.* 2.7.1–2), however, records an episode during which Titus Vestricius Spurinna had imposed a Rome-friendly king on the Bructeri against their



Conclusion

This paper presents a first foray towards a wider analysis of the military forces of imperial Rome's allies, comparing three cases. The primary result of the analysis is that the armies of dependent states were doubtlessly an important military factor: Commagene, Nabataea and the Cherusci together could already muster an army in excess of 30,000 men, and there were hundreds of Roman *amici* in the first century AD who maintained their own armies.¹⁰⁹ While many probably only commanded a few hundred men or so, the cumulative military weight of the allies was crucial in every region. In Germania, Batavi, Frisii and others could fight alongside Cherusci, and in the northern Levant, Commagenian forces could operate together with Armenians, Cilicians, Emesans and many more.

With their fighting styles and equipment, they differed from the legions and at least partly from the auxilia units, who became increasingly aligned to Roman standards during the first century AD.¹¹⁰ As outlined above, Nabataeans and Commagenians could supply skilled archers that provided the Roman army with ranged troops, while the Cherusci possessed light cavalry capable of being deployed in a reconnaissance role, or to harass an enemy army that was still forming for battle and effectively pursue defeated foes. All three also developed types of heavy infantry that would fight in close formation and could form the backbone of an army that operated either independently from Roman forces or together with them in the war against a common enemy.¹¹¹ Thus, their armies were a useful tactical and strategical addition to the imperial army, not least since they were paid for by the principalities, tribes or kingdoms themselves.

Often, the dependent kings and states readily answered the call of Roman commanders, as in the Jewish War or in Nero's war against Armenia and Parthia.¹¹²

will, but he did not survive for long – in fact, his establishment may have led to the destruction of the Bructeri Tacitus tells us about; cf. Wolters 1990, 261. The Chatti had indeed been Roman allies before 10 AD, but this connection was then dissolved. Cf. Roymans 2004, 56–58.

¹⁰⁹ When Varus, as governor of Syria, was faced with the Pentecost revolt in 4 BC, not only a Nabataean army, but also the militia of Berytus and further forces from unnamed βασιλεῖς and τετράρχαι supported him and played a crucial role in securing a swift victory: Joseph. *AJ* 17.10.9 (286), cf. *BJ* 2.5.1 (67–68).

¹¹⁰ Cf. Speidel 1992, 71; Goldsworthy 1998, 20–21; Speidel 2016 *passim*; more generally and in-depth on the role of *auxilia* Haynes 2013.

¹¹¹ For instance, in 54 AD Corbulo asked Antiochus IV to attack those parts of Armenia adjacent to Commagene, while other allies and the Roman forces would attack at different fronts. Cf. Tac. *Ann.* 13.37.2–3.

¹¹² For the latter, see n. 100 above.



Sometimes, it was their own decision to send troops (as we have seen with Aretas IV), and it is likely that it was always up to them how many men exactly they would dispatch. This probably depended on availability, costs and other, ever-changing circumstances. Not every ruler would have been able to do without a large part of their army at the very moment when the Romans needed it. Yet, we learned that the Commagenians fought alongside Roman troops in Judaea and against Vitellius, Nabataeans played a crucial role in the various fights against Judaeans rebels and the Cherusci distracted a part of the Chatti in Domitian's war in Germania. Finally, the *amici* contributed food, water and other logistical help to Roman armies operating in their region.¹¹³ To therefore answer the question from the introduction: the military forces of the allied states clearly contributed to the defence of the empire and its borders, and they were also able to effectively aid in the suppression of revolts or to support offensive operations like those against the Parthians under Nero.¹¹⁴

This Roman perspective aside, it needs to be emphasised that the armies existed first and foremost to serve as a military arm of their own respective rulers. Far from only being raised to please the Romans, these forces primarily had to defend their own borders against possible external enemies, like the Parthians or rival groups within the same area – such as the Chatti. Furthermore, they were used to suppress brigandry and internal revolts to uphold the government of the dynast or ruling elite.¹¹⁵ To this end, the armies also established military colonies and constructed forts and fortresses.¹¹⁶ Since brigandry was a major problem in many areas, recruiting physically fit young men into the army also helped to drain the pool of potential bandits.¹¹⁷ At the same time, the military forces certainly had a political function as well. Parading troops had been a way to display power and legitimate the position of kings since the early Hellenistic period.¹¹⁸ In this regard, the military fulfilled a performative role in communicating the character of the monarch's rule and his or her designs to the native elites and the wider population.

¹¹³ Kehne 2007, 331, 334.

¹¹⁴ Another great example are the Caucasian Iberians, who supported various anti-Parthian campaigns during the 1st century AD. Cf. Braund 1994, 218–224.

¹¹⁵ For instance, the Nabatean army suppressed the revolt of one Damasī in the early 70s AD. He may have been the son of a *strategos* who had hoped to succeed him in his position. When Damasī was overlooked by the new king Rabbel II, however, he revolted together with nomadic allies. Cf. Winnett 1973; Al-Husan, Al-Rawabdeh 2018.

¹¹⁶ See 190 above for military colonies in Judaea and 196 for Nabataean fortifications.

¹¹⁷ Isaac 1990 broadly emphasised the prevalence of this problem in the Roman East, while Strabo (Strab. 14.5.6C671) was of the opinion that dependent kings were better able in handling the issue than Roman governors and troops.

¹¹⁸ Such as the processions at the Ptolemaieia in Alexandria, especially famous under Ptolemy II (Athen. 5.196a–203b), or the Daphne parade of Antiochus IV (Polyb. 30.25).



At the same time, the armies of the *amici populi Romani* were also an instrument in their competition to better influence Roman officials and emperors. Those dynasts who were most closely bound to Rome in particular, like the monarchs of Judaea, Commagene or Thrace, renamed cities (usually as *Caesarea*), established imperial cults and minted coins with detailed pro-Roman iconography to impress a Roman audience.¹¹⁹ This was less vital for the more distant *amici*, like the Nabataeans or Cherusci. Their relationships with Rome were always dynamic, however, for a ruler like Chariomerus, it was doubtlessly beneficial to convince the Romans that he was able to contribute a sizable army to the war against the Chatti. In fact, Domitian's decision to sacrifice him may well have been down to the diminished standing of the Cherusci as a military power. These various political advantages of maintaining a respectable army also explain why the monarchs were ready to shoulder the considerable costs at all, instead of just relying on a small militia, a royal guard and Roman support for larger campaigns.

This leads us to one last question: Were the dependencies so successful that the Romans actually rated them and their armies highly enough to protect them when they were attacked themselves? Kehne asserted that Augustus was the only emperor who cared to defend the foreign *amici*, but there is evidence that Roman support for its allies was not uncommon:¹²⁰ In the *Alexandrine War*, Gnaeus Domitius Calvinus is said to interpret the campaign of Pharnaces II, son of Mithridates the Great, against Deiotarus of Galatia, an *amicus et socius*, as a direct attack on Caesar and the *populus Romani*.¹²¹ Two decades later, Gaius Cornelius Gallus, the first prefect of Egypt, claimed that the king of Meroe had come under his *tutela* (protection).¹²² Braund stated that all *amici populi Romani* were under the *tutela* of the Romans.¹²³ Him and others rightly show, however, that this did not always result in military support for attacked dependencies, since it was usually cheaper and easier for Rome to only send money or gifts, as the example of Chariomerus demonstrates.¹²⁴ At times, the Roman army would intervene directly, however: Caesar eventually marched north to defeat Pharnaces, Nero sent troops to the Bosporan Kingdom when it was invaded by Scythians, Vespasian stationed Roman soldiers in Caucasian Iberia. It is therefore at least clear that it would be wrong to suggest the Romans did nothing at all to help their

¹¹⁹ For such closely bound *client kings* and their pro-Roman activities cf. Ish-Shalom 2021 and Wilker 2022.

¹²⁰ Kehne 2000, 326.

¹²¹ *BAlex.* 34. Cf. Brunt 2014, 169.

¹²² Gallus: Hoffmann, Minas-Nerpel, Pfeiffer 2009 = *CIL* 3, 14147 = *ILS* 8995 = *OGIS* 654 = *IGRRP* I, 1293 = *IGLPhilae* 2, 128 = *SEG* 52, 1798 = *SEG* 58, 1978, ll. 7–8.

¹²³ Braund 1984, 146. Ball 2023, 56 also asserts that “client kingdoms” received military protection.

¹²⁴ Braund 1984, 182–183, 186; Mrozewicz 2000, 307–308; 310.



allies: Queen Cartimandua of the Brigantes was even evacuated from her imploding realm at the cost of many Roman lives.¹²⁵

Here, the agency of both sides must be considered, and the example of Nabataea in particular demonstrates that many dependent rulers were not mere receivers of Roman orders or victims that needed to be saved from danger. They knew that, to survive in the brave new world of the Principate and to convince the Romans of their worth, they needed to keep men under arms who could defend their own territory and contribute to the defence of the Empire. In difference to old ideas of a grand strategy,¹²⁶ we should not imagine these forces as pawns on a Roman chessboard. Rather, in each specific situation, the dependent rulers would either decide to dispatch military contingents on their own, or the Romans would request their assistance, and in any case it was up to the *amici populi Romani* to select how many and which type of troops they would contribute.¹²⁷ This unpredictability did not harm the value of the allied forces, however: with (1) their numbers, (2) their local expertise in regional campaigns and (3) their specific tactical skills and equipment, the militaries of the dependent states were a precious asset for any Roman leader in every corner of the empire. They were always at his (imperial) majesty's service – though they very much had a will of their own.

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¹²⁵ Hartmann 2015, 322 (Iberia), Braund 1996, 124–127, Mattingly 2006, 114–115 (Cartimandua), MacDonald 2005, 64–65, Creighton 2006, 51 (Bosporan Kingdom), Plut. *Vit. Caes.* 50.1–3 (Pharnaces).

¹²⁶ As in Luttwak 1976.

¹²⁷ Cf. Baltrusch 2022, 254 (Nabataeans and Judaeans); Tac. *Ann.* 2.46.5 (Rome requests military support from the Cherusci). Pina Polo 2015, 39 emphasises that the various internal and external 'clients' were very reluctant in sending any military reinforcements during the civil wars, yet, in major battles, both sides were often joined by myriads of allied troops, as Speidel 2016, 82–84 demonstrates for Actium.



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