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## The Red Sea and its strategic importance in the Hellenistic and Roman eras

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### Abstract:

Throughout various historical eras, the Red Sea has acquired strategic status and importance, represented primarily by its geographical location, as it connects Asia and Africa, east and west, and is considered a passage to Europe from the north. Thus, it connects the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea through Bab-el-Mandeb in the south, and the Gulf of Suez in the north.

This study came to highlight the historical, strategic and commercial importance of the Red Sea in the Hellenistic and early Roman eras, and how this region was an arena for competition, because whoever controls it will inevitably control eastern trade, guarantee the flow of goods from India and China, and facilitate their passage to the Mediterranean region through the Gulf of Suez. Therefore, the Red Sea constituted a strategic field for the Ptolemies and Romans.

**Keywords:** Red Sea; strategic importance; Oriental trade; Hellenistic era; Ptolemies; the Romans.

### Introduction:

The strategic importance of the Red Sea lies primarily in its geographical location, as it constitutes the entrance to the Indian Ocean through the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait. Since ancient times, this importance has caused competition to control it, so exploratory campaigns were organized to learn about its secrets and advantages, including Alexander the Great's attempt to reach India via this sea.

During the Hellenistic era during the Ptolemaic era in Egypt, interest in navigation in the Red Sea was among their most important goals, beginning with King Ptolemy I (Soter), who had previously seen the gains that could be achieved from controlling it and the eastern trade route towards India, and interest continues. The Ptolemaic kings after him, especially Ptolemy II (Philadelphus) and Ptolemy III. During this period, navigation in the Red Sea was active and prosperous, as they were able to control it and its outlets, and exploratory

campaigns were organized that enabled them to cross Bab-el-Mandeb and reach India, after discovering the secret of the monsoon winds.

In the Roman period, after the Romans were able to annex Egypt, they learned about the strategic importance of the Red Sea through its location and outlets, while getting acquainted with oriental goods such as perfumes, spices, incense, precious stones, silk, and other products coming from the southern Arabian Peninsula and Yemen, and when the demand for them increased by The Roman people, and due to its high cost to the empire, the Romans decided, beginning in the era of Emperor Augustus, to control this trade themselves without the mediation of the Arabs of the south and the Nabataeans who controlled it. Thus, navigation in the Red Sea became active again, and with the Romans' control of the Red Sea, maritime navigation became safer, and Augustus's successors did not abandon the policy of caring for this sea.

This study aims to attempt to highlight the historical, strategic and commercial importance of the Red Sea in the Hellenistic and early Roman eras.

- How was this region an arena for competition?
- What are the most important developments you witnessed during this period? Because whoever controls it will inevitably control eastern trade, guarantee the arrival of goods from India and China, and facilitate their passage to the Mediterranean region through the Gulf of Suez. Therefore, the Red Sea formed a strategic commercial and military field for the Ptolemies and Romans.

## **I- The natural framework of the Red Sea:**

### **1- Geography of the Red Sea:**

The Red Sea extends from the ports of Suez and Aqaba to the Bab al-Mandab Strait in the south, then expands south of this strait, to form the Gulf of Aden, which extends from the Bab el-Mandab Strait towards the east to Ras Guardafui on the coast of Somalia, and to the Shihr region on the southern coast of the Arabian Peninsula, where it connects. In the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean, its length is about 2000 km, its width is about 400 km in the southern part, and about 200 km in the northern part. It contains two important gulfs: the Gulf of Aqaba to the east, which is about 160 kilometers long and between 7 and 25 kilometers wide on one side; On the other hand, the Gulf of Suez to the west, which is about 280 kilometers long and between 20 and 50 kilometers wide<sup>1</sup>, and is separated by the Sinai Peninsula.

This sea was given several names, such as the Pharaonic Sea, the Abyssinian or Eritrean Sea, the Qalzum Sea, and others, in reference to the nations that were prevalent in the region, and finally the name the Red Sea, by which it is known to this day. Regarding the origin of this name, several opinions have been received, including the opinion that this name is due to the reddish color of the mountains located on its shores, and another opinion

attributes the name to the presence of a type of algae whose color tends to be reddish, which gave the sea this color<sup>2</sup>.

## **2- The topography and climate of the Red Sea:**

One of the topographic features of the Red Sea is that the areas adjacent to it are generally mountainous, while its coasts are low sandy, on the eastern side there is the Arabian Plateau, and on the west, there is a chain of mountains, and the areas overlooking the Gulf of Aden are barren. The southern coast of this bay is low and sandy and begins to rise towards the east, and behind the coastal plains extend the mountains; In general, nothing is obstructing maritime navigation on this coast, except for the area surrounding the town of Zeila. There are many bays along the coast, especially the African one, which helped flourish marine activity among ancient peoples such as the Egyptians, Semites, and others, as for the climate of the Red Sea, it is characterized by low rainfall and high temperature and humidity, especially in the summer, while the northern half of it does not receive rain, and no rivers are flowing into it. As for the wind movement, in the northern part, northerly and northwesterly winds prevail, and in the central part, the wind movement is variable, while in the south, easterly and southeasterly winds prevail.

## **II- The human framework:**

In ancient times, the Red Sea region witnessed a succession of human migrations from the Asian side to the African side through the Bab al-Mandab Strait and its environs. This is what contributed to the reconstruction of the regions of East Africa, and these migrations of the Hamites and Cushites began from Arabia from the Upper Paleolithic era through three main stages. These human elements were the Baria tribes that inhabit eastern Abyssinia; The second is the Beja and Ajaw tribes, and the third is the Galla tribes.

It also witnessed the arrival of Somalis and Avars (Afar), and mixing occurred between the immigrants and Negroes in Africa, in addition to the Hamitic migrations. The region also witnessed the influx of Semites through Bab al-Mandab as well, and there was also mixing between Semites and Hamites, although it is difficult to distinguish between them because their origin is the same.

There are those who believe that the time period of these migrations was between the first millennium BC and the first half after that, and it is most likely that they preceded this period, and these migrations contributed to the transfer of cultural influences from the Asian side of the Red Sea to the African side of it<sup>3</sup>.

As for the coasts of Africa, the Egyptians were carrying out sea campaigns to the land of Punt and other areas of the African coast of the Red Sea during the third and second millennium BC, even though this region was not inhabited except by groups of nomads and fishermen before the emergence of the Kingdom of Aksum during the first century AD, but On the other hand, we find the eastern coast of the Red Sea (southwest of the Arabian

Peninsula - currently Yemen) includes powerful kingdoms controlling eastern trade in the region.

### **III- The Greeks and Romans and their expeditions in the Red Sea:**

#### **1- The most important historical sources about the Red Sea:**

Among the historical sources about the Red Sea in the days of the Greeks is what Agatharchides wrote around 110 BC; It is noteworthy that, in his talk about the Red Sea, he relied on oral reports from eyewitnesses and written reports included in the royal documents in Alexandria, including the report of Ariston, who had been sent by the Ptolemaic king Philadelphus II (285-246 BC) to explore the western coast. For the Arabian Peninsula.

There is also a book called Periplus of the Erythraean Sea, which probably dates back to about 50-60 BC, by an unknown Greek author. Since he is a merchant, he wrote this book about the western shores of the Indian Ocean to be a support for merchants and navigators. Thus, he provided details about navigation, ports, and goods on the coast of the Red Sea, in Somalia, and in western India, based on what he personally witnessed. While his information about East Africa beyond Cape Guardafue and Arabia to the east, and south of the Bombay region in India, he derived it from the sayings of some of the merchants with whom he dealt and communicated<sup>4</sup>.

As for the Roman period, there is the book Geography by Strabo and the book Natural History by Pliny the Elder, which included information about maritime trade between the Roman Empire and India.

#### **2- The Greeks and the Red Sea (Campaigns of Alexander the Great):**

The Greeks' connection with the Red Sea goes back to the beginning of the sixth century BC, and they were able to reach it due to its commercial and strategic importance, as this region was famous for its availability of various and important products such as spices, aromatic plants, frankincense, incense, etc., and these materials were used in religious and funerary rituals among some peoples of ancient civilizations. The real exploration of the Red Sea and its coasts dates back to the expansions of Alexander the Great (336-323 BC), and discoveries of these places continued in the era of the Ptolemaic kings, especially the first four who succeeded Alexander in ruling Egypt<sup>5</sup>.

As part of Alexander the Great's preparation for his campaign against Arabia, he sent exploratory missions to collect information beginning in the year 324 BC. The first mission was led by Archias, the second was led by Androthenes, and the third was led by Hieron and set off from southern Babylon. It was able to circumnavigate the Arabian Peninsula and reached Egypt (the port of Heropolis), and submitted reports about it<sup>6</sup>. In return, Alexander sent an expedition from Egypt led by Anaxicrates to circumambulate the Arabian Peninsula via the Red Sea, but it did not go beyond Bab al-Mandab<sup>7</sup>. Anaxicrates was able to survey the coast of the Arabian Peninsula across the Bab al-Mandab Strait, then returned to Egypt with a detailed report on the political conditions in the region<sup>8</sup>.

Since Alexander's policy was based on establishing cities and colonies in the regions at whose expense he expanded, he founded Alexandria in Egypt, which was close to the crossroads between Asia and Africa, and between the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean via the Red Sea. Alexander's goal was to establish this city to be a defensive center against Arab raids, to establish a port to invade their country, and to use it as a commercial center to attract merchants and goods coming from the East. It later became, thanks to the political prowess of the first Ptolemaic kings and the activity and skill of the Greek merchants, a center of trade, reaching an extent never seen before. Regarding Alexander's campaign against the Arab countries, he did not witness it because he died in 323 BC at a time when preparations were underway<sup>9</sup>.

### **3- The Red Sea in the Hellenistic era and its importance to the Ptolemies:**

The Hellenistic era represents the period that came after the death of Alexander the Great, which was known for the mixing of Greek civilization with the civilizations of the East. One of the political features of this era is the emergence of several kingdoms and states following the disintegration of Alexander's empire, namely the Kingdom of Macedonia, the Kingdom of the Seleucids in Syria and Mesopotamia, and the Kingdom of the Ptolemies in Egypt.

The Ptolemies also had an interest in Arabia and trade with India (Alexander's desire before them); Ptolemy I - Soter (367 BC - 283 BC) had accompanied Alexander the Great in his campaign against India, and he saw that this trade had great benefits, so after he assumed his authority in Egypt, he created a fleet, and entrusted its leadership to Philon<sup>10</sup>, who was He discovered the Emerald Isle for voyages to India, and the latter undertook a campaign that reached Meroe in Africa and the island of Topazos in the Red Sea<sup>11</sup>.

During the reign of Ptolemy II (Philadelphus - 284-246 BC), interest in navigation in the Red Sea continued. The naval expeditions to Arabia continued, so he sent an expedition led by Ariston. He explored the coast of the Sinai Peninsula, the Gulf of Aqaba, and the Nabataean Kingdom, then headed south along the western coast of the Arabian Peninsula until he reached the borders of the Kingdom of Moin. Ptolemy established a colony in Arabia called Ampelone, a city that he may have asked the people of Miletus to settle between 277 and 260 BC<sup>12</sup>.

This maritime activity of the Ptolemies in the Red Sea had an impact on the Nabataeans, which made them practice piracy on Egyptian ships. Ptolemy II decided to carry out campaigns against them. The first was in the year 278 BC and the second in 277 BC to secure Egypt's eastern trade<sup>13</sup>. In this regard, Agatharchides says: "From ancient times, they lived a contented life, content with the food provided by their herds of livestock; but later, when the kings of Alexandria made the Gulf navigable for merchants, they began attacking survivors of wrecked ships and building pirate ships to rob the navigators... But

Ships that had four rows of oars attacked them at sea, and inflicted on them the punishment they deserved<sup>14</sup>.

Ptolemy II's goal in controlling the southern Arabian Peninsula was to control the eastern trade routes, as the Nabataeans were the ones who controlled them through their direct communication between the Arab kingdoms in the south and the cities of the Phoenician coast. His desire from his activity in Arab countries was to exchange eastern goods directly with the Sabaeans without the mediation of the Nabataeans. After Ptolemy's campaigns, Egypt's relationship with the Arabian Peninsula was strengthened, Arab merchants began to practice their activities in Egypt, and good relations were established with the Kingdom of Ma'in.

Ptolemy II was also interested in the African coast of the Red Sea, so he sent a campaign to Ethiopia under the leadership of Temosthenes, which no Greek had dared to sail to before the era of Philadelphus<sup>15</sup>.

It is noteworthy that one of the motives for this campaign was to protect the southern borders of Egypt, as well as to stimulate trade with Africa, while the other possibility was Ptolemy II's desire to practice his hobby of acquiring some plants and hunting rare animals. In addition to his goal of obtaining elephants to use in his wars to confront the Indian elephants of the Seleucids. Therefore, he set up stations on the Ethiopian coast to transfer the elephants to strong boats, to cross the sea to the port of Berenice, east of Aswan, and then they were driven across the desert to Qift along a road equipped with garrisons. This route was used to avoid the winds and pirates in the upper part of the Red Sea<sup>16</sup>. On the other hand, Ptolemy II did not neglect the Gulf of Suez, as he ordered the revival of the ancient canal linking the Nile and the Red Sea in about 275 BC<sup>17</sup>. The truth is that the idea of linking the Red Sea and the Nile River has haunted the Egyptians since ancient times, and this canal was dug during the era of the New Kingdom, and the first one to start digging it was King Necho (610-595 BC), son of Psamtik, and it was completed after him by the Persian King Darius I, but the canal was neglected and Ptolemy revived it again, and at its end a city was established called Arsinoe (almost Suez), and some call it Cleopatra<sup>18</sup>. The re-drilling of this canal is considered evidence that eastern trade in the Red Sea witnessed great activity during this period. During the reign of Ptolemy III (246 - 222 BC), he organized hunting trips in Somalia, established trading stations in the region, and founded a number of cities on the southwestern shore of the Red Sea, naming three of them after his wife, Berenice<sup>19</sup>. But his successors neglected navigation in the Red Sea, and the Strait of Aden and the Indian route remained under the rule and control of the Yemenis, as the Ptolemies did not organize trips to India until the end of the second century BC<sup>20</sup>, and during this period their relations with India were characterized by important developments that had an impact on the Arabs of the south. Ptolemy VII (Euergetes II 146-116 BC) was also keen on promoting Red Sea trade, as there are reports of direct sea voyages from Egypt to India led by Euodorus, who was from the city of Cyzicus, and it seems that from that

time Regular trips to India began, and secondly, there was a Greek person named Hippalus who had learned the art of direct navigation in the ocean from Arabia to India with the help of the southwestern monsoon winds, which blow in the summer. It is likely that the latter accompanied Eudoxus on his sea voyages, and Hapalos' knowledge of the monsoon winds was not relied upon at first, but little by little ship captains began to take the route from the southern end of the Red Sea directly to the Malabar coast; Hapalus was the first navigator who knew how to sail across the ocean by observing the locations of ports and sea conditions, but he was not the first to know the existence of monsoon winds because knowledge of their existence and their seasons was known to the Greeks since the return of Nearchus from Sindh (326 - 325 BC), while what he knew was how Take advantage of the monsoon winds on your trip to India<sup>21</sup>.

During the last century of Ptolemaic rule, their activity in the Red Sea was limited to encouraging trade with the incense-producing regions of southern Arabia, Somalia, and India. After their country entered a stage of weakness, they focused their attention on the African coast. On the other hand, the Nabataeans began to expand along the eastern coast and took control of several areas, the most important of which was Al-Hajar (Mada'in Saleh), where they reached the port of Ambeloni, destroyed it, and established a new port, Lueke Kome, and thus controlled trade in the region, which affected the Ptolemaic influence in the Red Sea<sup>22</sup>, and with the end of their rule in Egypt in 30 BC, the Egyptian borders retreated to Aswan, and Egypt came under Roman control.

#### **4- The Red Sea in the Roman period and its commercial importance:**

After the Romans were able to impose their control over the western Mediterranean after the end of the conflict with Carthage, they turned their attention to the Hellenistic East, where they initially had an organized political plan to control the Red Sea, but after their annexation of Egypt in 30 BC-, Through which the Red Sea trade passed, learn about the advantages of life in the East. When oriental goods, such as perfumes, spices, incense, precious stones, silk, and other products coming from the southern Arabian Peninsula and Yemen via the Red Sea, began to flow to the Roman people, the demand for them increased<sup>23</sup>.

It was costly to the state treasury, so the Romans decided to control this trade themselves without the mediation of the Arabs of the south and the Nabataeans who controlled it. Therefore, Octavius (Augustus) saw the necessity of diverting the trade route in the Red Sea in favor of Egyptian ports<sup>24</sup> such as the port of Berenice, Myos Hermos, and Arsinoe, which would make the empire enter into a struggle to extend full sovereignty over the Red Sea. In his strategy in the Red Sea, Augustus focused on Egypt because it was the link between it and the Mediterranean Sea, in addition to the length of its coast overlooking it. He also worked to re-purify the canal linking the Nile and the Gulf of Suez, which had been re-dug during the reign of Ptolemy II, and this shows its importance in linking the Red Sea trade to Alexandria via the Nile River. However, the use of this canal in the Roman

period was limited due to the use of caravan routes in the eastern desert, especially the Myos Hormos Qift route, as it was among the most important routes for transporting Red Sea goods, and it was equipped with water tanks, rest stops and guard points, as there is another route from the port of Bereniki to Qift, which was the main port in the days of the Ptolemies, but the Romans preferred the Myos Hermos-Qift route without neglecting the port of Bereniki. The Romans did not establish new ports on the Egyptian coast on the Red Sea because what the Ptolemies built was enough for them, as they focused on the port of Myos Hermos and the port of Berenice, and worked to improve and secure these roads.

In addition to the Egyptian coastal ports on the Red Sea, we find the port of Adulis (Aduli), which is the main port of the Kingdom of Aksum, as it was a center for trade in leather, ivory, and other materials. The kingdom's relationship with the Romans was not hostile at first, especially since Aksum was importing products from Roman Egypt.

Among the ports that also played a role in stimulating trade movement in the Red Sea, we mention the port of Opono in Somalia and the port of Mundus. The merchants reached the south as far as the coast of Uganda, where there is the port of Rhapta, which represented the first arrival station for ships coming across the Indian Ocean, and from there they headed north to enter the Red Sea until Myos Hermos. This region of the African coast falls under the direct influence of the Himyarite Sabaeen state in the south, but the Romans worked to prevent this state from imposing its sovereignty on the African coast facing the Red Sea straits so as not to hinder their influence<sup>25</sup>.

These were not all the goals of the Romans to control the Red Sea. Rather, there was another motive, which was to put an end to the Persian (Parthian) threat, especially after they controlled the eastern trade route (a northern land route heading west towards Rome), as well as their desire to control Yemen so that they could gain access to it. The southwestern link between India, the Far East, the southern seas, areas of Roman influence, and the Mediterranean basin<sup>26</sup>.

Since the southern borders of Egypt are also the borders of the Roman Empire, Augustus and the emperors after him worked to secure them. It is noteworthy that not a year had passed after Rome's annexation of Egypt until a revolution broke out in Thebes against the Romans<sup>27</sup>. Therefore, one of the first tasks assigned to Cornelius Gallus, the first Roman governor in Egypt, was to suppress these internal disturbances and revolutions. He was able to suppress a rebellion in Heropolis and sent an army to suppress a revolution in the region of Thebes in the year 29 BC. He also received the ambassadors of the King of Nubia (Ethiopians) on the island of Philae, and reached an agreement with them stipulating that the area beyond the First Cataract would be considered a Roman protectorate, provided that its rule would remain. In the hands of the Ethiopians<sup>28</sup>.

### **5- The campaign of Aelius Gallus against Arabia:**

Emperor Augustus was keen to secure the eastern trade routes and ports in the Red Sea, which were under the control of the Arabs, which shows that the Romans, like the



Ptolemies, were interested in the Arabian Peninsula, and to this end they sent military campaigns, the first of which was the campaign of Aelius Gallus, the governor of Egypt, to Arabia Felix (Yemen). 24 BC. This campaign had many goals, the most important of which was imposing Roman control on the entrances to the Red Sea, in addition to the wealth that this region enjoyed, and the desire to secure trade routes with India<sup>29</sup>.

Aelius Gallus prepared a force of ten thousand soldiers, and the Nabataeans participated in this campaign with a number of thousands of soldiers (their king was Ubadah III), since they were friends of the Romans. Minister Sylaius participated with them as a guide, and a fleet was prepared at the port of Arsinoe in the Gulf of Suez to transport the army to the eastern shore of the Red Sea.

The Romans landed at the Nabatean port of Leuci-Comi, and the expedition had to continue its journey by land, but it faced many difficulties that made it take six months because the Romans were not accustomed to desert conditions, and they suffered from a lack of water, and a large number of soldiers perished due to diseases that were widespread in the region, and when the expedition reached its destination, the soldiers were exhausted, overcome by despair and fatigue.<sup>30</sup>

When the Roman forces arrived at Ma'rib, the capital of Sheba, they besieged it, but to no avail, due to the lack of supplies, so the campaign returned by sea directly from the shores of Yemen to Egypt<sup>31</sup>, which means that the campaign failed from a military standpoint. Its failure was due to the Nabataean minister Selaesus, who deliberately misled the campaign leader, Aelius Gallus, and did not guide him to the safe sea route or to the land route as well. Although this campaign did not achieve its desired purpose, it did not negatively affect Roman-Nabataean relations in this period, and Augustus did not take any action against the Nabataeans after the failure of the Aelius Gallus campaign. But relations after this campaign became tense - not because of the negative role of the Nabataeans and Selaesus in this campaign, but for other reasons. Selaesus had a role in it, which made Augustus convinced that his stay would cause trouble for the Romans in Syria and eastern Jordan, so he did not hesitate to execute him in Rome in the year 5 BC<sup>32</sup>. With his death, a new page of peace relations and the exchange of common interests began between the Nabataean Kingdom and the Roman Empire.

One of the effects of the absence of Aelius Gallus and part of the Roman forces in the campaign against Arabia was that it encouraged the Nubians (Ethiopians) to break their agreement with the Romans, so they raided the Roman military centers in the south of the valley, and were able to seize Aswan, Elephantine, and Philae, and defeated three Roman battalions. However, the new governor, Gaius Petronius, headed south to repel the attacks of the Nubians and expel them as far south as Napata. When Kandake, Queen of the Ethiopians, sent to ask for peace, Petronius decided that it was not wise to penetrate the country further; He returned to Alexandria, and within two years the Nubians besieged the garrison, so Petronius rushed to their aid and broke the siege. When the queen offered to

negotiate again, he ordered her to contact Emperor Augustus directly, as the result was the withdrawal of Roman forces from the northern part, and the Nubians were exempted from paying tribute<sup>33</sup>. This time, the Romans established sufficient fortifications and forces on the borders, and this was enough to achieve peace, and the region did not witness any disturbances for a long time after that<sup>34</sup>. Regarding Yemen, Augustus sent another campaign to it led by his grandson Gaius Caesar, but it did not take long because it was like an exploratory campaign to the Arab countries<sup>35</sup>. Here it can be said that Augustus had begun implementing Alexander's project before him, which was related to completing the circumnavigation of the Arabian Peninsula from the Persian Gulf to the Red Sea, as he surveyed and explored both sides of the Persian Gulf, and it is likely that one of the results of this campaign was the raid on the port of Aden and its destruction.

After the subjugation of the port of Aden, Roman influence began to increase in the Arabian Peninsula, and missions began to arrive to Rome from Arab countries as well as from India, and it is most likely that these missions were primarily for the purpose of trade<sup>36</sup>.

There are those who believe that the Romans established an alliance with the Himyarite state in the early period of the era of Augustus, and relations with the Arab countries remained based on alliance and friendship until the year 106 AD, when they were officially annexed to the Roman Empire, and that was during the era of Emperor Trajan<sup>37</sup>, who decided to reopen The canal connecting the Nile River and the Red Sea<sup>38</sup>, and created a road from Eilat at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba to Damascus, passing through Petra and Bosra<sup>39</sup>. Navigation became safe in the Gulfs of Aqaba and Suez due to the Roman presence in the Red Sea and its fleet, which protected commercial ships, which contributed to the increase in eastern trade activity. The Red Sea, in its various ports, became a center for attracting navigators and merchants from various regions, such as the Palmyrenes and the Syrians, whose activities extended to Europe via the Mediterranean, and their influence in Roman trade continued throughout the first and second centuries AD. However, at the beginning of the third century AD, Roman trade across the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean began to decline due to the emergence of competing powers such as the Persians, who established trade relations with India, China, and the African coast, and the Kingdom of Aksum in Abyssinia, which began to interfere in the affairs of the Red Sea<sup>40</sup>, which truly highlights the strategic and commercial importance of the Red Sea.

**Conclusion:**

From what was previously mentioned in this study, we conclude the following:

- The strategic importance of the Red Sea was represented primarily in its geographical location as it is the eastern trade route with India and China, and through it goods pass to reach Europe via the Mediterranean Sea, which means that controlling it and controlling its outlets guarantees control of eastern trade.

- The Red Sea was an area of continuous and renewed struggle to control it, as ancient kingdoms and empires worked to extend their influence, such as the Greeks and Ptolemies in Egypt and the Romans, and local kingdoms such as the Nabataeans and Yemenis, and even on the African coast, such as the Kingdom of Aksum after its appearance in the first century AD.
- Controlling the Red Sea and its trade was initially the focus of Alexander the Great, and his Ptolemaic successors continued to achieve this goal, as they paid attention to the eastern desert routes between Thebes and the Red Sea ports. Exploratory missions began in preparation for controlling it, the most important of which was the campaign sent by Ptolemy II Philadelphus to establish new ports and settlements, but it clashed with the power of the Nabataeans, whose influence declined after this campaign. Therefore, we find that they took advantage of the hostility of the Seleucids in Syria to the Ptolemies and stood by them.
- Egyptian imports from India came via the Red Sea through intermediaries from Arabia (Aden), and these intermediaries kept the secret of discovering the monsoon winds and hid it from the Greeks coming from Egypt and others, to maintain their monopoly on Indian goods, but this monopoly began to decline at the end of the second century BC.
- - After the Romans annexed Egypt, they focused their attention on securing the southern borders from the Persian threat in the first place, by controlling the Red Sea and the southern Arabian Peninsula, and securing the maritime trade route.
- From an economic standpoint, the Romans' acquisition of Eastern goods greatly affected the state treasury due to their high cost, as this was a factor in their insistence on annexing Yemen and controlling its trade route and the Red Sea, because the Yemenis controlled the trade of the East, and they were intermediaries for trade between the ancient Egyptians and the Europeans and the Far East.
- With the beginning of the Roman presence in Egypt during the reign of Augustus, transportation improved and the demand for eastern goods increased, especially in Rome and Alexandria, where Roman trade with India and the Arab countries flourished during the first century AD, and after Augustus his successors continued the policy of interest in the Red Sea.

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**Footnotes:**

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- <sup>2</sup> -Abd Elmoneim Abd eldjilil Sayid, *The Red Sea and its Backwaters in Ancient Times*, University Knowledge House, Alexandria, 1993, p. 2.
- <sup>3</sup> -Ibid, pp. 02-06.
- <sup>4</sup>-George Fadlo Hourani, *Arabs and Navigation in the Indian Ocean in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, translated by Yacoub Bakr, Anglo-Egyptian Library, Cairo, 1958, pp. 53-54.
- <sup>5</sup>-George Fadlo Hourani, *Arabs and Navigation in the Indian Ocean in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, translated by Yacoub Bakr, Anglo-Egyptian Library, Cairo, 1958, p. 17.
- <sup>6</sup> -Abou Elyusr Faraj, *The History of Egypt in the Ptolemaic and Roman Era*, Ain for Human and Social Studies and Research, Cairo, 2002, p. 32.
- <sup>7</sup>-George Fadlo Hourani, *Arabs and Navigation in the Indian Ocean in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, translated by Yacoub Bakr, Anglo-Egyptian Library, Cairo, 1958, p. 55.

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- <sup>8</sup> -Agathar Khaidis Al-Kennedy, on the Erythraean Sea, translated and commented by Elhussein Ahmed Abd Allah, Ain for Human Studies and Research, Cairo, 2011, p. 19.
- <sup>9</sup> - Abou ElYusr Faraj, The History of Egypt in the Ptolemaic and Roman Eras, p. 33.
- <sup>10</sup> - Abd Elatif Fayeze Ali Mohamed, Transport and Communication in Egypt in the Greco-Roman Era, Egyptian General Book Authority, Cairo, 2013, p. 264.
- <sup>11</sup> - Abou ElYusr Faraj, History of Egypt in the Ptolemaic and Roman Eras, p. 52.
- <sup>12</sup> - Mohamed Asayid Mohamed Abd elGhani, The Arabian Peninsula, Egypt, and Ancient Eastern Trade - A Documentary Study, Modern University Office, Alexandria, 1999, pp. 17-18.
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- <sup>16</sup> -George Fadlo Hourani, Arabs and Navigation in the Indian Ocean in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, p. 57.
- <sup>17</sup> - Agathar Chaides of Kenedi, On the Erythraean Sea, p. 22.
- <sup>18</sup> -Strabon, Géographie, Traduit par Amédée Tardieu, Librairie de L Hachette, Paris ,1867, XVII. 1.25.
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- <sup>20</sup> -Mohamed ElArabi ElAgoun: Navigation and trade between the ancient East and West, the importance of the Red Sea, Civilized Dialogue, 2009.
- <sup>21</sup> -George Fadlo Hourani, Arabs and Navigation in the Indian Ocean in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, pp. 66-69.
- <sup>22</sup> -Sid Ahmed Ali Ennasiri, The Romans and the Red Sea, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University, n.d, p. 19.
- <sup>23</sup> -Hanan Aissa Jassim, Roman Policy towards the Arabian Peninsula, Journal of Historical and Civilizational Studies, Tikrit University, Iraq, Volume 5, Number 17, 2013, p. 328.
- <sup>24</sup> -Abd Ellatif Fayeze Ali Mohamed, Transport and Communication in Egypt in the Greco-Roman Era, p. 268.
- <sup>25</sup> -Sid Ahmed Ali Ennasiri, The Romans and the Red Sea, pp. 12-17.
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- <sup>28</sup> -Mohamed Esayid Mohamed Abd ElGhani, Glimpses from the History of Egypt under Roman Rule, Modern University Office, Alexandria, 2006, p. 75.
- <sup>29</sup> - Abou ElYusr Faraj, The History of Egypt in the Ptolemaic and Roman Eras, p. 170
- <sup>30</sup> - Strabon, Géographie, XVI. 4.23 - 24.
- <sup>31</sup> - Abd Ellatif Ahmed Ali, Egypt and the Roman Empire in Light of the Papyrus Papers, p. 64.
- <sup>32</sup> - Strabon, Géographie, XVI. 4. 23-24.

<sup>33</sup> -Abd Ellatif Ahmed Ali, Egypt and the Roman Empire in Light of the Papyrus Papers, p. 68; Mohamed Essayid Mohamed Abd ElGhani, Glimpses from the History of Egypt Under Roman Rule, pp. 78-79.

<sup>34</sup> -Abou ElYusr Faraj, The History of Egypt in the Ptolemaic and Roman Era, p. 173.

<sup>35</sup> - Pline l'Ancien, Histoire Naturelle ,tr Hubert Zehnacker, Gallimar, Paris, 1999, VI.141.

<sup>36</sup> - Sid Ahmed Ali Ennasiri, The Romans and the Red Sea, p. 27.

<sup>37</sup> - Abou ElYusr Faraj, The History of Egypt in the Ptolemaic and Roman Eras, p. 172.

<sup>38</sup> - Abou ElYusr Faraj, The Nile in Greek Sources, Egyptian General Book Authority, Cairo, 2012, p. 166.

<sup>39</sup> -George Fadlo Hourani, Arabs and Navigation in the Indian Ocean in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, p. 86.

<sup>40</sup> -Youssef Hassan Ghawanma, Ayla (Aqaba) and the Red Sea and its historical and strategic importance, Jordanian Ministry of Culture, Jordan, 2nd edition, 2016, p. 83.