The establishment of Roman power, above all the Augustan peace, made a very great impact on the province of Syria. Under the Julio-Claudians Roman government was largely indirect. Large areas were ruled by client kings, or petty chieftains. Roman power was concentrated in the north, with no fewer than four legions. The Roman state presumably had treaty relationships with the rulers and nomad groups, though we have little information about these treaties. In time, the incorporation of client states led to the movement of legions, north into Mesopotamia, and south into Judaea and Arabia. Syria was left with IV Scythica at Zeugma and III Gallica at Raphanea. In the reign of Nero, Corbulo established Roman forts along the left bank of the Euphrates, and along the edge of the desert between Soura on the Euphrates and Palmyra.

After the Persian invasions of Syria of the middle third century the emperor Diocletian systematically reorganised the Roman military presence on the desert fringe. Subsequently a continuous chain of observation posts, large and small forts, lined the desert highway from Soura to Palmyra and from Palmyra to the Red Sea. Cavalry units were stationed well behind the frontier, at strategic cross roads. Along the desert road
forts were within visible distance of each other, but the garrisons were not large. The two legionary camps may have housed 1000 men, but the small forts only between 60 and a hundred. The Diocletianic system represented a defensive structure such as that region had never had before. It was not designed to repel a major invasion—which could hardly be expected across the desert. But the troops would certainly be able to police the conflict fraught relations between nomads and settled peasants, and to protect both from incursions of marauding bands. It is unlikely that the dramatic expansion of sedentary life in the following centuries could have happened without them.

*The condition of Northern Syria when it was incorporated into the Roman Empire*

As we have seen much of the country between the Seleucid cities, and some of the cities too, were controlled by local dynasts or leaders of tribal groups. The lands to the east of the Orontes plain, that is the limestone massif, and the lands beyond, seem to have been controlled by tribal federations. We know very little about them. They were ignored by Greek writers, and have left no written evidence of their own.

Agriculture without irrigation requires at least 250 mm of rain per year. The limit of agriculture unsupported by irrigation runs approximately sixty kilometres east of the limestone massif. Except for some natural oases, the land to the east of that line can only be exploited for grazing. But when Syria became part of the Roman Empire nomadic grazing seems to have been the dominant land-use much further west.

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5 Konrad 2001, op. cit. (n. 3), 104–105: garrison of Qusair as-Saila 60–100. The Diocletianic forts at Lejjun and Udruh in Jordan are c. 242 m x 190 meters, and might have had room for 1000 or 1500 men. This may well have been the size of the North Syrian legions, cf. J. Lander and S.T. Parker, ‘Legio IV *Martia* and the legionary camp at El-Lejjun’, *Byzantinische Forschungen* 8 (1982), 185–210; Udruh: A. Killick, *Udruh, Caravan City and Desert Oasis* (Romsey 1987).
7 Grainger 1990, op. cit. (n. 6), 234, map 4, lists from north to south: Gazetae, Gindareni (around Gindarus), Rhambaei, Tardytones, Hylatae (around Raphanea), Samsigerami (around Emesa), cf. Jones 1971, op. cit. (n. 6), 262–263.
8 This also suggested by Strabo 16.2.11 (probably based on Posidonius (135–51 BC), a native of Apamea on the Orontes).