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## THE ROMAN ARMY IN PROVINCIA ARABIA: OLD AND NEW DOCUMENTS FROM UMM AL-JIMĀL (JORDAN)\*

Julien ALIQUOT  
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**Abstract** – This article offers the *editio princeps* of two epigraphic documents recently discovered in the southern, Jordanian part of Ḥawrān at Umm al-Jimāl, south of Bostra, the capital of the Roman province of Arabia. The first inscription is a Greek dedication of an altar that a *beneficiarius* addressed to Zeus Keraunios under the Severi. The second is a Latin inscription dealing with the building of a tower in the fourth century CE under the authority of the *dux* Flavius Maximinus. The publication of both texts provides an opportunity to review the sources relating to presence of the Roman army at Umm al-Jimāl from the creation of Provincia Arabia (106 CE) to the reign of Justinian (527-565 CE). On a broader level, the aim is to contribute to the ongoing discussion of the relationships between soldiers, villagers, and nomads in the *limes Arabicus*.

**Keywords** – Greek inscription, Latin inscription, Roman army, Roman Arabia, Bostra, Umm al-Jimāl, Jordan

### L'armée romaine dans la province d'Arabie : anciens et nouveaux documents d'Umm al-Jimāl (Jordanie)

**Résumé** – Cet article offre l'*editio princeps* de deux documents épigraphiques récemment découverts dans la partie méridionale et jordanienne du Ḥawrān à Umm al-Jimāl, au sud de Bostra, la capitale de la province romaine d'Arabie. La première inscription est la dédicace grecque d'un autel consacré à Zeus Keraunios par un bénéficiaire sous les Sévères. La seconde est une inscription latine relative à la construction d'une tour au IV<sup>e</sup> siècle apr. J.-C., sous l'autorité du duc Flavius Maximinus. La publication des deux textes donne l'occasion de réviser les sources qui se rapportent à la présence de l'armée romaine à Umm al-Jimāl entre la création de la province d'Arabie (106 apr. J.-C.) et le règne de Justinien (527-565 apr. J.-C.). À une échelle plus large, l'objectif est de contribuer aux travaux en cours sur les relations entre les soldats, les villageois et les nomades du *limes Arabicus*.

**Mots-clés** – inscription grecque, inscription latine, armée romaine, Arabie romaine, Bostra, Umm al-Jimāl, Jordanie

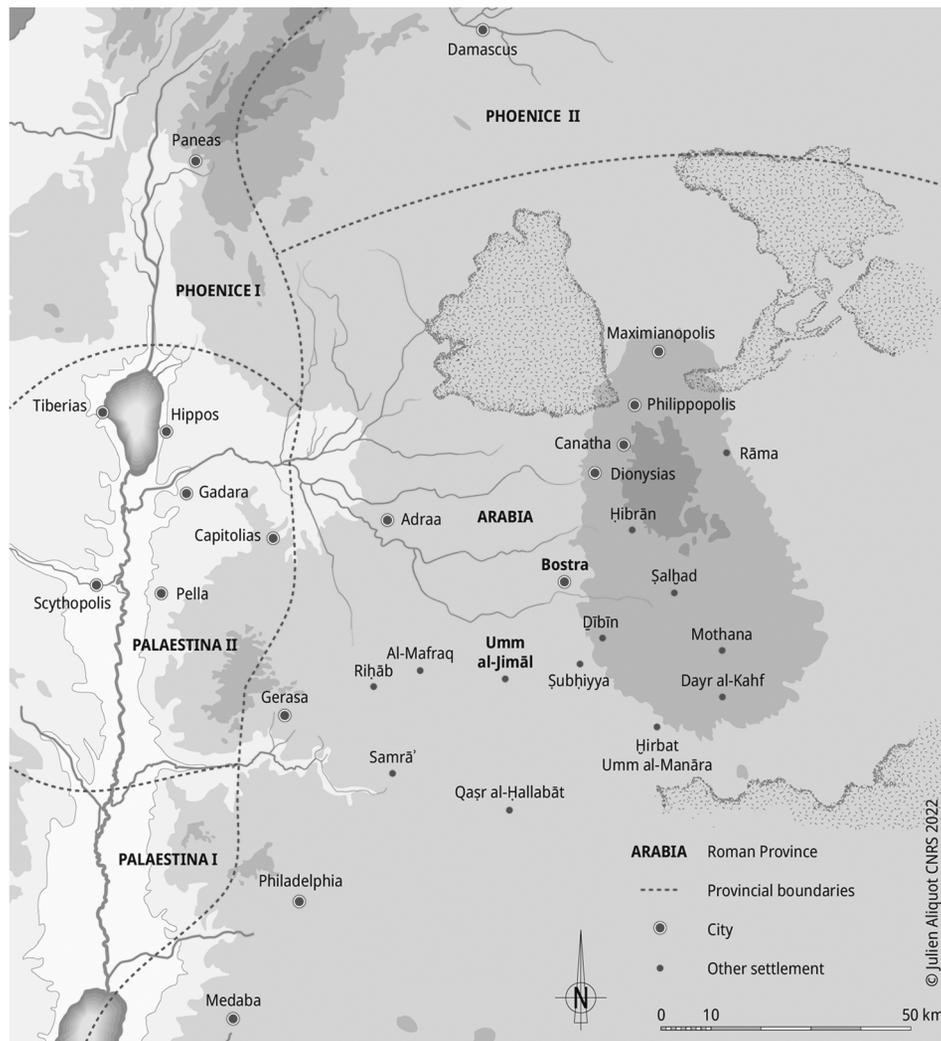
الجيش الروماني في المقاطعة العربية: وثائق قديمة وحديثة من أم الجمال (الأردن)  
خلاصة – تقدم هذه المقالة الطبعة الأولى من نقشين تم اكتشافهما مؤخراً في أم الجمال، في الجزء الجنوبي والأردني من حوران، جنوب بصرى، عاصمة ولاية المقاطعة العربية. النقش الأول هو إهداء يوناني لمذبح لزيوس كيراونايوس بواسطة *beneficiarius* من زمن أباطرة سيفيران. الثاني هو نقش لاتيني يتعامل مع بناء برج في القرن الرابع الميلادي تحت سلطة دوكتس فلافيوس ماكسيمينوس. يوفر نشر كلا النصين فرصة لمراجعة المصادر المتعلقة بوجود الجيش الروماني في أم الجمال من إنشاء Provincia Arabia (106 م) إلى عهد جستينيان (527-565 م). على مستوى أوسع، الهدف هو المساهمة في الدراسة المستمرة للعلاقات بين الجنود والقرويين والبدو في *limes Arabicus*.

الكلمات المفتاحية – نقش يوناني، نقش لاتيني، الجيش الروماني، المقاطعة العربية، بصرى، أم الجمال، الأردن

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Near the northern border of present-day Jordan, Umm al-Jimāl is an important ancient rural site of more than 30 ha, located toward the southern edge of the Ḥawrān basalts and on the edge of the Syro-Jordanian steppe, 25 km south of Bostra, the capital of the Roman province of Arabia (**fig. 1**). Its ancient name has not been identified with certainty to this day. As for its occupation, it does not appear to have really started before the late second century CE. An earlier Nabataean and Roman village was already established at al-Ḥirīṭ, only a few hundred meters to the east. The own development of Umm al-Jimāl is apparently contemporary with the decline of this village. It has resulted in the rise of a large fortified settlement in late antiquity (**fig. 2**). Epigraphic records and remains of military buildings, including an enclosure wall and two *castella*, attest to the presence of the Roman army from the fourth to the beginning of the seventh century. However, as will be seen in the course of the discussion, on the one hand, the chronology and identification of the preserved monuments deserve to be re-evaluated and, on the other hand, new documents supplement the information on the still poorly known period of the second and third centuries as well as on the soldiers and administrators of the Roman Empire who were stationed on site.

The material studied here is part of the larger batch of Greek and Latin inscriptions that have been recently discovered in the Jordanian Ḥawrān, thanks to a close partnership between the Department of Antiquities of Jordan and its office in al-Mafraq, the Umm al-Jimāl Project, and the French-Jordanian



**Figure 1.** Umm al-Jimāl, Bostra, and the northern part of Provincia Arabia, late fourth-early seventh century (map by J. Aliquot 2022 © CNRS Hisoma).



Figure 2. Archaeological plan of Umm al-Jimāl (courtesy B. de Vries/Umm al-Jimāl Project).

team of the ‘Inscriptions de la Jordanie’ (‘Greek and Latin Inscriptions in Jordan’). Of special interest are a Greek dedication to Zeus Keraunios by a *beneficiarius* in the service of the provincial governor under the Severi and a Latin inscription dealing with the building of a tower under the authority of Flavius Maximinus, *dux* of Arabia, in the fourth century CE. The purpose of this article is to present both documents for the first time and to contrast them with the archaeological and epigraphic material relating to the presence of the Roman army at Umm al-Jimāl from the creation of Provincia Arabia (106 CE) to the reign of Justinian (527-565 CE). In this respect, our study should complement the work of Howard Crosby Butler and the Princeton University archaeological expeditions from 1904-1905 and 1909,<sup>1</sup> the results of the Umm al-Jimāl Project initiated by the late Bert de Vries in 1972,<sup>2</sup> and the corpus of Greek and Latin inscriptions from northeast Jordan published by Nabil Bader in 2009.<sup>3</sup>

A GREEK DEDICATION FROM THE SEVERAN STATION OF *BENEFICIARI*

The basalt altar on which is engraved our first inscription was found in 2015 by Muaffaq Hazza to the east of the site, in the ruins of the outer wall of Building 95. It is now kept in the archaeological museum of Umm al-Jimāl (fig. 3). The stone is 87 cm high, 33 cm wide, and 27 cm deep. The shaft is 53 cm high, 27 cm wide, and 24 cm deep. The height of the letters is between 4 and 5 cm. The altar is

1. BUTLER 1913 (architecture); LITTMANN, MAGIE Jr. and STUART 1913 (Greek and Latin epigraphy).  
 2. DE VRIES 1998, with VILLENEUVE 2001 and KENNEDY 2004, p. 86-91.  
 3. BADER 2009 (*I. Jordanie* 5/1).

well preserved, except in its lower left-hand corner, where it is broken, and in its right-hand side, which has been cut away for reuse. Despite these minor damages, its inscription was read easily in 2018. This Greek text filled one side of the shaft. It commemorated in the first person singular the offering of the altar to the god Zeus Keraunios by a soldier seconded from the staff of the provincial governor. The inscription includes usual abbreviations to refer to the name and functions of the two persons mentioned:



- Διὶ κεραυνίῳ,  
 Τίτος(ς) Φλάουιος) Ἀρτεμίδω-  
 ρος, β(ενε)φ(ικιάριος) Φλ(αοῦιου)  
 4 Βάλβου, π[ρεσβ(ευτοῦ)]  
 Σεβ(αστοῦ) ἀντιστρα[τ(ήγου)],  
 εὐχαριστῶ[v]  
 ἀνέθηκα.

Translation:

“To Zeus Keraunios, I, Titus Flavius Artemidoros, *beneficiarius* of Flavius Balbus, *legatus pro praetore* of Augustus, dedicated (this) in thanksgiving.”

**Figure 3.** Basalt altar with a Greek dedication to Zeus Keraunios by T. Flavius Artemidoros (photo J. Aliquot 2018 © CNRS Hisoma).

The name of Zeus Keraunios (i.e., “thunder-wielding”) could fit many deities of the Roman Near East, including Baalshamin, the Lord of Heavens. Given the military context of the Umm al-Jimāl dedication, Zeus was here perhaps none other than Jupiter Hammon, the tutelary god of the third legion Cyrenaica, whose main camp was at Bostra and whose command was entrusted to the governors of Arabia since the reign of Hadrian. Jupiter Hammon had his own temple in the capital city of the province.<sup>4</sup> His expected status as a lightning god was emphasized in the coinage minted at Bostra in the name of the third legion under Antoninus Pius, since one of the known types shows the legionary eagle (*aquila*) holding the thunderbolt (**fig. 4**).<sup>5</sup>



**Figure 4.** Bronze coin of the third legion Cyrenaica minted in Bostra under Antoninus Pius (courtesy Bibliothèque nationale de France).

4. *IGLS* 13/1, 9010, 9011, 9015, 9107.

5. HOLLARD 2004.

The dedication can be dated approximately thanks to the mention of Q. Flavius Balbus, whose governorship in Arabia is thought to have taken place between ca. 213 and 221 CE,<sup>6</sup> and perhaps more precisely in 216-217 CE, under Caracalla.<sup>7</sup> This document adds nothing to the discussion of the exact period of Balbus' *legatio*. On the other hand, it furthers our knowledge of the role of Umm al-Jimāl as a place of settlement for the military. Until now, it was already known that the Roman army had been permanently established on the site at the latest since the time when the governor of Arabia had supervised the construction of a *uallum*, i.e., a mere palisade combined with an earth bank or a more resistant masonry rampart, in 177-180 CE.<sup>8</sup> As will be seen later, it is also questionable whether the Latin inscription of 212/213 CE which deals with the construction of a new fort (*castellum nouum*) and which was reused at Qaṣr al-Ḥallabāt also referred to the fortifications of Umm al-Jimāl. This will be discussed in connection with the later *castellum*.

The new inscription shows that, at least under the Severi, warrant officers (*optiones*) favored by the provincial governors as *beneficiarii* (holders of a *beneficium*) were temporarily detached from the third legion Cyrenaica and assigned to a military *statio* at Umm al-Jimāl, in addition to the soldiers of the local garrison.<sup>9</sup> Here as elsewhere, the physical framework of the station probably consisted of a modest building designed as a guardhouse associated with a small sanctuary for the use of its occupants and perhaps playing the role of a relay of the imperial post (*cursus publicus*).<sup>10</sup> More precisely, the text is part of the constantly growing series of dedications addressed by *beneficiarii* to the gods of their *statio* to thank them for their assignments or to celebrate the end of their mission.<sup>11</sup> Two other Greek inscriptions from Umm al-Jimāl could be linked to the same practice. The first one recalls that a *beneficiarius* contributed to the decoration of a monument.<sup>12</sup> The second one looks even more like the dedication of T. Flavius Artemidoros, because it was engraved on the shaft of a basalt altar and addressed to Zeus (**fig. 5**):<sup>13</sup>



Διὶ ἁγί-  
ῳ ἐπιη-  
κόῳ Ζ

4 ---

Translation:

“To Zeus, holy, listening to prayer...”

**Figure 5.** Basalt altar with a Greek dedication to Zeus (photo J. Aliquot 2022 © CNRS Hisoma).

6. *PIR*<sup>2</sup> F 227; SARTRE 1982, p. 88, no. 25, with *IGLS* 13/1, 9072-9074; THOMASSON 2009, p. 141, no. 35:047.

7. CHRISTOL and DREW-BEAR 2014, p. 301-306; ECK 2022.

8. *I. Jordanie* 5/1, 124, from the Commodus Gate; cf. *IGLS* 14, 412, for the date, maybe 177-178 CE. On Commodus Gate: OSINGA and DE VRIES 2021.

9. On *beneficiarii*: SCHALLMAYER, EIBL and OTT 1990; OTT 1995; NELIS-CLÉMENT 2000.

10. FRANCE and NELIS-CLÉMENT 2014, on the concept and material realities of the *stationes* in the Roman Empire.

11. E.g., GATIER 1998, p. 393, no. 84 (*AE* 1998, 1458), for a Latin dedication of an altar from Rihāb by a *beneficiarius consularis*, with this comment: “Le village aurait-il abrité une *statio* du *cursus publicus* confiée à un bénéficiaire ?” The god to whom the dedication was addressed may be I(uppiter) O(ptimus) M(aximus) H(ammon) rather than I(uppiter) O(ptimus) M(aximus) H(eliopolitanus); cf. FIEMA, VILLENEUVE and BAUZOU 2020, for a series of dedications of Hegra where the name of the god of the third legion Cyrenaica was either written in full or abbreviated as IOMH.

12. *I. Jordanie* 5/1, 145.

13. *I. Jordanie* 5/1, 100, found in a late antique house east of the so-called Barracks.

At the end of line 3 and in the following lines, the epithet κ[εραυνίω] may be restored, although other possibilities are not excluded (e.g., κ[υρίω] or the personal name of the donor beginning with a kappa). Either way, the name and titles of Zeus would once again suit the god of the third legion Cyrenaica, who was also described as “holy” at Bostra by means of a Latin epiclesis (*sanctus*) synonymous with the Greek epithet ἅγιος.<sup>14</sup>

The brevity of the new dedication makes it impossible to know more about T. Flavius Artemidoros. The onomastic formula that designated this Roman citizen is quite ordinary, so that it is not surprising to find homonyms in the Empire. Similarly, the duration of his mission remains unknown. At the beginning of the third century CE, the posting of *beneficarii* to a given station routinely lasted six months, from the ides of January to the ides of July, then from the ides of July to the ides of January, and so on. However, longer missions are also documented, including in the *limes Arabicus*.<sup>15</sup> The main point is that provincial authorities relied on such officers to carry out military police and law enforcement operations at Umm al-Jimāl, in direct contact with the nearby village community of al-Hirrī’ and independently of the garrison hosted in the local *castellum*.

As with the *castellum*, the question of the location of the *statio* and its shrine now has to be asked. At first sight, there is little hope of finding any trace of these facilities, as the pre-fourth century buildings of the whole area appear to have been largely disrupted and dismantled due to the specific development of the late antique settlement of Umm al-Jimāl. We can nevertheless venture a proposal. In its initial state, the so-called Praetorium was a small public building, whose careful construction may date back to the late second or third century CE (fig. 6).<sup>16</sup> It is tempting to view it as the station of the *beneficarii*.

#### THE FOURTH-CENTURY *BURGUS* OF THE *EQUITES NONODALMATAE*

Epigraphic sources provide only little information on the presence of Roman soldiers at Umm al-Jimāl for about a century and a half after the time of the Severi. Inscriptions mention road repairs and unidentified activity of the provincial governor during the Tetrarchy.<sup>17</sup> At the end of this period, large-scale military work was undertaken during the joint reign of Valentinian, Valens, and Gratian (367-375 CE). This is what we learn from a small series of three Latin inscriptions. According to the first two texts, two towers were probably built in the same year 368 CE under the authority of Flavius Maximinus, *comes* and *dux* of Arabia,<sup>18</sup> through the efforts of the *Nonodalmatae*, and to the care of Agathodaimon, tribune of the soldiers in this unit. The first document, found near Church 22 (North East Church), is not fully preserved at the end:<sup>19</sup>

[Saluis et uictori]b[us] ddd(ominis) n[on]n(ostris) Valen[ti]niano et Valente et [Gratia]n[o],  
semper Aug(ustis), prospicie[ns] sa[l]utisferumq(ue) fore cuntis [Fl(auius) Ma|x]iminus,  
u(ir) c(larissimus), com(es) et dux, h[anc] | t]urrem exurgere iusit a ff[und] | amentis e[ri]t  
speculo c[ur]an]t[e] ---].

14. *IGLS* 13/1, 9010: “Jupiter Optimus Maximus holy Genius Hammon” (*Iuppiter Optimus Maximus Genius sanctus Hammon*).

15. Cf. *IGLS* 14, 8, 9 and 14, for the possible three-year mission of Flavianus in the city of Adraa between 259/260 and 262/263 CE, perhaps over several stays.

16. BROWN 1998; DE VRIES 1998, p. 229.

17. *I. Jordanie* 5/1, 121-123.

18. *PLRE* 1, p. 577, “Maximinus 6.”

19. *I. Jordanie* 5/1, 125 (367-375 CE). Lines 3-4: [sa]l]utisferumq(ue) for salutiferumque; cuntis for cunctis. Line 6: exurgere for exurgere; iusit for iussit.



**Figure 6.** The so-called Praetorium at Umm al-Jimāl (courtesy APAAME).

The second inscription, reused in House XX, provides a complete version of the text:<sup>20</sup>

*Saluis et uictorib(us) dd(ominis) nn(ostris) Valent[iniano] | et Valente et Gratiano, semper Aug(ustis), | prospiciens salutiferum fore cunctis F[l(auius)] | Maximinus, dux, hanc turrem exurgere ius[sit a fun]damentis eius speculo curante Agat[ho]daimone, trib(uno) m(ilitum) uex(illationis), dd(ominis) nn(ostris) Valentinia[no] | et Valente II co(n)s(ulibus), | per uex(illationem) VIII Dalmatam deuotissimam.*

Translation:

“To our safe and victorious lords Valentinian, Valens, and Gratian, forever Augusti, foreseeing that it will be salutary to all, Flavius Maximinus, *dux*, ordered to raise this tower from the foundations to be an observation post to the care of Agathodaimon, tribune of the unit soldiers at the time when our lords Valentinian and Valens were consuls for the second time (368 CE), by the most devoted ninth Dalmatian unit.”

The tribune in charge of the works had a Greek name which betrayed his Egyptian origin: Ἀγαθοδαίμων.<sup>21</sup> His unit was composed of horsemen who had obviously been placed in the service of the *dux* of Arabia, head of the border troops stationed throughout the province and subordinate of the *magister militum per Orientem*. Later in the fourth century CE, the *equites Nonodalmatae* joined

20. *I. Jordanie* 5/1, 126 (368 CE).

21. BLOUIN 2016, p. 79-82.

the palatine armies of the eastern Empire.<sup>22</sup> A handful of Latin dedications of monumental tombs from the fourth century CE might relate to the officers of the same *uexillatio* and their families in Umm al-Jimāl.<sup>23</sup>

Other building operations were carried out in Arabia under the authority of the *dux* Maximinus at Dībīn in 365 CE,<sup>24</sup> at Šubḥiyya in 369/370 CE,<sup>25</sup> and at Dayr al-Kahf between 367 and 375 CE.<sup>26</sup> The Dayr al-Kahf inscription deserves to be quoted in full as it is very similar to the texts from Umm al-Jimāl:<sup>27</sup>

*Saluis ac uictoribus | ddd(ominis) nnn(ostris) Valentiniano | et Valente et Gra|tiano, aeternis | triunfatoribus, | senper Augustis, | hunc castellu[m i]n | [hac s]ede posit[um] | atque [ampli]a[t]um disposi[t]ione | Maximini, u(iri) c(larissimi), com(itis) et ducis, haec | monumenta {te}testa[n]tur, | insistentibus Valen[t]iniano, praep[osito] uex(illationis), et So[z]omeno | et Cointo, | scriniari[i]s[.]*

Translation:

“To our safe and victorious lords Valentinian, Valens, and Gratian, eternal triumphers, forever Augusti, these records testify that this fort was built in this place and enlarged according to the orders of Flavius Maximinus, *uir clarissimus*, *comes*, and *dux*, and through the commitment of Valentinianus, unit commander, and Sozomenus and Quintus, archivists.”

A third, more recent text from Umm al-Jimāl mentions the construction of a whole *burgus* by the *equites Nonodalmatae* under the supervision of the superior of all the troops of the Diocese of the East, Iulius, *magister militum (per Orientem)*, who resided in Antioch, in 371 CE (**fig. 7**):<sup>28</sup>

*Saluis ddd(ominis) nnn(ostris) Valentiniano, Valente et Gratiano, | uictoriosissimis, semper Aug(ustis), dispositione Iuli, | u(iri) c(larissimi), com(itis), magistri equitum et peditum, fabri|catus est burgus ex fundamento mano deuo|tissimorum equitum VIII Dalm(atarum), s(ub) c(ura) Vahali, trib(uni), | in consulatum d(omini) n(ostri) Gratiani, perpetui Aug(usti) iterum, | et Probi, u(iri) c(larissimi).*

Translation:

“To our lords Valentinian, Valens, and Gratian, most victorious, forever Augusti, according to the orders of Iulius, *uir clarissimus*, *comes*, and commander of horsemen and infantrymen, the *burgus* was built from the foundations by the hand of the most devoted *Nonodalmatae* horsemen, to the care of Vahalus, tribune, during the consulship of our lord Gratian, perpetual August for the second time, and Probus, *uir clarissimus*.”

22. *Notitia Dignitatum*, Or. 5.37, where the *equites nono Dalmatae* are mentioned among the *uexillationes comitatenses* under the authority of the *magister militum praesentalis I*; SCHARF 2001, on late antique units of *equites Dalmatae*, especially p. 190-192, about the *Nonodalmatae*.
23. *I. Jordanie* 5/1, 149, funerary inscription for Aurelia Quirilla, wife of Veranus, *sex(quiplicarius) = sesq(uiuplicarius)*, i.e., “receiving one and a half pay”; 150, epitaph of Corneliana, daughter of Maurus, former *praepositus*, and wife of Flavius Proclianus, also a *praepositus*, as LITTMANN, MAGIE JR. and STUART 1913, p. 135-136, no. 236 assumed, without however retaining this reading; 151, epitaph of Flavius Lucianus, *praepositus* originating from Philippopolis in Thrace and *tribunus minor* under Constantius II; cf. 617, for a fragmentary inscription mentioning a *praepositus*.
24. *SEG* 7, 1164 = *IGLS* 16/5, 1211.
25. Unpublished Greek dedication of a *castellum* kept at al-Mafraq in the Al-Bayt University Museum, inv. 98/6.
26. *CIL* 3, 14381, 14382; LITTMANN, MAGIE JR. and STUART 1910, p. 127-128, no. 229; KENNEDY 2004, p. 76, no. 6.
27. On lines 7-8, *[i]n | [--- s]ede* in earlier editions. On line 10, previous editors read *praef(ecto)* or *praef[ect]o [coh(ortis)]*, which would be anachronistic in the fourth century CE.
28. *I. Jordanie* 5/1, 127, on a lintel reused in the so-called Cathedral or Church 14; cf. *PLRE* 1, p. 481, “Iulius 2.” On line 4, the *I. Jordanie* edition has *burgu[s]*.



**Figure 7.** Latin building inscription of a *burgus* by the *equites Nonodalmatae* (photo J. Aliquot 2022 © CNRS Hisoma).

In 371 CE, Vahalus had replaced Agathodaimon as head of the *equites Nonodalmatae*.<sup>29</sup> The name of the tribune is reminiscent of the ancient name of a river in the Batavian country, the present Waal in the Netherlands.<sup>30</sup> However, it is not known as a personal name among Germans or Celts, so it is better to consider it as a transcription of a Semitic anthroponym. Given the presence of the Latin H, which could be used to render the *ʿayn*, it was not related to the Arabic *wʿl* and the Nabataean *wʿlw*,<sup>31</sup> but to the Arabic name of the Nubian ibex (*Capra nubiana*), *wʿl*, which was extensively used as a personal name in ancient North Arabian languages (especially Hismaic and Safaitic) and from which the less common *wʿlw* was also derived in Nabataean Aramaic.<sup>32</sup> In any case, the idea of local or regional recruitment should be favored for the tribune.

In addition to the three Latin building inscriptions already mentioned, a new document must now be taken into account. It was found in 2018 by Muaffaq Hazza under the rubble of Church 12, next to the so-called Barracks. The text was engraved in 3 to 4 cm-high letters on a large basalt block, which was considerably reduced in size, especially in height, as a result of its reuse as a threshold (**fig. 8**). Today, the stone is 21 cm high, 132 cm wide, and 41 cm deep. The following edition is based on an autopsy of the

29. *PLRE* 1, p. 929, “Vahalus.”

30. *Vahal*, *Vahalis*, etc., of Germanic or Celtic origin according to SCHEUNGRABER and GRÜNZWEIG 2014, p. 355-358, s.v. “Vahal 1.”

31. Pace SARTRE 1985, p. 225.

32. LITTMANN, MAGIE Jr. and STUART 1913, p. 134: “The name *Vahalus* may be the Latin transcription of an Arabic name, such as *Waʿl* or *Waʿla*.” See also HARDING 1971, p. 645, s.v. “wʿl”; SARTRE 2007, p. 217-224 (with confusing comments on Οὐάλης/*Valens*, Ουαελος, and *wʿl*).

block in 2018, on the examination of numerous detailed photographs as well as on a comparison with the better preserved inscriptions from Umm al-Jimāl and Dayr al-Kahf, which are very similar in wording. There are likely to be significant gaps at the top (line 1) and bottom (lines 6-8). Line 5 was apparently reduced to a centred word. This may also be the case on line 8. The writing is influenced by the capital cursive. The following reading can be considered the most plausible, even if it must be acknowledged that it is still conjectural in the details of lines 6 to 8:

[*Saluis d*]dd(*ominis*) n[nn(*ostris*)] Vq[*lentiniano, Valente et Gratia*]-  
 [no], triumphatoribus, se[mper Augustis, hanc tur]-  
 [re]m a fundamentis fabricatam disposition[e]  
 4 [Fl(au)] Maximini, u(iri) c(larissimi), comitis et duxis, haec monum[enta]  
 vac. testantur vac.  
 [curante Agathodaimone, trib(un)o m(ilitum) uex(illationis), dd(ominis) nn(ostris) Val]enti-  
 [niano et Valente II co(n)ss(ulibus), per uex(illationem) VIII Dalmatam]  
 8 [vac. deuotissimam?].

Translation:

“To our safe lords Valentinian, Valens, and Gratian, triumphers, forever Augusti, these records testify that this tower was built from the foundations according to the orders of Flavius Maximinus, *uir clarissimus*, *comes*, and *dux*, to the care of Agathodaimon, tribune of the unit soldiers at the time when our lords Valentinian and Valens were consuls for the second time (368 CE), by the most devoted ninth Dalmatian unit.”



**Figure 8.** Latin building inscription of a tower under the authority of the *dux* Flavius Maximinus (photo J. Aliquot 2022 © CNRS Hisoma).

If we look at all the available documents together, not only two, but at least three towers (*turres*, sing. *turris*) were probably built at Umm al-Jimāl in 368 CE before a whole *burgus* was inaugurated in 371 CE. Although the situation seems quite clear, the interpretation of the Latin term *burgus* is not self-evident. This word of Germanic origin does not necessarily refer to a tower, contrary to what an abusive comparison with the Greek πύργος may have suggested.<sup>33</sup> The three dedications of real towers belonging to the fourth-century defenses of Umm al-Jimāl prove that something else was at stake. The *burgus* was in fact a fortlet, a *castellum paruolum* in the words of Vegetius.<sup>34</sup>

33. ISAAC 1992, p. 178-186; SCHEUNGRABER and GRÜNZEIG 2014, p. 112-114, s.v. “Burg 1.” For other mentions of late antique *burgi* in the Near East: *IGLS* 13/2, 9857; 16/5, 1284a; *CIIP* 2, 1261.

34. *Epitoma rei militaris* 4.10: *castellum paruolum quem burgum uocant*.

Once again, it is difficult to recognize the fourth-century fortifications on the ground, as all inscriptions that show their existence were discovered in secondary locations. With regard to the *burgus*, the Princeton expedition scholars considered either the so-called Praetorium,<sup>35</sup> which eventually did not show any fourth-century construction phase,<sup>36</sup> or by pure guesswork “an outpost of the main *castra*” built in the late second century CE.<sup>37</sup> In 1981, the excavations conducted as part of the Umm al-Jimāl Project started to uncover a large Roman *castellum* to the east of the site.<sup>38</sup> It was an irregular quadrilateral of about 1 ha, with walls originally just under 2 m wide, four main gates flanked by towers, projecting towers at all four corners, interior rooms built against the walls and in the courtyard area, and a building identified as *principia* in its northern half (fig. 9). In its southwest corner, the fort was paired with a large reservoir fed by an aqueduct from a dam to the northeast. The very broad periodization put forward has so far not been supported by any detailed publication of the stratigraphy: while it is sure that the fort was dismantled in late antiquity, the alleged idea of a Tetrarchic foundation (ca. 300 CE) may be relevant, but it still seems to lack solid evidence. We are left to speculate on the possible building or reconstruction of this major fortification and its towers ca. 368-371 CE, under the reign of Valentinian, Valens, and Gratian.



**Figure 9.** The late Roman *castellum* at Umm al-Jimāl (courtesy APAAME).

35. BUTLER 1913, p. 165-166.

36. BROWN 1998.

37. LITTMANN, MAGIE JR. and STUART 1913, p. 134.

38. DE VRIES 1986, p. 231-232, 238, fig. 10.2; DE VRIES 1993, p. 435-436, 445-446, 447, 452, fig. 4; KENNEDY 2004, p. 86-88.

THE BYZANTINE *KASTRON* AND ITS *CASTELLUM*

A Greek inscription dates the construction of the later *castellum* to 412 or 413 CE (fig. 10):<sup>39</sup>

Ἐπὶ Φλ(αοῦ)ίου Πελαγίου  
 Ἀντιπάτρου τοῦ λαμπροτάτου)  
 κόμ(ητος) καὶ δουκὸς ἐκτί-  
 4 σθη ὁ κάστελλος  
 σπουδῆ Βάσσου,  
 πριμικη[ρ(ίου) ---]μίας,  
 ἔτο[υς τζ'?, ἰνδ(ικτῶνος) ι]α'.

Translation:

“Under the authority of Flavius Pelagios Antipatros, *clarissimus comes* and *dux*, the *castellum* was built through the zeal of Bassus, *primicerius* from..., in the year 307 (or 308), indiction 11.”



**Figure 10.** Greek building inscription of the later *castellum* of Umm al-Jimāl under the authority of the *dux* Flavius Pelagios Antipatros (photo J. Aliquot 2022 © CNRS Hisoma).

The same *dux* of Arabia is known from the Greek dedication of another *castellum* in al-Bā'ij, very close to the site.<sup>40</sup> At Umm al-Jimāl, the construction of the fort was supervised by a junior officer whose rank was just below that of tribune. The name of Bassos could be the Greek transcription of the Latin *Bassus* or the transcription of an Arabic anthroponym taken from the name of the cat, *bs*.<sup>41</sup> It is too common to draw any conclusions about the origin of the *primicerius*, but there is reason to wonder whether this soldier came from Tricomia ([Τρικω?]μίας) and whether this garrison site was located in Umm al-Jimāl.<sup>42</sup> If such an assumption were to prove correct, then it would have to be concluded that the unit stationed at Umm al-Jimāl at the beginning of the fifth century CE was that of the *equites promoti Illyriciani*.

39. *I. Jordanie* 5/1, 128, “found in the courtyard of a house in the south-western corner of the city, a short distance south of the so-called ‘West Gate’,” according to LITTMANN, MAGIE JR. and STUART 1913, p. 136-137, no. 237. On line 6, [---]μίας is probably a place name in the genitive to specify the *origo* of the officer or the location of his garrison ([Τρικω?]μίας). The hypothetical restoration proposed by LITTMANN, MAGIE JR. and STUART 1913, p. 136-137, πριμικη[ρ(ίου) οίκονο]μίας, would be too long, unparalleled, and even quite odd. On line 7, ἔτο[υς τζ'] (year 307) or ἔτο[υς τη'] (year 308).

40. *I. Jordanie* 5/1, 92, dated June 17, 411 CE; cf. *PLRE* 2, p. 106, “Fl. Pelagius Antipater 3.”

41. SARTRE 2007, p. 204-208; YON 2018, p. 66-69.

42. *Notitia Dignitatum*, Or. 37.4 (*Tricomia*); 37.15 (*equites promoti Illyriciani, Tricomia*); George of Cyprus, 1074 (Τρικωμία). See also BRÜNNOW 1909, p. 70-71, for the forgotten proposal to locate Triacomia at Umm al-Jimāl; but cf. *IGLS* 16/5, 1116 (Τριακώμη in a 292/293 CE dedication from Ṣalḥād in southern Syria whose authors were from several different villages).



**Figure 11.** The later *castellum* (Barracks) at Umm al-Jimāl (courtesy APAAME).

Howard Crosby Butler linked the inscription to the first state of the Barracks (**fig. 11**).<sup>43</sup> Since the Princeton expedition, limited excavations under the outer wall of the building have produced ceramics from the fourth and fifth centuries CE, which did not invalidate this hypothesis.<sup>44</sup> The study of the Barracks also revealed major alterations between the early sixth and the early seventh century CE (repair of the southeast tower which was then adorned with Christian inscriptions, addition of a tower on the west side, etc.). During the same period, the surrounding wall of the whole settlement was the subject of repairs. A recently published Greek inscription may relate to this set of operations. It shows that the work done in the *castellum* (κάστελλος) was the responsibility of Kornelios, an *officialis* from the staff of the military governor of Arabia.<sup>45</sup>

It also turns out that a neglected inscription allows us to place the renovation of the defenses of Umm al-Jimāl in the context of the emergence of a *kastron* in the early years of Justinian's reign. This document was found in 1905 by the members of the Princeton expedition in the Umayyad residence of Qaṣr al-Ḥallabāt, about 20 km south of Umm al-Jimāl.<sup>46</sup> Today it is preserved in the storerooms of the Jordanian Archaeological Museum in the Ḥammān Citadel. The text was engraved inside a *tabula ansata* on a basalt plaque broken in two fragments (**fig. 12**).<sup>47</sup> There is no problem reading it:<sup>48</sup>

43. BUTLER 1913, p. 171.

44. PARKER 1998; cf. VILLENEUVE 2001, p. 213-214, and KENNEDY 2004, p. 90-91, with methodological caveats.

45. *I. Jordanie* 5/1, 130, "reposant sur le sol à l'extérieur, près de la maison n° 51."

46. LITTMANN, MAGIE JR. and STUART 1910, p. 22-23, no. 18; MEIMARIS 1992, p. 231, no. 262.

47. H. × W. × D.: 36 × 86 × 14 cm (a); 36 × 45 × 14 cm (b). Cross, S-shaped abbreviation mark. *Tabula ansata*: 28 × 74 cm. H. of the letters: 3.5-5 cm.

48. Line 2: ἀπά for ἀπό. Lines 3-4: δοῦξ for δουκός; τὰ | κάστραν for τὸ κάστρον; ἔτι for ἔτει.



**Figure 12.** Greek inscription commemorating the restoration of a *kastron* under the authority of the *dux* Flavius Anastasius, Jordanian Archaeological Museum, ‘Ammān, inv. J. 1646 (photo J. Aliquot 2022 © CNRS Hisoma).

† Ἐπὶ Φλ(αοῦ) Ἰου(ίου) Ἀναστασίου, ὑπερ-  
 φρεστ(άτου) κ(αὶ) πανευφ(ήμου) ἀπὸ ὑπά-  
 των κ(αὶ) δοῦξ, ἀνενεώθη τὰ  
 4 κάστραν ἐν ἔτι υκδ', χρ(όνοις) ζ' ἰνδ(ικτιῶνος).

Translation:

“Under the authority of Flavius Anastasius,<sup>49</sup> *excellentissimus* and *famosissimus* former consul and duke, the *kastron* was renovated in the year 424, at the time of the indiction 7 (= March 22-August 31, 529 CE).”

As Ghazi Bisheh convincingly argued over thirty years ago, it is highly likely that this inscription was originally displayed at Umm al-Jimāl.<sup>50</sup> The same can be said for all of the basalt blocks reused as building materials in the Umayyad residence of Qaṣr al-Ḥallabāt, including the slab which bears a Latin inscription relating to the construction of a *castellum nouum* with the help of detachments of four cohorts in 212/213 CE (**fig. 13**).<sup>51</sup> It is now established that the numerous fragments of the famous constitution of Anastasius I (491-518) found at Ḥallabāt were brought from Umm al-Jimāl.<sup>52</sup>

The use of the Greek word κάστρον also makes a strong case for attributing the *kastron* inscription to Umm al-Jimāl. This polysemous term belonged to the late antique administrative language.<sup>53</sup> Although it sometimes designated a fortress or a fortified residence, or even a monastery (in Sinai), it was most commonly used, in its Latin version *castrum* from the fourth century CE, and then in Greek from the sixth century onward, in relation to urban agglomerations of non-civic status, particularly in border areas, at a

49. *PLRE* 3a, p. 62, “Fl. Anastasius 3.”

50. BISHEH 1986, p. 161-162; BISHEH 1993, p. 49-50.

51. LITTMANN, MAGIE JR. and STUART 1910, p. 21-22, no. 17; KENNEDY 1982, p. 39-40, no. 3; KENNEDY 2004, p. 99-100, no. 1: *Pro salute domini Imp(eratoris) | Aug(usti) n(ostri) M(arci) Aureli Antonini, Pii, | Felicis, Arabici, Adiab(enici), Parthici, | Brittanici maximi, castellum no[u]m aedificauerunt mil(it)es c(o)h(ortium) VI Hisp(anorum), I Thrac(um), | V Afr(orum) Seu(er)ianae, III Thr(acum) per Phurnium Iulianum leg(atum) | Aug(usti) pr(o) pr(aetore)*. Translation: “For the salvation of our lord the Emperor Augustus Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Pius Felix, great conqueror over the Arabs, the Adiabeniensians, the Parthians, and the Britons, the soldiers of the cohorts *VI Hispanorum*, *I Thracum*, *V Afrorum Seueriana*, and *III Thracum* built the new fort, under the authority of Furnius Iulianus, legate of Augustus with praetorian rank.”

52. ARCE, FEISSEL and WEBER-KARYOTAKIS 2018; cf. ARCE 2018, who inconsistently believes that the two building inscriptions from 212/213 CE and 529 CE refer to the Roman and Byzantine fort of Ḥallabāt, while the latter was entirely made of limestone extracted from the local quarries. On the quarries near Ḥallabāt: GATIER 1995. See also GENEQUAND 2012, p. 209 n. 39, with legitimate doubts on Arce’s scenario.

53. SALIOU 2020.



**Figure 13.** Latin inscription commemorating the building of a Roman fort in 212/213 CE, Qaṣr al-Ḥallabāt Archaeological Museum (photo J. Aliquot 2018 © CNRS Hisoma).

stage prior to the elevation to the status of city (*ciuitas*, πόλις). Therefore, the notion of *kastron* would be inappropriate to describe the modest fortlet of Qaṣr al-Ḥallabāt under Justinian. On the other hand, the concept was well suited to a series of large villages located along the steppe and exposed to the threat of nomadic raids in Provincia Arabia, including Mothana (Imtān), Rihāb, Samrā', and Umm al-Jimāl, if only the territory of Bostra is considered.<sup>54</sup>

### CONCLUSION

The present study has brought to light several hitherto unknown aspects of the history of Umm al-Jimāl in the long run. At the origins of the settlement, it now appears that a station of *beneficarii* was established there no later than the reign of Caracalla (211-217). The warrant officers sent to the site were most probably detached from the headquarters of the third legion Cyrenaica in Bostra. With the capacity to act on behalf of the governor of Arabia, the highest authority in the province, they were responsible for police and intelligence operations around the adjacent village of al-Ḥirrī'. Their temporary missions were carried out independently from the local garrison stationed in the *castellum nouum* which was built or renovated in 212/213 CE and whose location is not known. We thus find here the soldiers of the Roman army in their traditional role of guardians of the territory entrusted to the provincial authorities on all the depth of the *limes Arabicus*. In this respect, the example of Umm al-Jimāl encourages further research into the network of beneficiary *stationes* scattered throughout the province between the second and early fourth century.<sup>55</sup> The reasons for the decline of al-Ḥirrī' during the same period have yet to be determined. One might consider the effects of the earthquake that devastated Palestine and Arabia in the night of May 18-19, 363 CE,<sup>56</sup> the recurring rise of territorial friction created by nomadic attacks, which epigraphic and literary sources occasionally mention,<sup>57</sup> or a combination of all these factors. In any case,

54. GATIER 2005, p. 109-110; ALIQUOT and AL-HUSAN 2019-2020.

55. It is enough here to gather epigraphic records on *beneficarii consularis* serving in the province of Arabia outside Bostra to show the interest of the subject: e.g., from north to south, *IJLS* 16/4, 808-809 (Rāma); *IJLS* 16/2, 336 (Dionysias) and 431 (Ḥibrān); *IJLS* 14, 8, 9, and 14 (Adraa); *AE* 1998, 1458 (Rihāb); *I. Jordanie* 2, 13 (Philadelphia); *I. Jordanie* 4, 20 (Petra).

56. RUSSELL 1980; GUIDOBONI 1994, p. 264-267, no. 153.

57. E.g., *AE* 1948, 136 (Ḥirbat Umm al-Manāra, 334 CE), with ALIQUOT 2016.

from the last third of the fourth century onward, the construction of important military buildings at Umm al-Jimāl under the authority of the dukes of Arabia led to the birth of a new fortified village which was to obtain the status of *kastron* in late antiquity.

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*CIL*

*Corpus inscriptionum Latinarum*, Berlin, since 1863.

*CIIP*

*Corpus inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palaestinae*, Berlin - New York - Boston, since 2010.

*I. Jordanie*

*Inscriptions de la Jordanie*, Paris/Beirut, since 1986.

*IGLS*

*Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie*, Paris/Beirut, since 1929.

*PIR*<sup>2</sup>

*Prosopographia imperii Romani saec. I. II. III.*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Berlin, 1933-2015.

*PLRE*

*The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, Cambridge, 1971-1992.

*SEG*

*Supplementum epigraphicum Graecum*, Leiden, since 1923.

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