

## KASTRON MEFAA, THE *EQUITES PROMOTI INDIGENAE* AND THE CREATION OF A LATE ROMAN FRONTIER

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The importance of Umm al Rasas (Mephaa) as a military site is shown by some sources of late antiquity: Eusebius (*Onomasticon* 128-129), in the last decade of the 3rd century or in the 4th century before the christianization of the East, wrote that Mephaat was a *phourion* of soldiers near the desert<sup>1</sup>.

The *Notitia Dignitatum Or. XXXVII* 19 attests that a unit of *equites promoti indigenae* was quartered at Mefa. It is now sure that the composition of the eastern section of this document dates to around 400 A.D.<sup>2</sup>

Palladius (*Dialogus de vita S. Joannis Chrysostomi* 20) writes that bishop Elusius, a follower of John Chrysostom, was exiled “in the *phourion* of Mespha, near the Saracens”. This happened between 405 and 407. As it has been recently proven, Mespha is Mephaa<sup>3</sup>.

The *Notitia Dignitatum* attests that in the Near East most of the border military apparatus was deployed symmetrically on the territory: in each province two legions were stationed – except in *Palaestina*, where there was only one. Furthermore there were cavalry-selected units of *equites illyriciani* and of *equites indigenae* that, like the *cohortes*, the *alae*, and the legions themselves were under the command of each provincial *dux*.

It is important to point out that in the *Notitia* we can easily detect great part of the Diocletianic military organisation in the area between the Euphrates and the Red Sea. This sector, unlike what had happened along elsewhere, didn't suffer repeated dramatic events and didn't go through any particular change in the course of the 4th century<sup>4</sup>.

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1. The identification of Umm al Rasas with Mephaa is definitely proven by M. Piccirillo, in M. Piccirillo - E. Alliata, *Umm al-Rasas Mayfa'ah. 1: Gli scavi del complesso di Santo Stefano*, Jerusalem 1994, 37-54. On the date of the composition of the *Onomasticon*, see below n. 42.

2. C. Zuckerman, “Comtes et ducs en Egypte autour de l'anne 400 et la date de la *Notitia Dignitatum Orientis*”, *AnTard* 6 (1998) 137-147.

3. P.L. Gatier, “Romains et Saracènes: deux forteresses de l'Antiquité tardive dans les documents méconnus”, *Topoi* 9 (1999) 215-218.

4. A.H.M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, Oxford 1964, 56-57. But see my works mentioned at n. 6.

Among the *equites indigenae*, there were generally two units of *equites promoti* under the command of each *dux*. In Phoenicia, at *Auatha* (ND. Or. XXXII 22) and at *Nazala* (ND. Or. XXXII 23); in Syria, at *Adada* (ND. Or. XXXIII 19) and at *Resafa* (ND. Or. XXXIII 27); in Palaestina, at *Sabaia* (ND. Or. XXXIV 23) and at *Zodocatha* (ND. Or. XXXIV 24); in Arabia, at *Speluncae* (ND. Or. XXXVII 18) and at *Mefa* (ND. Or. XXXVII 19). There were five more units of *equites sagittarii indigenae* in Palaestina (ND. Or. XXXIV 25-29), one in Arabia (ND. Or. XXXVII 20), three in Syria (ND. Or. XXXIII 20-22), and four in Phoenicia (ND. Or. XXXII 24-27). In Phoenicia units of *Saraceni indigenae* (ND. Or. XXXII 27) and of *Saraceni* (XXXII 28) are also attested.

As regards the *equites illyriciani*, it is important to remark that this kind of unit had different origin than the *equites indigenae*. The *equites illyriciani* were danubian units that at an unknown period were deployed in the Near East. Observing the symmetric disposition of these units in the Near East as it is described in the *Notitia*, Ritterling ascribed their deployment on the territory to Aurelianus, who had organised the defences of the Near East after the war with Zenobia<sup>5</sup>.

However, a rich documentation reveals the strong impact of the policy of Diocletian and his colleagues. In the tetrarchic age the imperial body was strengthened, and great care was given to the restoration of the military apparatus. The military structures on the fringe of the desert were renewed, and even built anew, as we shall see later. Diocletian and his colleagues might have been the authors of the reorganisation of the army, unlike Aurelianus, whose reign lasted shortly after the rebellion of Palmyra. It cannot be excluded that Diocletian himself deployed the Illyrian units in the Near East.

We must draw our attention on an important element: the Illyrian units were not quartered on the extreme fringes of the territory that was being occupied by the Romans. Consequently, there are two possibilities: 1) Aurelianus didn't occupy the most marginal areas of the steppe, and deployed the Illyrian units near the cultivated areas; 2) Diocletian, in the context of a global reorganisation of the sector, deployed the Illyrian units in

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5. E. Ritterling, "Zum römischen Heerwesen des ausgehenden dritten Jahrhunderts", in: *Festschrift zu Otto Hirschfeld sechzigstens Geburtstag*, Berlin 1903, 345-349. On the mobile army of the third century, see in general P. Southern - K.R. Dixon, *The Late Roman Army*, London 1996, 11-14; J.M. Carrié, in J.M. Carrié - A. Rousselle, *L'empire romain en mutation*, Paris 1999, 135-137.

the inner parts of the provinces, leaving the control on the areas close to the desert to other units<sup>6</sup>.

The Panopolis papyri are a decisive evidence of the process of fragmentation of a legion on the territory<sup>7</sup>. In the second papyrus, dated to the year 300, where the payments for some military units are listed, the *legio II Traiana* is described as divided in two *vexillationes*, in one unit of *lancearii*, and in one unit of *equites promoti*. The papyrus mentions as well the payments for a *vexillatio* and for some *lancearii* of the *legio III Diocletiana*.

We don't know whether the *equites promoti* had been created as a specialised unit of the legions before Diocletian. We must be cautious in attributing to this emperor the creation of every specialised unit attested in the documents of late antiquity. The *lanciarum* were thought to be a diocletianic creation until some inscriptions found at Apamea proved that they were part of the legions at least from the Severian Age<sup>8</sup>.

According to a well-established tradition of studies, the *equites promoti* were a late development of the legionary cavalry<sup>9</sup>. It has also been asserted that the *equites promoti indigenae* were the cavalry units of the legions quartered in the provinces. Eventually they became independent from their mother legion<sup>10</sup>. If we accept this last assessment, we would inevitably come to the conclusion that the units of *equites promoti indigenae* were the

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6. A. Lewin, "Diocletian, Politics & Limits in the Near East", in: Z. Fiema - P. Freeman (ed.), *Acts of the XVIII Limeskongress*, forthcoming; Idem, "Limitanei and Comitatuses in the Near East from Diocletian to Valens", in: *L'armée romaine de Dioclétien à Valentinien Ier*, forthcoming.

7. T.C. Skeat, *Papyri from Panopolis in the Chester Beatty Library*, Dublin 1964.

8. J.C. Balty - W. Van Rengen, *Apamea in Syria. The Winter Quarters of Legio II Parthica*, Bruxelles 1993, 24-26 nn. 3-5. It has to be observed that in an epitaph from Anazarbus a *νοῦμερος λαγγαρίων* is mentioned. The inscription is now lost. IGK *Anazarbus*, 72 relying on the first discoverer of the 19th century has dated the text in the 2nd-3rd century. But since the *lancearii* appear here to be an independent unit and not a specialized body of a legion, it must be posited that the text is of late antiquity. For the *lancearii* in the auxiliary units in the first century see R.S. Tomlin, "The missing lances or making the machine work", in: A. Goldsworthy - I. Haynes (eds.), *The Roman Army as Community*, Portsmouth 1999, 127-138.

9. R. Grosse, *Römische Militärgeschichte von Gallienus bis zur Beginn der byzantinischen Themenfassung*, Berlin 1920, 17-18; Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, 53; D. Hoffmann, *Die Spätromische Bewegungsheer*, Düsseldorf 1968, 246; M. Nicasie, *Twilight of Empire. The Roman Army from the Reign of Diocletian until the Battle of Adrianople*, Amsterdam 1998, 61-62; R.S.O. Tomlin, "The legions in late Empire", in: R.J. Brewer (ed.), *Roman Fortresses and their Legion*, London 2000, 166-167.

10. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, 57-58.

very last result of what is a process that appears to be in progress in the Panopolis papyri. On the other hand other sources lead to believe that the units of *equites promoti* called *indigenae* that are attested in the Near East in the *Notitia Dignitatum*, didn't have a legionary origin<sup>11</sup>.

Let us examine a recently published inscription from Bkhara, in Syria. This inscription, that is not completely legible, is a dedication to the tetrarchs made by a *praepositus* of the *equites promoti indigenae*, who was also at the head of another unit of *indigenae* troops, whose name is illegible. The missing word in the text was probably *sagittarii*. The inscription probably records the construction of the fort where the *equites promoti indigenae* had to be quartered or alternatively, it records only their installation in the structure. It is important to remark that Bkhara must be identified with *Auatha* that, according to *ND. Or. XXXII 22* was the base of the *equites promoti indigenae*<sup>12</sup>.

This supports the idea that most of the military organisation mentioned in the *Notitia Dignitatum* dates back to the period of Diocletian.

The architectural features of the Bkhara fort seem diocletianic: the structure has fan-shaped and u-shaped towers. Compared to late antique standards, the Bkhara fort is quite large: a rectangle of 97 x 154 m<sup>13</sup>.

Bkhara, one of the military sites along the *Strata Diocletiana*, is quite close to Palmyra. This could lead to think that the *equites promoti indigenae* of Bkhara came from the legion based in Palmyra, the *I Illyricorum*, whose camp had been built in the tetrarchic age<sup>14</sup>. If it were so, an important stage of the military organisation in Phoenicia in the tetrarchic age would be at-

11. B. Isaac, "The army in the late roman East: the Persian wars and the defence of the Byzantine provinces", in: A. Cameron (ed.), *The Byzantine and early Islamic Near East. III: States, Resources, Army*, Princeton 1995, 145 = B. Isaac, *The Near East under Roman Rule*, Amsterdam 1998, 458 has rightly pointed out that the units called *indigenae* "were clearly units without a name or number, unlike the legions and auxiliary units. Other units of *equites* with standard names are still qualified to the extent that no duplication occurs within a given duchy... The men (sc. *Equites indigenae*) were recruited locally". Already Hoffmann, *Die spätrömische Bewegungsheer*, 248 considered *indigenae* units recruited locally. See also J. Bujard, "La fortification de Kastron Mayfa'a / Umm ar-Rasas", in: G. Bisheh (ed.), *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan*, V, Amman 1995, 247-248.

12. T. Bauzou, "Epigraphie et toponymie: le cas de la Palmyrène du sud-ouest", *Syria* 69 (1993) 46-48.

13. Bauzou, "Epigraphie et toponymie", 46. In general about the great attention we must employ before attributing all the military structures who look diocletianic to Diocletian see M. Reddé, "Dioclézien et les fortifications militaires de l'antiquité tardive. Quelques considérations de méthode", *AnTard* 3 (1995) 91-124.

14. *CIL* III 133 = 6661.

tested, with the instalment of a new legion at Palmyra and the parting from it of the specialised unit of the *equites promoti*.

But, as already hinted, in order to establish the origin of the *equites promoti indigenae* we must take a different direction. In *Pap. Columb VII 188*, dated 320, a one *Valerius Aion* calls himself ἑκατόνταρχος οὐξιλλ-λατίωνος ἰππέων προμώτων λεγίωνος β' Τραιανῆς. In this papyrus, as in the *Pap. Panop. 2 (300)* and in *P. Grenf II 34 (302)*, the *equites promoti* are ascribed specifically to a particular legion. There is no mention of the fact that they could be called *indigenae*. So, even when the legionary *equites promoti* were detached from their mother unit, they continued to specify the legion they belonged to.

On the other hand, the Bkhara inscription shows that the word *indigenae* was already used in the tetrarchic age. In it there is no mention of the fact that the *equites promoti indigenae* belonged to a particular legion. Consequently, it seems that the name *indigenae* had been given to a different kind of *equites promoti*. We may assume that the Bkhara *equites promoti indigenae*, as well as the other units of *equites promoti indigenae* of the Near East, didn't come from the legions stationed in those provinces, but were units recruited locally<sup>15</sup>.

We may now assume the existence of four different kinds of units of *equites promoti*, the legionary, the *illyrian*, the *indigenae*, and the *equites promoti* who were a special unit of the mobile army<sup>16</sup>.

A new important discovery sheds light upon the Roman military presence in the areas on the fringe of the desert, near the fort of Qasr el Thuraiya: a stretch of a Roman paved road running from Qasr el Thuraiya in the direction of Umm al Rasas three kilometres long was detected. Along this road, a presumed anepigraphic milestone was noted.

Besides, from Qasr el Thuraiya a road reached the point where the slope towards wadi Su'eida, a tributary of wadi Mujib, started. Ruins of

15. Then it is essential to stress that, even though the *equites promoti indigenae* were quartered at *Auatha* in the same years when the fort of the *legio I Illyricorum* was built at Palmyra, they were not a detachment of the legion. This doesn't imply that the *legio I Illyricorum* didn't have any detachment settled in smaller military installations along the border. On the legionary detachments along the border between Sura and Palmyra, see M. Conrad, "Research on the roman and the early Byzantine frontier in north Syria", *JRA* 12 (1999) 392-410, esp. 404; Eadem, *Der Spättrömische Limes in Syrien. Resafa, V*, Mainz 2001.

16. It is to be remarked that the units called *equites promoti*, who were part of the mobile army, are thought to have originated from the cavalry of the praetorians. See M.P. Speidel, *Riding for Caesar*, London 1994, 73.

the road are visible, and one if its sides, well built and well preserved, can be seen from the highest point before the slope in the wadi starts. At first sight it can be taken for a dam<sup>17</sup>.

We can easily argue that this route crossed the wadi and reached Qasr el Al and the military area south of the wadi, the hinge of which was the legionary fortress of el Lejjun, basis of the *legio IV Martia*. The role played by Qasr el Thuraiya both as an important connection point on a north-south axis, and as a garrison watching over the tributary of the wadi, is now evident. It is now proven the existence of at least part of that alternative road to the *via nova Traiana*, conjectured by F. Koucky following Brünnow and von Domaszewski. The segment between Thuraiya and Qasr el-Al skirted the wadi Mujib, and it became a most important route in winter, when traffic along the flooded *via nova Traiana* in the wadi Mujib was not possible<sup>18</sup>.

The date of the installation of *IV Martia* at Bethoro, identified with the site of el Lejun, has been recently set thanks to the excavations lead by T. Parker. A coin dated back to 304/5 was found in the foundations of the primary legionary barracks. Consequently, we can presume that the fort had been built right at the end of the First Tetrarchy or some years later<sup>19</sup>. The military structures that formed a consistent system around Lejun seem contemporary, and a well-known inscription proves that Qasr Bshir was founded in the tetrarchic age<sup>20</sup>. It is important to remark that in this whole

17. D. Ben-Gad Hacohen, "והב בסופה וישבת ער" (Waheb be Suphah and the settled country of Ar.)" *Cathedra* 95 (2000) 15-21 (in Hebrew with abstract in English); Idem, "ערביקוס" (Arabic Coins) and "ויה למס (Via Limes Arabicus)", *Cathedra* 98 (2001) 159 (in Hebrew); C. Ben David-A. Klöner, "מסילות בארנון - דרך סלולה קדם רומית במראב" (Mesilot bearnon. Derech slula kedem romit bemoab)", forthcoming (in Hebrew). I want to thank C. Ben David for being such a good guide for D. Graf, I. Roll, and myself in the area of the new discoveries, in September 2000, and for supplying to me the publications mentioned in this note.

18. F. Koucky, "Survey of the Limes Zone", in: S.T. Parker (ed.), *The Roman Frontier in Central Jordan. Interim Report on the Central Limes Arabicus Project*, Oxford 1987, 74-75 who conjectured also that the route from Lejjun reached Qasr Bshir and Thuraiya in order to avoid the muddy area near Qatranah. It is important to point out that at our times in this region the wadi Su'eida is dry (personal communication by C. Ben David). D.F. Graf, "The *via militaris* in Arabia", *DOP* 51 (1997) 276-277 cast doubts about the existence of a continuous line of communication between Lejjun and Qasr el Thuraiya.

19. J.W. Betlyon, "Coins, commerce and politics: coins from the Limes Arabicus project 1975-1986", in: S.T. Parker (ed.), *The Roman Frontier in Central Jordan: Interim Report on the Limes Arabicus Project 1980-1985*, Oxford 1987, 657, coin n. 8.

20. S.T. Parker, *Romans and Saracens*, Winona Lake 1986, 58-85; *CIL* III 14149.

21. Parker, *Romans and Saracens*, 48-86; Idem (ed.), *The Roman Frontier in Central Jordan*.

area there is no trace of a relevant Roman military presence before late antiquity<sup>21</sup>.

It appears relevant that also at Qasr el Thuraiya the few surface sherds found can be dated back from the end of the 3rd century to the mid 5th<sup>22</sup>.

It cannot be excluded that the Umm al Rasas military structure was built before the tetrarchic age, in the 3rd century. A typological resemblance of the Umm al Rasas fort with the Qaryat el-Hadid fort in Jordan northern steppe, has been pointed out<sup>23</sup>. It is possible that the fort of Qaryat el-Hadid was founded in the age of Gallienus<sup>24</sup>. On the other hand a study on the ceramic material seemingly points out that Umm al Rasas wasn't founded before the 3rd century, and that its construction may be dated back at the very end of the 3rd century or in the early 4th<sup>25</sup>.

An inscription, unfortunately fragmentary that can be dated to 306/307 through the mention of the consular year was brought to light during the excavations. Only few words are legible, among which: *dedicatum... consolatu domini nostri Fl. Severi Augusti ...secundum sententiam*<sup>26</sup>.

A Latin inscription in such marginal areas must belong to the military world. A working hypothesis sufficiently founded is that this inscription records the construction, or an important reconstruction of the fort. Especially the mention of a *sententia*, surely of the emperors, has to be regarded as a significant clue. It can be compared with the *iudicium* of the *principes*, that prescribed the construction of military structures in 371<sup>27</sup>.

Therefore, we could presume this to be the age of the deployment of the *equites promoti indigenae* at Umm al Rasas. This would allow us to make an interesting comparison with the Bkhara text, from which it seems

22. Parker, *Romans and Saracens*, 50-51.

23. Bujard, "La fortification de Kastron Mayfa'a/Umm ar-Rasas", 241-248, with a study of the ceramic material by M.Joguin, *ibidem*, 248-249. See also D. Kennedy - D. Riley, *Rome's Desert Frontier from the Air*, London 1990, 189-193.

24. It is generally thought that an inscription of 253/259 found at a Qa'lat Zerqa, few kilometres away from Qaryat el-Hadid, recording the construction of a fort and the moving of troops from Palestine to Arabia, actually comes from Qaryat el-Hadid. But see the reservations by D. Kennedy, *The Roman Army in Jordan*, London 2000, 98-99. See also Idem, "Qaryat al-Hadid: a 'Lost' Roman Military Site in Northern Jordan", *Levant* 34 (2002) 99-110.

25. Bujard, "La fortification".

26. D. Scarpatti, "Un'iscrizione latina da Umm al Rasas", *LA* 41 (1991) 363-364.

27. *CIL* III 3653. Cf. *PAES* 233 = *CIL* III 88 = *ILS* 773. One of the most recurrent meanings of *sententia*, as well as of *iudicium*, is "to deliberate on a problem", "judgement", "deliberation". See H. Heumann - E. Seckel, *Handlexicon zu den Quellen der römischen Recht*, tenth edition, Graz 1958, 294-297; 534. See also *C. Th.* XVI,2,18; VIII, 1,11; VII,20,2,62. I thank Prof. G. Crifò for making this point clear to me.

to emerge also that the *equites promoti indigenae* were deployed there in the age of the first tetrarchy.

One last point needs to be emphasised: the Umm al Rasas fort is quite large (158 x 139 m), if compared to the standards of late antiquity. It could be supposed that it was built around the middle of the 3rd century, and that the *equites promoti indigenae* took the place of a more important unit<sup>28</sup>.

Nevertheless, the hypothesis that the *equites promoti indigenae* were small units could be well grounded if we could assess that they came from the legionary cavalry. The information we gather from the papyri of Panopolis on the effectives of the *equites promoti* of the Egyptian legions lead to small figures. According to a scholar this military unit had less than a hundred and fifty men, but more recently it was argued that it had only half of it, seventy-seven men<sup>29</sup>.

But, as we have already seen, the *equites promoti indigenae* were forces locally recruited; it is therefore clear that any comparison with the legionary *equites promoti* in terms of dimensions of the units becomes arbitrary.

On the other hand, it is interesting to remark that we have proofs of other forts of *equites promoti indigenae* that were quite large. The Bkhara fort is 97 x 154 m<sup>30</sup>. At Sadaqa (*Zodocatha* in the *ND. Or.* XXXIV 24) a building of 120 x 80 m has been located, with projecting rectangular towers at the corners, and intervals along the walls<sup>31</sup>.

As to the fort of the *equites promoti indigenae* attested in the *Notitia Dignitatum* (*Or.* XXXVII 18) at *Speluncae*, it must be reminded that it is traditionally identified with Deir el Kahf, because Kahf means caves in

28. Scarpati, "Un'iscrizione latina".

29. More precisely, they were a hundred and forty-nine for Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, 187-188. On the other hand, according to his calculations on the number of rations, R. Duncan-Jones, "Pay and numbers in Diocletian's army", *Chiron* 8 (1978) 541-560 = Idem, *Structure and Scale in the Roman Economy*, Cambridge 1990, 105-117, gets to a total amount of 77 and 3/4. See also Tomlin, "The legions in late empire", 170-172, who points out that the numbers in the papyri are actually shares and not recipients: the officers and the NCOs received higher donatives than the soldiers.

30. Bauzou, "Épigraphie et toponymie", 46.

31. D.F. Graf, "The *via nova traiana* in Arabia Petraea", in: *The Roman and Byzantine Near East*, Ann Arbor 1995, 250; S. Gregory, *Roman Military Architecture on the Eastern Frontier*, Amsterdam 1995-1997, 395-397.

32. R. Brünnow, "Die kastelle des arabischen Limes", in: *Florilegium Melchior de Vogüé*, Paris 1909, 70.

33. *PAES* 228 = *CIL* III 14380.



Arabic<sup>32</sup>. At Deir al Kahf an inscription attesting the construction, or the reconstruction of the fort in 306 was found<sup>33</sup>. But this fort is much smaller than those at Umm al Rasas, Bkhara, and Sadaqa. It is nearly squared, its sides are 60 m long. It seems it had two floors, and this might lead to posit a garrison of 400-500 men<sup>34</sup>.

Some doubts have been raised on the identification of Speluncae with Deir el Kahf, because Kahf appears to be too common a place-name in that area<sup>35</sup>.

In conclusion, the units of the *equites promoti indigenae* of the Near East were, at least in origin, large enough.

This documentation is of a certain interest, and it supports what has been recently assessed: not all the 4th century units were necessarily extremely small<sup>36</sup>.

## Conclusions

The existence of a route that from Umm al Rasas lead to south of wadi Su'eida, being a link to different military structures, seems to support the classical theory of Brünnow and Von Domaszewki. According the two

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34. D. Kennedy - D. Riley, *Rome's Desert Frontier from the Air*, London 1990, 179.

35. D. Kennedy - S. Gregory, *Sir Aurel Stein's Limes Report*, Oxford 1985, 413; H.I. MacAdam, "Epigraphy and the Notitia Dignitatum", in: D.H. French - C.S. Lightfoot (ed.), *The Eastern Frontier of the Roman Empire*, Oxford 1989, 302-303.

36. See the important study by N. Hodgson, "The late-Roman Plan at South Shields and the Size and Status of the Late-Roman Army", in: N. Gudea (ed.), *Roman Frontier Studies XVII*, Zalău 1999, 547-554 remarking at p. 550 that "the persuasive idea that the fourth century frontier units were generally of extremely small size can thus be shown to be a myth. Just as in the Principate, forts came in all sizes". On the size of the forts of the cavalry of non legionary origin on the Danubian border, i.e. the *equites promoti* and the *equites Dalmatae*, see Z. Visy, *Der pannonische Limes in Ungarn*, Stuttgart 1988. In particular, on the fort of the *equites promoti* at Matrica (Szazhalombatta), that measured 180 x 180 m, see P. Kovacs, "Excavations in the roman fort at Szazhalombatta (Matrica), 1993-1995", in: W. Groenmann-van Waateringe - B.L. van Beek - W.J.K. Willems - S.L. Wynia (ed.), *Roman Frontier Studies XVI*, Oxford 1997, 425-427. In general, see T. Coello, *Unit sizes in the Late Roman Army*, Oxford 1996 who, on p. 41 rightly insists on the need to be cautious, as Duncan-Jones before him (see above n. 28), before assigning the whole empire the small figures extracted from the Papyri of Panopolis. In particular, the papyri could reflect a particular situation, a weakening of the cadres due to the losses suffered in the two Egyptian campaigns of Galerius and Diocletian.

37. R. Brünnow - A. von Domaszewski, *Die provincia Arabia*, Strassburg 1904-1909.

scholars, there was a military route on the fringe of the desert running parallel to the *via nova Traiana*<sup>37</sup>.

However it is not sure whether there was a continuous road parallel to the *via nova Traiana* between Ziza and Udruh. In the area near the wadi Hasa, consistent sections of this route have not been found. Doubts have been raised about the existence of a continuous road connecting Ziza and Umm al Rasas; furthermore, the connection among the forts of Jurf-ed Darawish, Dajaniya, and Udruh, is seen as problematic<sup>38</sup>.

An accurate inquiry in the area of central Jordan has shown that the elaborate military system centred on the legionary fort of Lejjun was founded at the end of the tetrarchy and in the following years<sup>39</sup>. We are now confident enough to affirm that also the area that lies between Umm al Rasas and Thuraiya and stretches itself to the southern part of the wadi Su'eida, was object of the imperial attention in the same period.

In the *Onomasticon*, not only it is affirmed that Umm al Rasas was a *phourion* with a garrison of soldiers, but also that a treacherous place with ravines, called *Arnona*, was garrisoned by soldiers. The terrifying nature of the place required a continuous guard<sup>40</sup>. *Arnona* was the ancient name given to the wadi Mujib as a whole, included tributaries. Consequently the wadi Su'eida too was called *Arnona*<sup>41</sup>. Qasr Thuraiya, next to the wadi Su'eida, probably was part of the system described by Eusebius. If we accept the years around 295 as a date for the composition of the *Onomasticon*, we could infer the existence of a military presence at Umm al Rasas and in the installations near the Mujib already before the tetrarchy. But unfortunately it is not possible to date exactly the *Onomasticon*. It could have even been written later, at the time of Licinius<sup>42</sup>.

38. G.W. Bowersock, "Limes Arabicus", *HSCP* 80 (1976) 219-229; Graf, "The *via militaris* in Arabia".

39. See n. 22.

40. Eusebius, *Onomasticon* 10-11.

41. Ben-Gad Hacohen, "Waheb in Suphah", 18-19.

42. T.D. Barnes, "The Composition of Eusebius' *Onomasticon*", *JThS* 26 (1975) 412-415 dates the *Onomasticon* around 295, pointing out that in the last entry of Petra in the *Onomasticon* the city is not mentioned anymore as part of *Arabia*, but of *Palaestina*. This could mean that the city had underwent an administrative change while Eusebius was writing the *Onomasticon*. The methodology used by Barnes was questioned by P. Mayerson, "«Palaestina» vs «Arabia» in the Byzantine sources", *ZPE* 56 (1984) 223-230 = Idem, *Monks, Martyrs, Soldiers and Saracens*, 224-231. Taking everything into account, we must assert that the *Onomasticon* cannot be dated after the time of Licinius. As a matter of fact, this work never mentions Christianity as the official religion.

In late antiquity great attention was given to the strengthening of all the military apparatus, from Umm al Rasas to Lejjun. This was part of the policy of Diocletian in the Near East: in order to stress the restoration of the Roman authority, he strove to have the control on the most marginal areas<sup>43</sup>. The outer road alternative to the *via nova Traiana* had to be provided with military structures. Umm al Rasas, Qasr el Thuraiya, and Qasr el Al were part of this organisation. The road run in areas Eusebius describes as inaccessible and close to the desert. It is clear that in such secluded areas the nomad banditry was particularly feared<sup>44</sup>.

Besides, the strengthening of the Roman military presence in the Near East most marginal areas, between the Euphrates and the Red Sea, was due also to the necessity of preventing raids from the Arabian tribes allied with the Persians, or in any case united in confederations. Since the time of Diocletian, and even few decades before, the Arabian tribes had emerged as a troubling element in the scenario of the Near East. It is important to note that since then these tribes had a wide range of action, they could strike areas away from the ones they lived in<sup>45</sup>.

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43. Lewin, "Diocletian". The general idea on the late antique period had already been briefly expressed by B. Isaac, "The eastern frontier", in: A. Cameron - P. Garnsey (ed.), *Cambridge ancient History*, Cambridge 1998, 455: "Army moved into the marginal areas on an unprecedented scale". See F. Millar, *The Roman Near East, 31 BC - 337 AD*, Cambridge Mass. 1993, 186-189.

44. On banditry in general, see B. Isaac, "Bandits in Judaea and Arabia", *HSCPh* 88 (1984) 171-203 = Idem, *The Near East under Roman Rule*, 122-158 (with a postscript); Idem, *The Limits of the Roman Empire*, Oxford 1990, 213-218.

45. The importance of this new factor is pointed out by Isaac, "The eastern frontier", 444-447; 459. See also Millar, *The Roman near East*, 428-436. In their turn, the Romans employed some Arabian tribes against the Persians. It has to be stressed the extreme mobility of the Arabian tribes who were in the pay both of the Romans and of the Persians as allies fighting a common enemy. In a famous inscription dated 328, the Arabian chief Imru' al-Qays tells he had fought in areas of the Arabian peninsula that were at a great distance one from the other. See I. Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century*, Washington, D.C. 1984, 53. On the creation of new Arabian confederations, see G.W. Bowersock, *Roman Arabia*, Cambridge Mass. 1983, 132-142; see also the general concept clearly expressed by D. Kennedy - D. Riley, *Rom's Desert Frontier from the Air*, London 1990, 38. Parker, *Romans and Saracens*, 8-9; Idem, "Peasants, pastoralist and Pax Romana. A different view", *BASOR* 265 (1987) 35-51 thinks that the Roman military presence in the steppe was meant to monitor the seasonal movements and the raids of tribes along the frontier.

## ADDENDA

Before the publication of the present paper I was able to receive a copy of an important paper by its author: P. Brennan, Divide and Fall: the separation of legionary cavalry and the fragmentation of the Roman Empire, in T.W. Hillard et alii (Edd.), *Ancient History in a Modern University*, 2, Grand Rapids 1998, 238-244. Professor Brennan gives a proof of the fact that the legionary *promoti* could have had the denomination of *indigenae*. In ND Or. XXXI,30; 31 (ed. O. Seeck) two different units are listed: *equites promoti indigenae*... at XXXI, 30 and *legio tertia Diocletiana, Ombos*. at XXXI, 31. Brennan noted that “the best manuscript tradition reads *Equites Promoti Indigenae Legionis Tertiae Diocletiano Ambos*. Though Seeck’s edition converted this entry into two units, one of unsited *Promoti* and another a detachment of III *Diocletiana* sited at Ombos, such a change adds a gratuitous problem to the text – there are now nineteen units in the chapter listing, but only eighteen units noted in the *insignia* at the beginning of the chapter.” Brennan’s acute observations might establish, contrary to what has been argued in the pages of the present paper, that all the units called *equites promoti indigenae* had their origin from the legionary cavalry.

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