The Laguatan: A Libyan Tribal Confederation in the Late Roman Empire

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Abstract
The tribal grouping known as the Laguatan, Leuathaes and Lawata in various late Roman and Arabic sources are identified as a powerful confederation of Libyan tribes. The confederation comprised two main types of tribes. On the one hand there were neo-berbers who migrated from the east to the west through the Libyan desert in late antiquity; on the other, there were the original inhabitants of the desert oases, of Cyrenaica and of Tripolitania who formed alliances with the newcomers. The growth of the confederation had a destabilising effect on the Roman frontiers and severe raids were made against the more Romanised areas, notably the territoria of the coastal cities.

Through the sedentary agriculture of the allied Libyans, based on settlements such as Ghirza, and new conquest and exploitation, the Laguatan established an economic and agricultural regime largely independent of Rome. It is inappropriate, therefore, to view the Laguatan simply as camel-riding nomads as has been done in the past, nor was the diffusion of the camel a decisive factor in the timing of the onset of their raids. It is argued, on the contrary, that the camel was present at a much earlier date, that it was mainly used as a pack- and farm animal in pre-Islamic times and that the horse was the main instrument of the Laguatan in warfare and raiding. The Laguatan were the instigators of a Libyan cultural, religious and political revival and their history is of great importance to an understanding of the late Roman and Islamic eras.

Introduction
The confederation of Libyan tribes which forms the subject of this paper played a major role in one of the most turbulent phases of North African history. The Laguatan witnessed the decline of Rome, the brief Vandal dominance, the Byzantine reconquest and the coming of Islam. Their part in this historical drama is made doubly significant by the fact that they survived the upheavals and provide a vital element of continuity.

The tribal ethnic is known from several sources, though under various different spellings. Following the excellent new edition of the Iohannidos of Corippus, produced by Diggle and Goodyear (1970), it is clear that the preferred and intended forms used in the epic poem were Laguatan and, a Libyan plural form, Ilaguas (see Appendix).

Although the existence of the confederation has been noted previously, apart from the thesis by Jerary there has not been the detailed discussion which the available evidence merits (Bates 1914, 67–68, 71; Courtois 1955, 102–104, 344–350; Desanges 1962, 82, 101–102; Brogan 1975, 282–286; Jerary 1976; Camps 1980, 124–127). In the first place, the Laguatan have been considered distinct from another tribal confederation also known in the late Roman sources, the Austuriani. It will be argued below that the Austuriani and Laguatan were one and the same, being different historical phases of the same confederation. Secondly, there has been a tendency to treat all the tribal names encountered in the primary sources as of equal importance, although this is demonstrably incorrect (Desanges 1962). Many tribes can be shown to have been sub-groups of confederations or of large ethnic groupings. Berber societies are notable for their hierarchical and segmental structures. The tribe functions on several levels simultaneously. At one extreme it is fragmented and decentralised into individual family units. Yet the same structure allows for large scale confederation in particular circumstances, such as when faced by an external threat (Gellner 1969, 35–69). The Laguatan were an amalgam of old and new tribes and the confederation was, on occasion, extremely widespread. But it is also important to realise that there was no permanent, centralised control and no overall chieftain, except in wartime. In normal conditions the

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constituent sub-tribes were largely autonomous, though confederation remained latent. This underlying, segmented structure is important in helping to explain the sporadic nature of the threat posed by the Laguatan. Roman treaty relations seem to have been conducted with individual tribes, rather than with the confederation as a whole. When we refer, then, to the Austuriani or the Laguatan we are not dealing with a single tribe, but with a complex alliance which was always latent and, when activated, very large. However, the exact composition changed through time as the fortunes of the Laguatan fluctuated. It is perhaps significant that the same processes of large scale confederation of the peripheral tribes beset other Roman frontiers in late antiquity (Mann 1974).

A third major problem with some previous analyses of the Laguatan is that they have tended to be classified as 'nomades chameliers' (Gautier 1952, 188-214; Desanges 1962, 17, 82; Pringle 1981, 15-16) and have been judged in terms of their propensity for destructive raiding. I shall not dispute the fact that these tribes possessed large numbers of camels, but the connection which has sometimes been made between the diffusion of the camel and the onset of the raids is spurious and obscures the true significance of the event (Gsell 1926; Leschi 1942; Guey 1939; Gautier 1952, 182-185). In fact the date of the introduction of the domesticated camel into North Africa has now been put into the late first millenium BC (Brogan 1954; Demougeot 1960), and this is an additional reason for a revision of received ideas on the Laguatan and the importance of the camel in the pre-Islamic era. Moreover, many of the sedentarised Libyan tribes of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica joined forces with the Laguatan and the name of the confederation was not limited solely to nomadic people.

The Laguatan from the Third to Eighth Centuries AD

Nonetheless, one of the fundamental points to be established about the Laguatan tribes is that the dominant faction were 'neo-berbères' who migrated westwards between the third and eighth centuries AD (Brogan 1975, 282-284; Camps 1980, 124-128). This movement is reflected in the main historical references to Laguatan and Austuriani. In the AD 260s Marmaridae tribes attacked the Pentapolis and, after the Prefect of Egypt, Probus, had defeated them, a dedication to Claudius Gothicus (AD 269-270) was erected in the refounded Cyrene (SEG ix, 9). The 'Marmaridae' in this context may well have had a connection with the Laguatan tribes.

Serious trouble was apparently not anticipated in Tripolitania at this date, judging from the day records and the reports sent in from outposts which have been found at the Roman fort of Bu Njem (Gholaia). The appearance of a single Garamantian riding a donkey at one of these outposts is typical of the mundane events reported and the garrison of Bu Njem was evidently withdrawn c. AD 260, whilst these peaceful conditions still prevailed (Marichal 1979, 448-451). This proved to have been a premature judgement, for by the 290s the Laguatan had reached the Syritic hinterland and threatened Tripolitania. The Tetrarch Maximian was obliged to make two campaigns against them (Corippus, i, 480-483; v, 178-180; vii, 530-533).

A number of fourth century inscriptions from Sabratha and Lepcis Magna attest major reorganisation of the frontier defences and warfare (IRT 103, 111, 470?, 562, 563, 565, 570; Reynolds 1955, 130). The troubles were clearly prolonged if sporadic. The only literary record concerns the raids of 363-365 and is bound up in Ammianus' account of official corruption (Ammianus Marcellinus, xxviii, 6, 1-5; 6, 10-14). These destructive raids were carried out by the Austuriani following the execution by burning of one of their chiefs, Stachao. He had apparently entered the province in peacetime to spy out the land and stir up unrest. His punishment was laid down by law (Codex Theodosianus, vii, 1, 1). The failure of diplomatic suasion and the death of Stachao led to the gathering of a large confederation in the subsequent raids, against which no adequate military response was made. As well as carrying off vast amounts of booty, the 'barbarians' also chopped down olive orchards and
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vineyards and killed those who had not fled to the cities (xxviii, 6, 13, cunctisque (nisti quos fuga discriminibus eximeret) interemptis, praedas quas antehac reliquerant, avexerunt arboribus exsectis et vitibus.) These first raids were against the territoria of the cities, which extended well into the Gebel (di Vita-Eyrard 1979). In subsequent attacks the cities themselves were besieged (xxviii, 6, 14; IRT 103, 111).

The same style of raiding and agricultural vandalism was repeated in Cyrenaica in the early fifth century AD and was recorded in considerable detail by Synesius, a member of the landed gentry of Cyrene who became bishop of Ptolemais in c. 410 (Goodchild 1976b; Fitzgerald 1926, introduction; Tomlin 1979, 259–266). His many letters span a long period of Ausuriani (sic) raids, c. 401–413. He describes how the enemy came,

countless as the leaves and flowers in Spring. Alas! for the young men we have lost. Alas! for our crops which we hoped for in vain. We have planted our fields for the fires lit by our enemy. Our wealth for the most of us was our cattle, our herds of camels and of horses... All are lost, all are driven away... I write to you shut up behind ramparts and besieged' (Fitzgerald 1926, Letter 130).

In another letter (125) he again mentions the depredations of the rural areas,

the enemy has occupied Battia... he has burnt the threshing floors, sold the women into slavery and as to the men there was no quarter given.'

Time and again he mentions the presence of the enemy on the Cyrenaican plateau (Letters 13, 57, 62, 67, 69, 78, 94, 95, 104, 107, 108, 113, 130, 132, 133, 134), the importance of horses in combatting them (13, 78, 104, 108, 125, 130, 132, 133), the impotence of the regular troops (69, 107, 122, 125, 130, 132) and the inadequate armament of the Home-Guard style militia he had helped to organise (78, 104, 107, 108, 122, 125, 133). The tone of some of the letters verges on the hysterical and in one of the latest (Letter 69), he records that the enemy had

spread en masse over the country. All is lost, all is destroyed. At the moment of writing there is nothing left but the cities, nothing.'

The Catastasis or sermon of Synesius fills in further details, such as the fact that the Ausuriani needed 5,000 camels, which were probably rustled, to carry way their booty after one particular raid (Fitzgerald 1930, II, Catastasis I, columns 1568–1569; 1572).

There is evidence for further Ausuriani razzias against Tripolitania in this same period (IRT 480; Reynolds 1977, 13), but they are not mentioned in historical sources. Politically and economically, the provinces of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica had become backwaters. Even before the Vandals arrived in Tripolitania the deep hinterland of the coastal cities had been losing touch with Rome. The Vandals found Libyan tribes in control of the interior and were content to rule from the coastal centres. Nonetheless, there was trouble between them and the western Laguatan. In AD 523, Cabaon led a confederation of tribes in revolt against Vandal overlordship and won a great victory over the formidable Vandal cavalry (Procopius, Wars, iii, 8, 15–29). By the time of the Byzantine reconquest, AD 533, Lepcis itself was abandoned and the Laguatan tribes occupied the Msellata region (Procopius, Buildings, vi, 4, 6–10).

The early history of the Byzantine reoccupation of Tripolitania was comparatively peaceful, with subsidies, treaties and the 'customary insignia of office' being granted to individual Laguatan chiefs (Procopius, Wars, iii, 25, 7. Pringle 1981, 9–16, 23–50, is the best modern analysis of the Byzantine frontier policy). Contingents from the Laguatan sub-tribes even served alongside the Byzantine forces, though they were of dubious loyalty. The Ifuraces and Mecales with Solomon in 544 defected to the enemy in the battle in which he lost his life! (Corippus, iii, 410–415). The first serious failures of Byzantine diplomacy involved the tribes of southern Byzacium and Tripolitania, some of whom were permanently confederated under the leadership of Antalas. Initially he had been a loyal ally, receiving subsidy payments (Procopius, Wars, iv, 22, 7–11; Corippus, ii, 374–376; iv, 358–375). When
his brother was summarily executed and his own subsidy stopped, he led his tribes in revolt, considering himself the victim of Byzantine duplicity. The tribal heartlands of Antalas have generally been assumed to lie in the Tunisian Dorsal (Courtois 1955, 341-343; Pringle 1981, 15). However, in view of the close links between his own tribesmen and those of Tripolitania (some of them are indeed called Laguatan) and, also, because of their devotion to the cult of the Libyan Ammon, it is more likely that initially his centres were in the oases of the Djerid and Gafsa region in south-western Tunisia. It is significant that Antalas exercised his political power partly through his religious charisma, derived from an oracle of Ammon (Corippus, iii, 75–155; 158–170).

The troubles were exacerbated by the conduct of the new dux of Tripolitania, Sergius, on his arrival at Lepcis in AD 543. He was met by a deputation of Laguatan sub-chiefes, 80 of whom were allowed to enter Lepcis to renew their treaties and to receive the customary symbols of office, which were accorded to allied chiefs (Procopius, Wars, iii, 25, 7). At a banquet they presented some grievances to Sergius, including the complaint that the Byzantine troops had been pillaging their crops. But Sergius refused to listen, one of the chiefs grabbed at his sleeve and was killed by the guards. A massacre then ensued from which only one of the chiefs escaped alive. The outrage was made worse on account of the solemn oaths taken by Sergius guaranteeing their safe-conduct (Procopius, Wars, iv, 21, 2–11). The value of Byzantine verbal treaties was destroyed and the full force of the confederation was united to avenge the treacherous killing of the 79 chieftains. In alliance with Antalas, they broke through into Byzacium and penetrated as far north as Laribus (Wars, iv, 22, 12–20; Corippus, passim). The situation was complicated by army mutinies and peace was not restored until 548, following the hard-won victories of John Troglitas. In the aftermath of the war there may well have been reprisals against the more accessible of the tribal centres. The temple at Ghirza, whose significance is discussed below, was destroyed by fire at about this time. Thereafter, Byzantine control seems to have reverted to treaty relationships with individual tribes. There is no evidence for a reoccupation or garrisoning of the Tripolitanian hinterland but the confederation seems to have taken a long time to recover from the defeat.

In Cyrenaica, Goodchild (1953, 195–206) believed that the Byzantine government continued to control the same frontier line as that of the earlier Roman province. In truth there is no firm proof that Byzantine troops continued to be stationed on the line of the Darb el Hag, nor indeed on the Cyrenaican plateau, up to the Arab invasions. Several factors suggest that some of the best agricultural lands were occupied by Laguatan, albeit that they may have acknowledged Byzantine hegemony. Syennus’ pessimistic account and the evident decline of most of the cities must be taken with the direct evidence relating to the first Arab campaigns. Ibn Abd-al-Hakam’s account of the AD 642 campaign gives an insight into the political reality, instead of being opposed by organised Byzantine resistance, ‘Amr Ibn-al-Aasi swept across the Cyrenaican plateau to Barca (or Barce) and entirely ignored the Byzantine forces, who along with the ‘rich men of the province’, had withdrawn to make their last stand at Tauchira (Toera) (Gateau 1947, 35–37; Goodchild 1967, 255–261 especially 258 for a translation of the other main source, John of Nikiu). According to Abd-al-Hakam, the people of Barca were Louata and had been occupying the lands of the Pentapolis for a long time. It would not appear then that direct Byzantine rule extended much beyond the coastal cities by the seventh century, although treaty relations must have been maintained with the inland tribes. In these circumstances, the Arab drive for Barca was entirely logical. By forcing a settlement upon the Laguatan of the region, the Arabs isolated the Byzantine garrison from its nominal tribal allies and established a basis for their own political domination of the region. To ’Amr Ibn-al-Aasi the whereabouts of the Byzantine dux was of secondary importance.

Following the Arab conquest of the Maghreb, the Louata or Lawata and their principal sub-tribes (Hawara and Nefusa) are recorded in many diverse locations. Ibn Khaldun, for
instance, noted them in the following places from east to west; in the Western desert near the Nile Delta and in the major oases (Siwa, Bahariya, Farafra, Dakha, Kharga) (De Slane 1926/1956, 235–236), in Cyrenaica (ibid. 236), in Tripolitania (Gebel Msellata, Nefusa, Gefara, Nefzaoua) (ibid. 231, 280–281), in Tunisia (Sfax and Kairouan regions) and in Algeria (oases of Zab, Aures mountains and Bougie) (ibid. 232–236). Although this information dates to some centuries after the Arab conquest, it does indicate both the origins and the eventual westward extent of the Laguatan confederation.

The Nature of the Laguatan

So much for the bare historical facts; we must now consider who the Laguatan actually were. The large scale of the confederation is clearest in the account of Corippus. The tribes gathered by Antalas and the Laguatan commander-in-chief, Ierna, are described as gentilibus innumeris (ii, 7) and a selection are named specifically: Fretes, Sinusdisae, Silvaceae, Naffur, Silcadenit, Silvaizan, Macares, the people of Silzactae, of Caunes, of wadi Vadar, of Mounts Agalumnum and Macubius, of the infertile plains of Zerulis, the men from the hills of Gallica (the Tunisian Gebel) and Talanteis and the plain of Tillibaris (ii, 42–80). Messengers fetched in further tribes of the unconquered Ilaguas (ii, 84–88); the Muctonia manus (from the deserts of Tripolits), the men of Gadabis, of Digdiga and of Barcaei (Barca?), the Velaniade boatmen, Marmaridit tribes, men from Mount Geminus and uncultivated Zerquilis, from the Mountain of Nauusi or Navusi (Nefusa?) and from the savage country of Arzugin (ii, 116–148). In addition the following tribes are mentioned in the preparations for the subsequent battle; the Austur of the gentis Ilaguas (ii, 345), the Ifuraces (iv, 641) and a thousand other chiefs from the Syritic region (iv, 644, mille duces misere in proelis Syriest).

After their defeat in AD 546 by John Troglitas, the Laguatan rallied under a new military leader, Carcasan, who was the chief of the Ifuraces. Syritic cavalry were sent out to secure the aid of allied and subject tribes (vi, 191–192) and the final confederation included not only Laguatan, but other tribes as diverse as the Nasamonic cultivators of the Syritic shore, neighbours of the Garamantes and people from the borders of the Nile. Quis dicere gentes aut numero quaera? (vi, 195–201). As we have already noted, Procopius attests the presence of at least 80 Laguatan chieftainships in Tripolitania alone (Wars, iv, 21, 2–11). The confederated structure of the Laguatan cannot be denied, irrespective of the possible inaccuracies or anachronisms in Corippus' list.

Corippus recorded the presence of the Austur sub-tribe in the Laguatan armies and also used the word Austur as a synonym for Laguatan, thus establishing a clear connection between the Austuriani and the later confederation (Corippus, ii, 89–91, 209, 345; v, 172, 283–285). The Syritic oases must have been occupied by the Austurian in order for them to have directed raids against both Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. Yet it is here that the most important centres of the Laguatan were according to Corippus (late third century AD: v, 175–180; sixth century: vi, 104–148, 188–200). The Austurian, therefore, is the name by which the Laguatan were known up to at least the fifth century AD, probably on account of the military dominance of the Austur sub-tribe at that time.

A number of other tribes are specifically identified as Laguatan sub-tribes rather than allied or subject peoples. The Ifuraces (ii, 113–115; iii, 406–413; iv, 639–641; viii, 489–490; 648) and the Mecales/Imacles (ii, 75; iii, 410–412) are certainly in this category. The Ursiliani/Uceliana manus (Vegetius, epitome rei militaris, iii, 23; Corippus, ii, 75; vi, 390), the Anacutas (ii, 75) Silcadenit, Silvaceae, Silvaizan (ii, 52–63) are less certain. Many of the other names listed by Corippus can be tentatively identified with tribal ethnics known in earlier sources and relate to tribes which had been absorbed by the spread of the Laguatan, as for instance the Astrykes (ii, 75; vi, 391, 404, 431, 454, 464) and the Astrapikyes (Ptolemy, iv, 3, 6; 6, 6).
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The Westward Migration of the Laguatan
The eventual westward extension of the confederation into Algeria has already been mentioned, but there is important evidence relating to the origins of the dominant tribes and the process of their migration. The terms Marmaridae, Nasamon and Syrtica were used by Corippus as synonyms for Laguatan (compare, for example, vi, 507; vi, 552; vi 564). This was of course a poetic device, designed to avoid the endless repetition of the name Laguatan, but the implication of the chosen synonyms is that the Laguatan were associated, by Africans like Corippus, with the old Nasamonian territory and points further east, in spite of their dominance in Tripolitania and southern Byzacium in the sixth century AD. This implies a westward migration and it is unfortunate that there were no written Berber histories to record the events. By the time that Ibn Khaldun wrote, the process of verbal transmission had complicated matters by introducing mythical genealogies as a form of historical explanation. Unrealistic as these genealogies are, they are consistent on one point, namely that the Berbers emigrated from the east and a westward migration is an essential element of their oral history (De Slane 1926/1956, 1, 176–182). One of the sources quoted by Ibn Khaldun, Abu Omer-Ibn-Abd-el-Berr, dealt specifically with the origin of the Louata tribes (De Slane 1925/1956, 181–182). He stated that the Louata originated in Egypt and moved across the desert behind (that is, south of) Barca (here Cyrenaica). One branch took land in Tripolitania and another (the Nefza) other territory, presumably equivalent to the modern Nefzaoua in Tunisia. The tribe eventually reached Kairouan and beyond. There is then historical evidence for the migration of some of the tribes who made up the confederation. These ‘neo-berbères’ seem to have emigrated from the Western Egyptian and Libyan Deserts. In character this movement probably resembled earlier Berber migrations, such as that which took the Garamantes to the Fezzan c. 2000 BC (Daniels 1971, 284).

The migration of the Laguatan tribes and the spread of their confederation may hold the key to one of the perennial problems in Berber history, the division of the Berbers of the Maghreb into two groups in the Islamic era, the Botr and the Beranes (Gautier 1952, 215–244; Brogan 1975, 284–286; Camps 1980, 126–127). In a recent paper, Bulliet (1981, 105, 112–114) has suggested that the Botr might be identifiable with the agricultural peasantry of Tripolitania and southern Byzacium and that they moved west when Rome declined. This is clearly only a partial solution however, as it takes no account of the catalyst effect of the migratory Laguatan. As we have seen, the Laguatan confederation was made up of both neo-berbers and all the tribes they encountered and subjugated during their slow migration. One can largely correlate the geographic evidence for the spread of the Laguatan with the later distribution of the Botr (De Slane 1926/1956, 1, 168–182). The Beranes should in general be the old Berber populations who did not form alliances with the Laguatan super-tribe.

The route by which the Laguatan crossed the north-eastern Sahara is fixed by the physical geography. A chain of oases begins in the Western Desert with el-Kharga, Dakhla, Farafra, Bahariya, leading in to the oasis of Siwa, centre of the Libyan Ammon cult. These multiple oases were capable of sustaining large populations and even in Dynastic times they had posed a threat to the Egyptians of the Nile Valley (Chamoux 1953, 35–68). From Siwa the main routes are via Augila (the oasis centre of the Nasamones) to Zuila in the Fezzan and the Girofra via Zella (Bates 1914, 8–14; Rebuffat 1970a and 1970b). It is the same chain of oases which Herodotus pictured as stretching to the Atlantic (iv, 181–184) and along which the cult of Ammon spread (Rebuffat 1970b). Augila was an oracular centre of Ammon, probably second only to Siwa, and almost certainly the oracle consulted by the Laguatan in 547 (Mela, 1, 8, 46; Procopius, Buildings, vi, 2, 15–20; Corippus, vi, 145–176, 187; 556; vii, 515–520; viii, 252).

It is evident that the Laguatan must have either displaced or absorbed the populations of the more westerly oases when their migration began in the later third century. The latter
Figure 1. Map illustrating the spread of the Laguatan with reference to the principal routes and main population centres of the north-eastern Sahara.
explanation fits the evidence better and from that date the inland-lying Nasamones were, to all intents and purposes, Laguatan, even though their own tribal ethnic still survived. The same applies to the Marmaridae and other tribes lying between the Laguatan and the ‘ecological niches’ of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. The confederation of AD 546 included tribes of Cyrenaica and the Syrtic shore and town populations, such as the inhabitants of Digidiga (Digidida, Peutinger Table, segment viii). Further west it is likely that the once mighty Garamantes were also allied (Corippus, vi, 198-199). The former frontier zone of Tripolitania is also recalled by certain names: horrida tellus Arzogis (ii, 148; regio Arzugum, Arzuges, Orosius, i, 2, 90; St Augustine, Letters, 46-47, 93), Talanteis and Tillibaris (the old limes forts of Talalati and Tillibari, Antonine Itinerary, 75, 3; 75, 5). Clearly, many of the in situ Libyan tribes defected from their Roman allegiance to meet a changing situation. The newly arrived Laguatan seem to have directed their land seizure against the territoria of the cities, whose inhabitants were liable to resist the confederation most strongly (Procopius, Wars, iv, 21, 1-11; Gateau 1947, 35-37; Oates 1953, 1954).

Ghirza is an highly significant site in this context. There are over 40 buildings in the settlement and it must have been a minor tribal centre (Brogan and Smith 1957). The inhabitants were slightly Romanised Libyans in the early fourth century AD and we know some of their Libyan names from their funerary inscriptions, Nasif, Fydel, Nimira, Mathlich and so on (IRT 898-900). There are indications, however, that the Libyan cultural element was even stronger in late antiquity. Excavation of Building 32 showed that it had been a pagan temple and a series of altars and a bowl inscribed with letters in a Libyan alphabet were recovered (Brogan and Smith 1957, 177, 181; Reynolds, Brogan and Smith 1958; Brogan 1975, 269-276). Significantly this alphabet did not correspond with either of the two main Libyan scripts known from Tunisia and Algeria (Chabot 1940).

El Bekri remarked on the continuing pagan practices at Gurza in the eleventh century (De Slane 1913, 31) and the similarity of names suggests that Ghirza may have been a centre where the Libyan deity Gurzil was worshipped. The origins of this cult were probably pre-Roman in date (note the rock carving of a bull with a solar disc between its horns at Maia Dib, south of Mizda, Haynes 1959, 23-24). Elmeyer has recently identified the name GRZL in a neo-Punic dedication from Lepcis Magna, for which a first or second century AD date is most likely (Elmeyer 1982, 49-50). Gurzil was the bull-headed progeny of Ammon, and like Ammon, he was essentially a god of desert communities. These two deities were paramount in the Laguatan pantheon. An effigy of Gurzil was carried into battle by his priest Ierna, who was also the Laguatan commander-in-chief (Corippus, ii, 109-112, 405-406; v, 22-39, 495-502; vi, 116-118; viii, 300-317). The identification of Ghirza as a centre for Gurzil worship is strengthened by a relief carving on one of the tombs of a bull being sacrificed and by an inscription found by Mausoleum A in the north cemetery (Reynolds 1955, 139, S22), which recorded an extraordinary memorial sacrifice of 51 bulls and 38 goats. It is reasonable to assume that like many other Libyan communities, Ghirza became part of the Laguatan alliance, although not necessarily occupied by one of the migratory Laguatan sub-tribes.

The archaeological evidence collected by the UNESCO Libyan Valleys Project (see Jones and Barker 1980; Barker and Jones 1981, 1982), has shown a greater measure of continuity into the Islamic period than was once believed. There are categories of gsur which are of demonstrably later date than the gsur of Romano-Libyan construction. An increasing use of vaulting techniques and certain types of decorative plasterwork mark the transition, together with the virtual disappearance of the central light-well as an architectural feature. One gsur of this type from the wadi Mansour has been dated by C14 sample of an original timber to AD 860 ± 80. Another seemingly diagnostic feature of these late gsur is the construction of an additional ‘skirt’ of walling at a steep angle around the base of the main wall. Gsur with this external batter are known as ‘Egyptian gsur’ even today and and it is conceivable that some of the innovations were due to the settlement of new people. Further carbon dates will
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offer a measure of chronological control for a period where there is little diagnostic pottery. Since there was little Arab settlement in the hinterland of Tripolitania until after the Beni Hilal invasions, the continuity must relate to the amalgam of Laguatan and pre-existing tribes (De Slane 1913, 25-32). The process of agricultural decline in the Sofeggin and Zem-Zem wadi systems is difficult to follow, but it was a gradual one. In spite of the destructive raids on the territoria of the cities, the Laguatan continued the traditional practice of a mixed economy wherever possible. The abandonment of the more isolated farmsteads is not necessarily indicative of a dwindling population as many of the gsuir in the region had considerable villages around them. The concentration of early and later Islamic period settlement along the wadi Beni Ulid implies a gradual shift in emphasis to the more ecologically favourable northern wadis, at the expense of more marginal settlements such as Ghirza.

The Role of the Camel in the Rise of the Laguatan

An important point requiring clarification is the problem of whether the camel has any relevance to the rise to prominence of the Laguatan. It is evident from the above discussion that to view the rise of the confederation as a clash between nomads and sedentary people is to imply a false dichotomy. The most detailed sources are the Byzantine and Arab ones and they describe a mixture of sedentary and nomadic people in the confederation. Some of the tribes were certainly nomadic and bellicose, but I doubt that it was possession of large numbers of camels that caused them to migrate west (Gautier 1952, 190-210). There are two counter-arguments. In the first place, it is now established that the camel was present in the northern Sahara by the late first millennium BC (Brogan 1954; Demougeot 1960, 209-233). It was mainly employed on the caravan routes (east-west if not necessarily north-south), for local haulage (Michaël 1979, for the supply of Bu Njem by local camel drivers) and as a farm animal. There is ample archaeological evidence for this, particularly relief carvings of camels ploughing, in spite of the extraordinary dearth of information in the literary sources.

The second counter-argument concerns the assumption that the employment of the camel was radically altered in late Roman times, when, allegedly, it became the mount for nomads in their razzias against the Roman limites. Careful study of the late sources shows this to be a distortion of the facts. The only certain involvement of camels in warfare in this period was their use as a rudimentary defensive cordon, when placed in ranks around the Laguatan camps (Procopius, Wars, iii, 8, 15-29; iv, 11, 17-56; Corippus, see below. Vegetius, epitoma rei militaris, iii, 23 and Ibn Khaldun, Muqaddimah, Rosenthal 1980, II, 78, describe variations of this tactic). Contrary to the impression given by some commentators, this was not the only tactic employed in battle by the Laguatan, nor were camels the only animals used to form the defensive rings. Corippus (ii, 91-99; iv, 597-619; viii, 33-40) described these camps in detail and as well as the ranks of camels, there were outer rings of oxen/cattle and smaller animals (donkeys, sheep and goats) which were hobbled or joined together by lines and trip-wires. This complicated obstacle course made a direct cavalry charge, or a concerted infantry rush, highly dangerous for the attackers. The camel played no active role here, it was simply used as a shield by the defenders. Furthermore, this was not the favoured fighting method of the Libyans, since it placed their major wealth in livestock at risk and it was only resorted to in dire emergency. The camps were fortified as a matter of course before a battle and provided positions to which the Laguatan cavalry could fall back, if defeated in open battle. Of the three main battles described by Corippus, the first commenced as a large-scale cavalry engagement. It was only when the Laguatan horsemen had been routed that they retired to their camp and made a last-ditch stand on foot (ibid. iv; v). In the battle of Marta in AD 547, the Laguatan cavalry inflicted a severe reverse on John in a pitched battle (ibid. vi). The final battle was decided in John Troglitas' favour by another mainly cavalry engagement (ibid. vii; viii).
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The false emphasis placed on the camel has obscured the real and continuing importance of the horse in warfare and raiding. Both Corippus and Procopius confirm that the greatest strength of the Laguatan was in the quality and quantity of their cavalry (Corippus, i, 540-548; iv, 628-644; vi, 280, 569; viii, 610-614; Procopius, Wars, iv, 11, 18-20; 12, 3-28). In total there are over 50 references to horses and cavalry in the Johannidos, compared with only three specific instances where camels were being ridden. In two of these cases the riders themselves were described and both times it was the wives and children of the Laguatan who sat perched on top of their household baggage (v, 421-433; vi, 82-86. The third reference is vi, 194-195). The camel would seem to have remained first and foremost a pack-animal amongst the Laguatan tribes and the main action of warfare and raiding was conducted by lightly armed equine cavalry.

The Economic Mode of the Laguatan
The final question to be considered here is that of the economic mode of the Laguatan. In view of the diverse locations of the tribes brought within the confederation it would be surprising if one single economic model could be found to apply to all of them. Yet this is the implicit assumption behind the common generalisation that the Laguatan were 'nomades chameliers'. This affects our historical perspective in relation to the confederation, as the raids have sometimes been viewed as the natural reaction of nomads to sedentary people. There are certainly some fine descriptions of nomadic types in the sources (Synesius, Letters 108, 132; Corippus, ii, 62, 100-101; iv, 321; Procopius, Wars, iv, 11, 18-19), but, in view of the migration of some of these people it is essential to look for deeper motivations than a debatable antagonism between 'nomades et sédentaires'. Perhaps rather than an imagined antagonism between these groups it was their very act of amalgamation in a Libyan confederation which posed the greater threat to Rome.

The record of the Austuriani raiders is full of destructive incident; invasion of the prime agricultural lands, crop-firing, the felling of orchards, destruction of farm buildings, killing of the owners if caught and the driving-off of all the livestock. Synesius has been accused of pessimism (Goodchild 1976b, 253), but the economic effects on the Romanised gentry must have been devastating. This was not an attempt to destroy agriculture per se, though, for as we have seen, having discouraged the return of the city-based landowners, the Laguatan occupied some of the prime agricultural land of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. In these regions they practised a mixed economy, there was no sudden return to pastoralism (Procopius, Wars, iv, 21, 5-6). Ibn Abd-al-Hakam described the sequel to the raids as follows (Gateau 1947, 35-37), the Hawara and Nefusa (sub-tribes of the Laguatan) had dispossessed the Rum (Romo-Libyans) of Lepcis and Sabratha of their lands. However, the 'Afariq who were subject to the Rum remained, paying a tribute which they were accustomed to render to all who occupy their country'. (Oates 1953, 113; 1954, has demonstrated the relevance of this passage for an area of the Tripolitanian Gebel.) The migration of the Laguatan was perhaps dictated by a search for new lands in the better ecological zones, where they affected a seigneurial change and inherited farms and a dependent peasantry. The losers were principally the landowners in the large territories of the cities, such as Synesius. Agriculture continued in the inland regions with a growing admixture of pastoralism. Sedentary agriculture had always been a feature of the large oasis communities of the northern Sahara so was not a totally alien lifestyle to the newcomers. For the more peripheral Romano-Libyan communities, like Ghirza, their distance from the cities, their Punico-Libyan culture and tribal organisation enabled them to coexist peacefully with the new arrivals. They may well have collaborated, at an early date, in directing the raids against the city territoria in the Gebel. The importance of the old Libyan cults of Ammon and Gursil was that they gave old and new tribes common ground and their revived paganism gave their confederation a cohesion in wartime (Corippus, iii, 77-155; vi, 145-187; vii, 515-520 on the significance of
an oracle obtained from the priestess of Ammon). One of the incidental consequences of this was the stipulation in later treaties imposed by Byzantium that Christianity be adopted by allied tribes (there is evidence relating to the Laguatan of Augila, Procopius, Buildings, vi, 2, 15–20; the Garamantes, John of Biclar, MGHAA XI, 212; and the Cidamensi (people of Ghadames), Procopius, Buildings, vi, 3, 9).

I can offer no certain explanation of why the Laguatan started to migrate west. The motivation which I have suggested for their raids implies that they were a surplus population, either without lands or with lands affected by drought, shifting sands or increased salinity. Part of the answer may be emerging from recent work in the Dakhla oasis. Large areas of oasis, which had been cultivated, were evidently abandoned in late antiquity and there was a dramatic fall in population. For instance, the last dated occupation at Amheida, one of the main towns of the ancient oasis, is early fourth century AD (Mills et al. 1980, 261–274, 405). Whatever the reasons, the move was unexpected and destabilised the Roman frontiers of Cyrenaica and Tripolitania. The failure of Rome to restore the situation led to the gradual defection of the majority of the peripheral Libyan tribes to the confederation. Thereafter military control of these regions by Romans, Vandals and Byzantium was more apparent than real. The Arab conquest swept away the last of these garrisons. It is to the Laguatan, that is to the Libyans themselves, that we must look for the vital element of continuity in this period of fundamental political changes.

Appendix

Notes on the Occurrence of the Laguatan in Classical Sources

See Diggle and Goodyear (1970) for the following references in the Iohannidos of Corippus: Laguatan: i, 144, 467; iv, 48, 85, 629; vi, 171; vi, 278; vii, 535; viii, 434, 474, 501. Ilaguan: i, 478; ii, 87, 96, 106, 210, 345; iv, 374; vi, 108, 195, 238, 437, 454, 462, 469, 604; vii, 383; viii, 580, 647. There are many slight variations of copyists' errors, for example, Leucada (iii, 294), Laguatan (v, 153), Langanatan (v, 434), Laguantan (vii, 535), Langanatan (vii, 474) and Iltaguan (vi, 437). Procopius recorded the name as Leuathae (Wars, iv, 21, 1–22; 22, 13–20; 28, 48–57; Buildings, vi, 4, 6–9) and it occurs again in the work of early Arab historians and geographers, as Louata or Lawata (Ibn Khaldun, De Slane 1925/1956, vol. I, pp. 168–182, 226–236, 273–282; Ibn Abd-al-Hakam, Gateau 1947, p.35–37). The forms used by Corippus were evidently the most closely observed transliterations of the Libyan pronunciations and have been adopted here for convenience.

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Bibliography


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IRT, See Reynolds and Ward-Perkins 1952.
MGHAA XI = Monumenta Germaniae Historic a (Auctores Antiquissimun) XI, Berlin, 1894.
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