

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

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## Abstract

The tribal grouping known as the *Laguatan*, *Leuathae* 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 Syrtic 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

vineyards and killed those who had not fled to the cities (xxviii, 6, 13, *cunctisque (nisi 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-Evrard 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, ravaged the fields, 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 *Austuriani* needed 5,000 camels, which were probably rustled, to carry away their booty after one particular raid (Fitzgerald 1930, II, *Catastasis* I, columns 1568-1569; 1572).

There is evidence for further *Austuriani 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-chiefs, 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. Synesius' 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* (Tocra) (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, Dakhla, 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: *Frexes*, *Sinusdisae*, *Silvacae*, *Naffur*, *Silcadenit*, *Silvaizan*, *Macares*, the people of *Silzactae*, of *Caunes*, of wadi *Vadara*, of Mounts *Agalumnus* and *Macubius*, of the infertile plains of *Zersilis*, 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 *Muctunia manus* (from the deserts of *Tripolis*), the men of *Gadabis*, of *Digdiga* and of *Barcae* (*Barca?*), the *Velanide* boatmen, *Marmaridae* tribes, men from Mount *Geminus* and uncultivated *Zerquilis*, from the Mountain of *Nauusi* or *Navusi* (Nefusa?) and from the savage country of *Arzugis* (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 Syrtic region (iv, 644, *mille duces misere in proelia Syrtes*).

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*. Syrtic 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 Nasamonian cultivators of the Syrtic shore, neighbours of the *Garamantes* and people from the borders of the Nile. *Quis dicere gentes aut numere queat?* (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 Syrtic oases must have been occupied by the *Austuriani* 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 *Austuriani*, therefore, is the name by which the *Laguatan* were known up to at least the early 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/Urceliana manus* (Vegetius, *epitome rei militaris*, iii, 23; Corippus, ii, 75; vi, 390), the *Anacutas* (ii, 75) *Silcadenit*, *Silvacae*, *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 *Astrikes* (ii, 75; vi, 391, 404, 431, 454, 464) and the *Astakoures* (Ptolemy, iv, 3, 6; 6, 6).

**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 emanated from the east and a westward migration is an essential element of their oral history (De Slane 1926/1956, I, 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 *Tripoli* (tania) 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 emanated 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, I, 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 Giofra 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, I, 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



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 *Digdiga* (*Digdiga*, *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 Arzugis* (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). Elmayer 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 (Elmayer 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 C<sub>14</sub> 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 it is conceivable that some of the innovations were due to the settlement of new people. Further carbon dates will



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 Hillal 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 *gsur* 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 (Marichal 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).

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 *Iohannidos*, 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 light-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* (Romano-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 *Gurzil* 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; v, 171; vi, 278; vii, 535; viii, 434, 474, 501. *Ilaguas*: 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), *Ilaguatan* (v, 153), *Languatan* (viii, 434), *Laguantan* (vii, 535), *Languantan* (vii, 474) and *Ilasguas* (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.

## Acknowledgements

A version of this paper was read to a meeting of the Society for Libyan Studies on 8th March 1983 and I am grateful for the advice and encouragement which I received from various members. I am particularly indebted to Professors G. D. B. Jones and A. R. Birley of Manchester University who made detailed comments on my first draft, leading to a number of necessary corrections. The views expressed and any remaining mistakes, however, are my own.

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