

## A New Latin Funerary Inscription from Gharandal (Southern Jordan)\*

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### Una nueva inscripción funeraria latina procedente de Gharandal (Jordania meridional)

The aim of this paper is to bring to light, edit and contextualize a Latin inscription from Gharandal (the ancient *Arindela* or *Arieldela*; Roman province of *Arabia Petraea* [al-Tafilah Governorate; Southern Jordan]). The piece, dating probably from the 2nd century AD, is the gravestone of Spratus, a soldier of a *cohors Ulp(ia) mil(iaria)*, hard to identify with any of the other *cohortes Ulpiae* known from the epigraphic evidence. This new inscription is interesting not only because it enlarges the short catalogue of Latin epigraphy in the area, but also because it broadens our knowledge of the Roman

El propósito del presente trabajo es dar a conocer, editar y contextualizar una nueva inscripción latina procedente de Gharandal (la antigua *Arindela* de la provincia romana de *Arabia Petraea*, en la actual provincia jordana de al-Tafilah). La pieza, probablemente del siglo II d. C., es la lápida funeraria de un tal Sprato, un desconocido soldado de una *cohors Ulp(ia) mil(iaria)*, que no resulta fácil de identificar con el resto de las *cohortes Ulpiae* que conocemos a través de los testimonios epigráficos. El interés de la inscripción no sólo se debe a que amplía el breve catálogo de la epigrafía latina de la

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\* This inscription is owned by the Department of Antiquities of Jordan and it is currently in its warehouses in Amman. The authors would like to express their deepest gratitude to the Director general of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan for the permission to study this piece. On the other hand, we highly appreciate the reviewers' comments on our manuscript.

military occupation of the new province of Arabia in the first half of the 2nd century.

zona, sino sobre todo al hecho de que contribuye a aumentar nuestro conocimiento de la ocupación militar romana de la zona en la primera mitad del siglo II d. C.

*Key words:* Roman funerary epigraphy; Gharandal (southern Jordan); Arabia Petraea; Cohors Ulpia miliaria.

*Palabras clave:* epigrafía funeraria romana; Gharandal (Jordania meridional); Arabia Petraea; Cohors Ulpia miliaria.

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## I. THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE OF GHARANDAL

The site of 'Ayn Gharandal (coord. 30.729289 N, 35.650694 E) lies about 45 kilometres to the north of Petra, 15 kilometres to the southeast of at-Tafilah and 5 kilometres to south of Busaira, the biblical Bozra<sup>1</sup>. However, unlike the nearby Edomite settlement, whose history goes back to the 7th century BC, remains of Gharandal are much later and, in any case, do not predate to the Nabataean period<sup>2</sup>. Even more, its authentic pre-eminence in the region was earned as a result of the Roman conquest of Arabia (106 AD)<sup>3</sup>: the earliest of the Latin inscriptions in the city (AE 1897, 65 = AE 1995, 1604; 112 AD)

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<sup>1</sup> Robinson (1857<sup>3</sup>, pp. 167-168), a Protestant biblical scholar of the 19th century, was the first to associate the modern Busaira with the biblical Bozrah (cf. *Gen.* 36.33; *1Chron.* 1.44, etc.). Although there is no conclusive evidence for this identification, the general consensus of our day accepts such a hypothesis without major discussions. Around 553 BC, it was conquered by Nabonidus, the last king of the neo-Babylonian Empire, who destroyed its temple and its palace. In fact, the monarch recorded his stay in the area in the only neo-Babylonian inscription found in Jordan, which was precisely discovered in 1996 in the vicinity of Busaira. For general information about the presence of Nabonidus in Arabia, see Crowell 2007 and da Riva 2016. Of course, trying to determine if the rising of Gharandal is related to the decline of Bozra goes beyond the aims of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> Considering that the inscription examined in this paper belongs to the Roman era, it is not worthwhile providing a detailed report on the remains of the Nabataean Era in Arindela. Instead, we deem sufficient to point out that archaeological search has discovered some traces of an ancient Nabataean temple in the site. A detailed online compendium of the archaeological search in 'Ayn Gharandal, in Walmsley et al. 1999; A. Walmsley 2001; Darby and Darby 2012a; 2012b; 2013; 2014; 2015a; 2015b; Duncan 2017 and Nandwani 2019.

<sup>3</sup> A general contextualization of the Roman presence in Arabia, in Sartre 1991, pp. 331-338, and Millar 1993, pp. 80-110.

commemorates the opening of a *nova via* between southern Syria and the Red Sea, which is an indication of the considerable weight that the conquerors gave to the ancient Nabataean town. In fact, the Roman army established a military settlement that gave birth to an important town. In this way, Arindela (Ἀρίνδηλα in the Byzantine sources or *Arieldela* in the *Notitia dignitatum* [Or. 34,44]) became the administrative centre of the region (al-Jibal, the Greco-Roman Gabalitis) in the late Roman and Byzantine Era<sup>4</sup>:

[Arindela] was the third-ranking town of Palaestina Tertia<sup>5</sup> (...) and the seat of a bishop. Bishops of Arindela attended two church councils: the ecumenical council of Ephesus in 431, and a synod of bishops called by Peter of Jerusalem in 536 (Walmsley and Grey 2001, p. 139).

Its prominent position in the region is evidenced by the remains from the late Antiquity and Byzantine Era that have appeared in the city. Recent archaeological search has brought to light a late Roman fort, a bathhouse (Darby and Darby 2012a; 2015, pp. 471-484) and remains of an early Christian church, perhaps from 4th century AD, which predates the great Byzantine church<sup>6</sup>. On the other hand, besides the architectural remains some relevant epigraphic discoveries have been found, in particular a monumental Latin inscription devoted to the Tetrarchs in 303 AD (AE 2015, 1691). In fact, only three Latin inscriptions have been discovered to date at the Gharandal site<sup>7</sup> (two of them

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<sup>4</sup> Ἀρίνδηλα, πόλις τρίτης Παλαιστίνης. Γλαῦκος δὲ κόμην αὐτὴν καλεῖ. [= «Arindela, city in Palaestina Tertia. Glaucus calls it “unwalled village”»]. (St. Byz. α 118.8). This description of Glaucus, author of a lost work entitled *De Arabica antiquitate libri IV*, is perplexing. It is not easy to understand why he calls Arindela «unwalled town» (κόμη). Had it lost his old Roman fortifications in Byzantine Era? On the other hand, the town is called Ἀρίδδηλαι in the Beersheba Tax Edict (frag. V, line 5) (perhaps 5th c. AD).

<sup>5</sup> *Palaestina Tertia* (or *Palaestina Salutaris*) was split from *Arabia Petraea* during the provincial reforms of Diocletian at the end of the 3rd century AD.

<sup>6</sup> «A fourth century church at Gharandal would be among the earliest purpose-built Christian structures in a military context found in the eastern Roman Empire and offers insight into changes in religious practices among soldiers stationed along the eastern frontier». (Duncan et al. 2017, p. 85).

<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, Darby and Darby (*apud* Corbett et al. 2014, p. 672) mention a «carefully painted Greek inscription» on the wall of a room along the curtain wall of Arindela (4th c. AD) (SEG LXIV 1823). Despite the important role of the city in the Byzantine era, no relevant Greek epigraphic remains have appeared there. However, a mosaic inscription in the narthex

from the 2nd century AD [AE 1897, 65; AE 1897, 66]; and the third is the aforementioned late inscription [AE 2015, 1691]). Therefore, the discovery of this fourth inscription is an addition to the brief list of Latin inscriptions in the area; furthermore, as we shall see, it enriches our knowledge of the process of the Roman military occupation in Arabia in the first half of the 2nd century.

## II. BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE INSCRIPTION

Before presenting the edition of the inscription, it is worth clarifying that it has been produced and completed as a result of the inspection of photographs and not of its direct examination. The piece in question displays an inscription incised in a stone block that originally had a rectangular shape whose measurements in its largest dimensions were 77.1 cm in width x 56.1 cm in height. The epigraphic space (58.5 cm x 34.2 cm) is delimited by an edge consisting of a simple line of small dots (less defined on the left side of the piece). On both sides of the inscription, under line 4, there are two symmetrical almond-shaped decorative marks («▷»/«◁») (7.1 cm in the major axis and 5.1 cm in the minor axis) whose acute angle is facing inwards<sup>8</sup>. The gravestone is severely damaged in the two corners of its left side. The destruction of the upper left corner has caused the loss of the initial six or seven letters of the deceased's name (presumably *praenomen* and *nomen*). The bottom of the piece (both on the left and

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of a church with a poem describing an image of the Virgin appeared in el-Rashidiyah, near Gharandal: ἐνταῦθα εἰσελθὼν κατανοήσεις μητέρα παρθένον, | Χ(ριστο)ῦ ἄφραστον λόγον, θ(εο)ῦ | οἰκονομίαν καὶ, εἰ πιστεύῃς, σωθήσῃς. σὺν θ(ε)ῷ ἐτελιώθη ἡ ψήφωσις μη(νι) Περίτιω | τοῦ ἔτ(ους) ὑξή' ἰνδ(ικτιῶνι) ζ'... (SEG LIII 1884; el-Rashidiyah; 574 AD). Reference works: Feissel and Gatiér 2005, no. 555; Gatiér 2008, no. 571. The best edition of the inscription, in L. di Segni 2006, pp. 587-588. Translation by di Segni: «Entering hither you will see the Virgin Mother of Christ, the ineffable Logos, dispensation of God, and if you believe, you will be saved. With God's help this mosaic was finished in the month of Peritios of the year 468, indiction 7...». A religious analysis of the text, in Villareal Leatherbury 2012, pp. 42-43). The excavations in the Byzantine basilica of Arindela (see Walmsley and Ricklefs 1997, pp. 498-503) have not brought to light any epigraphic discovery (MacDonald 2015, p. 73). Information on other Greek epigraphic findings in southern Jordan, in Tanner 1990 and Corbett et al. 2016, p. 670.

<sup>8</sup> One of the reviewers suggests that these marks could be a decorative solution to imitate the *ansae* of a *tabula ansata*. Inside the left «almond» there are traces of an oval drawn with small dots. On the other hand, to the right, outside the edge, at the height of line 5, there is a mark that appears to be an unfinished outline of another «almond» (6.2 cm in the major axis).

right side) has also been badly damaged. However, fortunately, that damage does not hamper the reading of the text.

From the palaeographic point of view, the inscription is drawn in thin capitals with serifs at the bottom and top of several letters (I, P, T, R, H, L). Some of them (A and M) are elongated at the top. The cross-stroke of A is almost imperceptible (*Sprato*; *Goriae*; *Aufidi*; *ann[os]*). The vertical stroke of F is curved at its bottom (*F[ilio]*; *Aufidi*). The bow of R (*[S]prato*; *Goriae*) is not entirely closed. There are no guidelines or any visible interpunct. With respect to the size of the letters, those in line 1 ([D] M) are 3.8 cm high and 6.6 cm wide; those in lines 2-5, 2.3 cm high and 2.8 cm wide (A); line 6 (STTL), 4.7 cm high and 1.9 cm wide (L). In line 6 S is misaligned with respect to the guideline of TTL. The characters resemble those of other inscriptions of the first half of the 2nd century (*AE* 2007, 1363; *AE* 1923, 4 [AD 135]; *Corinth* 8, 3, 100 [AD 114-116])<sup>9</sup>.



Fig. 1. Photograph by M. R. al-Rawahneh.

<sup>9</sup> In any case, it should be considered that such letters are «actuarial capitals» and that the type is still fully in force in the second half of that century (and even in the third century). Hence the paleographical analysis is not an absolute criterion to date the inscription. However, as will be shown below, there are other additional facts supporting the hypothesis that the inscription must be dated back to the first half of the 2nd century.



Fig. 2. Detail of the line 2.

## III. TRANSLITERATION AND EDITION

## M

[. 6-7.] ŞPRATOGORIAEF  
 MILCOHÎVLP MIL 7 AVFIDI  
 VIXITANNXLIISTIPXXIII

5 HICSITVSEST  
 S T T L

*Line 2:* Ş, only the lower stroke of a lost letter is preserved, but, in any case, S is the most likely reading. The bow of P is less defined than that of the other letters of the inscription, but there is no alternative reading, since it is very similar to the P of *Stip(endiorum)* (l. 4). In any case, as can be noted in fig. 2, this P is somewhat smaller than the remaining letters of its line. Ğ or less probably Ç, since its lower stroke is larger than that of COH(ORT)I(S) or that of HIC.

*Line 3:* there is a zigzag stroke above the I of COHI, which has been represented here as «^»: «Î». It is probably a «numeral sign»: *coh(ortis)* I. The unicode symbol «7» is used here to represent the abbreviation of *centuria*. (cf. *CIL* III 6598; *CIL* III 6602; *AE* 1975, 272; *CIL* VI 30881 [*centurio*]).

[D(is)] M(anibus)

[. 6-7.] Şprato Ğoriae f(ilio)<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> An alternative possibility of reading of the sequence ĞORIAEF could be *G(aleria) Oriae (filio)*: «Şpratus, Ğ(aleria) / (or Ç[ornelia]) tribe, son of Oria». However, this reading does not solve the problem of the name of the soldier's father either. On the other hand, another possibility would be to consider that the father's name was *Spratogoria*. However, taking into account the existence of the *cognomen* *Spratus* (*AE* 2016, 2012) and, above all, the patent separation between the words *Sprato* and *Goria* (see fig. 2). It is more likely that the correct reading is what we have already offered above.

mil(iti) coh(ort)i(s) I Ulp(iae) mil(iliariae) (centuria) Aufidi  
 uixit ann(os)<sup>11</sup> XLIII stip(endiorum) XXIII  
 hic situs est  
 S(it) t(ibi) t(erra) l(euis).

«To the Manes  
 of (...) Spratus<sup>12</sup>, son of Gorias (or Corias),  
 soldier in the Ulpian miliaria cohort, in the centuria of Aufidius.  
 He lived 43 years. He had 23 years paid service.  
 He lies here.  
 May the ground be light to you».

#### IV. COMMENTARY

##### 1. *The name*

The damage suffered by the piece has destroyed the area of the inscription where the soldier's *praenomen* and *nomen* presumably were. Only the final part of the *cognomen* —if it is true that there was a *cognomen*— remains. If our reading is correct, it should be Spratus, a *cognomen* only attested to the present day in a *defixio* of the end of the 1st century or the beginning of the 2nd century: *Met(i)lius Spratus* (AE 2016, 2012)<sup>13</sup>. Unfortunately, according

<sup>11</sup> In these inscriptions, there is a certain tendency to restore *ann(is)* and not *ann(os)*. However, considering that the use of the ablative of duration (*uixit decem annis*) is a vulgar linguistic feature (and that there are no traces of vulgar Latin in the inscription), there is no point, in our opinion, to restore *ann(is)*.

<sup>12</sup> It is highly improbable that the form *Sprato* is in place of the usual cognomen *Spērātus* (cf. *CIL* XI 6848; *CIL* XI 6869; *CIL* XI 574; *CIL* XI 178, etc), since the syncope of / ē / would not be easily explained. As shown, our reconstruction of the text suggests that the form *Sprato* is the dative of a theme in -o (*Spratus*, -i). Anyway, we are aware that the formula can also be built with a nominative (e. g. [*D(is) M(anibus)*] *sacrum L(ucius) Mesius L(uci) f(ilius)*... [*AE* 1996, 1701]). If it was a nominative, it would be a theme in nasal not attested (\**Sprato*, -onis). However, considering that the nominative *Spratus* is attested in AE 2016, 2012 (*Met(i)lius Spratus*), we think that our hypothesis is more plausible.

<sup>13</sup> According to the epigraphic *habitus* of the Roman auxiliary troops, buried soldiers show the *tria nomina* of a Roman citizen. However, there are some exceptions. For example, the Thracian soldiers enlisted in the auxiliary units stationed in the province of Arabia show their original onomastics instead of the Roman *tria nomina*: *Ziemices Ziopen f(ilius) eque[s]*

to Clauss-Slaby's online epigraphic repertoire, the origin of this *defixio* is unknown. Additional information about its origin might have shed some light on our elusive Spratus.

On the other hand, the formula *Sprato, Goriae* (or *Coriae*) *filius*) allows to retrace the most essential elements of the biography of our unknown soldier. Obviously, his father's name is not part of the repertoire of male Roman *praenomina*, which corroborates that Spratus was not born a Roman citizen. In any case, if *Goria*, his father, had been a free-born subject in 212, he would have automatically acquired Roman citizenship. The most likely date of the inscription is therefore the 2nd century. However, all our inquiries about the anthroponym *Goria* have been, unfortunately, unsuccessful. Hence, it has not been possible to assign him to a specific ethnic origin, which could have related him to some specific auxiliary military unit, in particular to some *cohors* formed by Celtic-speaking individuals (e.g. the *Cohors Ulpia Galatarum*)<sup>14</sup>. Instead, it seems less likely that the name is related to a Semitic background. Our consultation of the works of al-Qudrah (2001) and MacDonald (1999) has been unproductive for this purpose. Hence we consider more likely that Spratus was a soldier of Western origin.

## 2. Date of the inscription

Regardless of the possible palaeographic dating, the clearest indication to establish the date of the inscription is the presence in its text of a *cohors Ulpia*, whose existence is linked to Trajan's military campaigns in the East. Apart from the issue of determining the specific military unit to which Spratus could have belonged, it should be noted that the epithet *Ulpia* was only applied to those *cohortes* until the reign of Commodus (192 AD). It appears

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*alae* / *Thracum Aug(ustae)...*» (AE 1922, 131; Gerasa [Jordan]); [*Auluzenen Tr*]/*aedicenti filium*)... (AE 2003, 1818; Gerasa [Jordan]: AD 1st c.); *Doritses Tarsi filius*)... (AE 1930, 89; Gerasa [Jordan]).

<sup>14</sup> However, if the possibility of relating this name to the Celtic root \**gor* («force, strength, elevation, abundance» [e. g. Breton *gor* («elevation»); Welsh *gor* («over»); Gaelic *gorm* («nobleman»)]) —or perhaps to the old Irish *gor* («pious, dutiful» [a thorough analysis of the etymology of this word, in Schrijver 1996])— could be confirmed, that could be a clue to consider that we would be facing the *cohors Ulpia Galatarum*, a unit of celtic origin. However, the current knowledge about the Galatian language is still very scarce. Hence this suggestion is merely conjectural and unfounded from a linguistic point of view.



that the emperor's memory ceased to be honoured after the change of dynasty. After this date, the former *Ulpiae cohortes* became designated simply by mentioning the origin of their soldiers<sup>15</sup>. A good example is given by the cohort stationed in Gharandal, which is referred to as *cohors Ulpia Galatarum* in an inscription dated 160 (AE 2011, 1810) and simply called *secunda Galatarum* in the aforementioned monumental inscription of the Gharandal (AE 2015, 1691). In view of the reasons above, the inscription should be dated in all likelihood between the conquest of Arabia and the end of the reign of Commodus<sup>16</sup>.

In fact, the date could be specified a bit more, since the *Ulpiae cohortes* were recruited after the First Dacic War (101-102) in order to be employed in the Second Dacic War (104-106), in the annexation of Arabia (106) and in the Partic War (113-117). Therefore, if our Spratus was enlisted —hypothetically— in 104 and he served 23 years of service, the *terminus post-quem* of the inscription should be 127 or 128, under Hadrian, during whose reign the *miliaria* units became common. On the other hand, the formulas used in the inscription (in particular, the mention of the *centuria* and the *stipendia*) seem to refer to the first half of the 2nd century. Hence, the most plausible alter-

<sup>15</sup> This is the case in almost all inscriptions we have examined. However, there are two exceptions dated in the first half of the 3rd century AD: *[[C(aio) Iulio [Auito Ale]]] / [[xiano] [praef(ecto) coh(ortis) Ulp(iae)] / Petraeo[r(um)]...* (AE 1921, 64; Dalmatia [Salona]: AD 219-223); *Fl(auius) Adiutor / praef(ectus) coh(ortis) I Ulpiae / Galatarum...* (AE 1934, 230; Aquileia: AD 238).

<sup>16</sup> Below, a list of inscriptions relating to the *cohortes Ulpiae* after the reign of Trajan: *I Ulpia Traiana* (CIL XVI 69; Brigetio [Pannonia superior]: AD 122); *II Ulpia equitata ciuium Romanorum* (CIL 600; Gradisht [Macedonia]: AD 165); *Ulpia Afrorum* (AE 1990, 1023; Aegyptus: AD 179); *V Ulpia Petraeorum* (AE 2007, 1238; Mitoc [Dacia]: AD 117-138); *I and II Ulpia Galatarum* (AE 2006, 77; *prouincia incerta*: AD 117-138); *I Ulpia Brittonum torquata* (AE 2009, 1177; Cluj Napoca [Dacia]: AD 128); *II Ulpia Galatorum* (AE 2005, 1730; *prouincia incerta*: AD 138-161); *I and II Ulpia Galatarum* (AE 2011, 1810; *prouincia incerta*: AD 160); *II Ulpia Galatarum* and *VI Ulpia Petraeorum* (AE 1994, 1914; *prouincia incerta*: AD 160). We have only found a single case of a *cohors Ulpia* belonging to the reign of Commodus, the *prima Ulpia Pannoniorum* (CIL VI 41271; Roma: AD 188-190). The same could be said of the *alae Ulpiae*: *Ala I Ulpia Dacorum* (CIL III 600; Cappadocia: AD 135); *Ala I Ulpia Dromadariorum Palmyrenorum mil.* (AE 2006, 1841; Syria: 156-157); *Ala I Ulpia singularium* (AE 1996, 1603; Syria: 157); *Ala II Ulpia Auriana* (CIL III 6743; AE 1996, 1630; Cappadocia: AD 135); *Ala I Ulpia Syriaca* (AE 2006, 1841; Syria: AD 153) (cf. D'Amato 2017, pp. 13-14).

native is to date the inscription not after the reign of Antoninus Pius, and the dating could be circumscribed to the period 125 to 160.

### 3. Centuria Aufidi

Cf. *centuria Veris[si]mi* (CIL VI 3895); *centuria Iuli Sereni* (CIL XI 3533); *centuria Calui[ni]* (AE 1938, 97); *centuriae Felicis* (CIL VI 2493); *centuria Augustiani* (CIL VI 2603); *centuria Martialis* (CIL VI 2758).

The Roman *nomen Aufidius* is not unknown in the area (e.g. AE 2015, 1691; 1986, 699 [late 3rd century]). A recent inscription, appeared in Byblos and dated between 150 and 154, mentions another Aufidius, a soldier from Berytus:

I(oui) O(ptimo) M(aximo) H(eliopolitano) / Aufidius C(ai) f(ilius) / Verus b(ene)f(iciarius) Lae/liani co(n)s(ularis) / Beryten/sis statio/ne iter[at]a / u(o-tum) [l(ibens) s(oluit?)]. (EDCS-45800022)

Obviously, it is impossible to establish any relationship between this *miles beneficiarius* and the centurion of our inscription<sup>17</sup>.

### 4. Militi Cohortis I Ulpiae miliaria

As seen, Spratus was enlisted in one of the many auxiliary units that were created during Trajan's reign in view of their future participation in the campaigns planned by the emperor. Hence the honorary title of *Ulpia* that this military unit bore<sup>18</sup>. However, apart from this generic information, it is extremely difficult to determine in which *cohors Ulpia* he was enrolled. And

<sup>17</sup> According to Eck 2019, p. 256, the name *Aufidius* is not known in the epigraphic record of the city. However, a *M(arcus) Lucili(u)s Aufidianus*, a *u(ir) e(gregius)* from the Severan period, calls Berytus his homeland (AE 2007, 1614). On the other hand, this *Laelianus*, under whose command the *beneficiarius* had been, is probably M. Pontius Laelianus Larcius Sabinus, who is attested as a *legatus* in Syria in 153 [PIR2 P 806]. Under Antoninus Pius he had assumed the government of several provinces, first in *Pannonia Inferior*, then in *Pannonia Superior*, and finally in Syria, where he served from about 150 to 154.

<sup>18</sup> E. g. *Cohors II Ulpia equitata*; *Cohors II Ulpia Paphlagonum*; *Cohors III Ulpia Paphlagonum*; *Cohors I Ulpia Dacorum*; *Cohors I Ulpia Petraeorum*; *Cohors V Ulpia Petraeorum* (cf. CIL XVI 106: AD 156-157). *Cohors II Ulpia equitata ciuium Romanorum*; *Cohors*

the epigraphy of the Roman province of Arabia is not very informative in this regard. There are some inscriptions that show the presence of *cohortes* in the area, but none of them bears the title *Ulpia*:

1. [Δι(?)] Κυρί[ω] [— — —]ο βουλ(ευτή)ς | [καὶ — — —]νιο[ς] | ἑκατόντα[ρ(χος)] | σπίρης {= σπείρης} Αὐ[γ(ούστης)]. (*PPUAES* IIIA 6,769; Hauran [South Syria])

Inscription from the 1st century AD, where an unknown centurion of a *cohors Augusta* (σπείρα Αὐγούστα) is mentioned. Due to chronological and administrative reasons, the information of this inscription is not useful for our aim: it belongs to the 1st century AD and not to the 2nd century; the Aurantide came under direct control of Rome in 106 and was assigned to the province of Syria, and not to the newly conquered province of Arabia Petraea. In any case, the title of this *cohors* is *Augusta* and not *Ulpia*.

2. ... pr[ae]f(ecto) coh[ortis] / [trib(un)o mil(itum) leg(ionis) X] Pia[e] Fide[li]s] / [proc(uratori) prouinc(iae)] Arabiae / [milites(?)] leg(ionis) VI Ferr(atae) / [Imp(eratore) Caes(are) T]raiano Hadriano / [Aug(usto) trib(unicia) pot(estate) XI]V III co(n)s(ule) / [fece]runt... (AE 1983, 937; Gerasa [Jordan])

Inscription dated in 118-119 AD in honour of an unknown *procurator* of the province of Arabia, who had been before *praefectus* of an unknown *cohors*. Its fragmentary state does not allow to get more information about this individual. It is not even possible to say that the cohort under his command was stationed in the province of Arabia.

3. Perpetuae Paci / Diocletianus et [Maximianus] Augg(usti)] / Constantius et Maximianus Caess(ares) / cohortem secundam Galatarum / constituerunt per prouidentia(m) / Prisci praesidis [[p[rouinciae]]] / [[Palestinae(?)]] // Mul(tis) X(decennalibus) // Mul(tis) XX(uicennalibus). (AE 2015, 1691)<sup>19</sup>

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*I Ulpia sagittariorum; Cohors III Ulpia Paphlagonum; Cohors II Ulpia Paphlagonum* (cf. *CIL* III 600: AD 162-166 AD) (Pollard 2000, pp. 122-123).

<sup>19</sup> This inscription was found in 2013 among the collapsed blocks of the facade of the Roman fort of Arindela. It was probably above the arch of the main door in the wall. It is very similar to that of the fort in Yotvata, to the south of the Negev (AE 1986, 699 = 2002, 1563). In both cases, the mandated official for the project is Aufidius Priscus, *uir perfectissimus* and governor of Palestine between 293 and 303 AD (cf. Ameling et al. 2011, p. 215). This *cohors*

Outside the province of Arabia there are some indications of *cohortes* stationed in that province:

[Imp(erator) Caesar (...) Traianus Hadrianus Aug(ustus) pontifex maximus tribunic(ia) potest(ate) XIII(?) co(n)s(ul) III (...) [peditib(us) et equitib(us) qui militau(erunt) in cohort(ibus)] / duabus qua[e appell(antur) (...) et clas/sica | (miliaria) et sun[t in Arabia sub Haterio Ne]/pote... (Eck - Pangerl 2019, p. 258; *prouincia incerta*: AD 125)

This military diploma mentions two unspecified *cohortes* that are stationed in Arabia under the command of Haterius Nepos<sup>20</sup> during Hadrian's reign. It is plausible that the *cohors Ulpia miliaria* in question could be one of these. However, the inscription does not offer any indication about their title and their characteristics.

On the other hand, there is in the agora of Palmyra an inscription in honor of Marcus Acilius Athenodorus, commander of the *cohors prima Ulpia miliaria Petraeorum*:

4. [ἡ βουλὴ καὶ ὁ δῆμος] | Μ. Ἀκεῖλιον Ἀκελίου Μοκίμου υἱὸν Σεργία Ἀθηνόδωρον | χειλίαρχον λεγ(ιώνο)ς ἰ' Φρετηνσίας | καὶ χειλίαρχον σπειρίης α' Οὐ[λ]πίας Πετραίων κατὰ πάν[τα τῇ] | πόλει ζῶντα εὐσεβῆ καὶ [φιλό]πατρην τεμῆς καὶ ἀγνείας[ς] | [ἔνεκεν]. (*Agora de Palmyre* 152,IA.03; Palmyra [prov. Syria]: AD 120-150)<sup>21</sup>

was a unit made up of native soldiers from Galacia recruited to reinforce the army that Trajan was gathering to invade the Parthian Empire (114 to 117 AD). At the end of the war, the unit was stationed possibly in the province of Syria. In 132 AD, it was integrated into the army destined to crush the Bar Kojba's Revolt. However, at the end of the 3rd century we find it already in Arindela, where it was located for long years. According to the *Notitia dignitatum* (ca. 400 AD), this *cohors* was still stationed in Arindela. There was a *cohors prima Ulpia Galatarum* stationed in 238 in Aquileia: *I(oui) O(ptimo) M(aximo) / (...) pro salute et uictoria / ddd(ominorum) nnn(ostrum) / Imp(eratorum) Caesarum / [[[M(arci) Clodi Pupieni]]] / [[[D(ecimi) Caeli Caluini]]] / [[Balbini Au]]ggg(ustorum!) et / M(arci) Antoni Gordiani / nobiliss(im)i) Caes(aris) / ex uoto / Fl(auius) Seruilianus a mil(itis) / et Fl(auius) Adiutor / praef(ectus) coh(ortis) I Ulpiae / Galatarum praeposit(i) / militum agentium / in protensione Aquileia(e). (AE 2014, 484; Aquileia).*

<sup>20</sup> General information on Haterius Nepos, in Gatier 1996, pp. 48-49.

<sup>21</sup> In fact, there are other *Ulpiae cohortes* from Petra in the 2nd century AD, but all of them are stationed outside Arabia and do not bear the title «miliaria»: *Prima Ulpia Petraeorum*: stationed in Syria (*Agora de Palmyre* 152,IA.02; Palmyra [Tadmor]: AD 120-150; AE 2006,

This *cohors prima Ulpia Petraeorum* (σπεῖρα α΄ Οὐλπία Πετραίων) would be a suitable candidate to be identified with the unit that concerns us in this paper. However, such an identification is also not possible, since it was not frequent (although it was not impossible) that these auxiliary units were part of the military garrison of their home provinces. Most likely, these soldiers from Petra had been posted at the province of Syria.

These are the inscriptions that show *cohortes* that could be linked to the province of Arabia and, as seen, none of them is a suitable candidate to be identified with our *cohors Ulpia*. However, an alternative hypothesis may be raised. We have just seen that, at the end of the 3rd century, Arindela was defended by the *cohors secunda Galatarum* (AE 2015, 1691: AD 293-303). Could it be

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1852; *prouincia incerta*: AD 129; AE 2006, 1841; *prouincia incerta*: AD 154); *Quarta Ulpia Petraeorum*: stationed in Syria (AE 2006, 1835; *prouincia incerta*: AD 145); *Quinta Ulpia Petraeorum*: stationed in Syria (AE 2006, 1851; *prouincia incerta*: AD 129); *Sexta Ulpia Petraeorum*: stationed in Syria (AE 1972, 592; Asia [Ephesus]: AD 161-180). This cohort is mentioned in the following inscription: *Imp(erator) Caesar (...) Antoninus Aug(ustus) Pius (...) equitibus et peditib(us) qui militauer(unt) in alis VII et coh(ortibus) XX quae appellant(ur) I Fl(auia) Agrippia(na) et praetor(ia) sing(ularium) et I Ulp(ia) Syriac(a) et I Aug(usta) Xoitan(a) et I Thr(acum) Hercul(ana) et I Ulp(ia) sing(ularium) et I Ulpia dromad(ariorum) | (milliaria) et I Ulp(ia) Dacor(um) et I Ulp(ia) Petraeo(um) et I Flauia c(iuium) R(omanorum) et I Lucens(ium) et I Ulp(ia) sagit(tariorum) et I Fl(auia) Chalcid(enorum) et I Gaetul(orum) et I Aug(usta) Pan-non(iorum) et I Claud(ia) Sugambr(orum) tiron(um) et II Gemi(na) Ligur(um) et Corsor(um) et I Ascalon(itanorum) sagit(tariorum) et II classic(a) sagit(tariorum) et II Ulp(ia) Paphl(agonum) et II Ulp(ia) equit(ata) sagit(tariorum) et II Italic(a) c(iuium) R(omanorum) et III Thr(acum) Syriac(a) et III Aug(usta) [Thr(acum)] et IIII Gall(orum) et IIII Call(aecorum) Lucen[s(ium)] et VII Gall(orum) [et sunt in Syria sub] Pontio Laeliano l[eg(ato)] quin[is] et uicenis pluribusue stipendiis emeritis dimissis honesta missione quorum nomina subscripta sunt civitatem Romanam qui eorum non haberent dedit et conubium cum uxoribus quas tunc habuissent cum est ciuitas iis data aut cum iis quas postea duxissent dumtaxat singulis ...* (AE 2006, 1841; *prouincia incerta*: AD 153). As seen, the inscription does not inform where these units were stationed. On the other hand, the *Cohors secunda Ulpia Petraeorum miliaria equitata* is known through a single inscription in honour of the tribune Caius Camurius: *C(aio) Camurio C(ai) filio) / Lem(onia) Clementi (...) praef(ecto) i(iure) d(icundo) Imper(atoris) / Caes(aris) Traiani Aug(usti) (...) trib(uno) mil(itum) coh(ortis) / II Ulpiae Paetraeor(um) miliar(iae) / equit(atae), praef(ecto) alae Petrianae / miliarum c(iuium) R(omanorum)...* (CIL XI 5669 = AE 2008, 499; Attiggio/Attidium [Umbria]: AD 101-150). Since it is not mentioned in the *Notitia dignitatum*, is highly unlikely that it still existed at the beginning of the 5th century AD; however, it is not possible to know exactly when it disappeared. On the other hand, although the specific place where this cohort was stationed is unknown, it is likely that it had been somewhere in the Roman province of Syria Palaestina, like the other *cohortes Petraeorum* (Spaul 2000, pp. 438-439; 449; 451).

thought that the *cohors prima Ulpia Galatarum* (cf. AE 2014, 484) (or perhaps the *Prima Augusta Thrac(um)* or *Prima Thracum ciuium Romanorum* [AE 2004, 1925]) could have been stationed at Arindela in the first half of the 2nd century? There is not the slightest indication of this. But the non-Latin name of our soldier could be an indirect indication of the origin of this cohort. This is the reason why, at some point, we have considered the possibility that our Spratus was a soldier of Galatian or perhaps Thracian origin.

It could be considered a Galatian origin. If so, he would have belonged to the *cohors prima Ulpia Galatarum*. However, there is no evidence of the stay of this cohort in Arabia, insofar as it is only attested by a single inscription found in Aquileia and dated in 238 AD. In fact, as we have pointed out above, our efforts to relate the name Gorias with some Celtic roots have been unsuccessful. Another possibility would be that he was a soldier of Thracian origin, whose presence in the province of Arabia is well attested. Indeed, a military diploma from the beginning of the reign of Antoninus Pius reveals the presence in the province of two *cohortes* made up of Thracian soldiers, the *cohors prima Augusta Thrac(um)* and the *cohors prima Thracum ciuium Romanorum*:

Imp(erator) Caesar (...) Antoninus Aug(ustus) / Pius pont(ifex) max(imus) trib(unicia) pot(estate) V co(n)s(ul) III (...) equitib(us) et pedit(ibus) qui milit(auerunt) in alis II et coh(ortibus) VI / quae appell(antur) Gaetul(or)um ueter(ana) et Ulpia droma(dariorum) / Palmyr(enorum) | (miliaria) et I Aug(usta) Thrac(um) et I Thrac(um) c(iuium) R(omanorum) / et I Hisp(anorum) Cyren(aica) et I Aelia class(ica) et II Aure(lia) classic(a) et VI Hispan(or)um et sunt in Ara(bia) sub Aemilio Caro quinis et uicen(is) / [pluribusue stipendiis emeritis dimis]s(is) hon(esta) [miss(ione)] quorum nomina subscripta sunt ciuitatem Romanam qui eorum non hab(erent) ded(it) et conubium... (AE 2004, 1925; *prouincia incerta*: AD 142).

Was our Spratus enlisted in any of the aforementioned Thracian military units? It is not easily assumable, since neither of the two cohorts, except confusion, bears the title of *Ulpia*. Therefore, we close this section by pointing out that we have not been able to identify the cohort in which the soldier was enrolled.

##### 5. A brief biography of Spratus

Obviously, the little information provided by the inscription does not allow to reconstruct the biography of Spratus. Even more, his life offers more

unknowns than certainties. We know that, as he was a young man, he enlisted in a cohort of auxiliary soldiers in which he spent 23 years. He died at age 43, two years before reaching the 25 years of military service that would have provided him the coveted Roman citizenship. There is no indication that he had a wife and children. However, there are other additional questions to answer: Did he get the Roman citizenship? Did he get a military service license? Why was he in Arindela? In principle, we have considered that *Sprato* (dative) was a *cognomen* and that, therefore, the sequence of 6-7 letters that were missing in the destroyed part of the piece belonged to a *praenomen* and *cognomen* [M. Ulpio]. This is nothing more than a mere assumption, insofar as the information provided by the inscriptions are far from indisputable:

D(is) M(anibus) s(acrum) / M(arci) Aureli Muciani / militis cohor(tis) praeto-  
ries | (centuria) Aquile stupen/diorum XVI anno(rum) XXXX / nationem  
Trhacem ... (CIL IX 1424; Apulia-Calabria [Aequum Tuticum]: AD 3rd cen-  
tury)

D(is) M(anibus) / Flauio S[e]uero / militi c[o]hortis / Lusitanorum uixit /  
annis XX[I]X militauit / stipendia XIII memo(ria)m num[e]r[us] posuit.  
(CIL III 12257; Asia [Stratonicea]; s.d.)

These two inscriptions mention two soldiers of non-Roman origin militat-  
ing in auxiliary units for a few years and possessing, however, Roman citizen-  
ship, as evidenced by their names. However, the first is from the 3rd century,  
when all the free inhabitants of the Roman Empire since 212 AD were al-  
ready citizens; and the second is from an unknown date, which does not allow  
to establish any conclusion about the matter.

In contrast, other soldiers of the auxiliary troops died, apparently, with-  
out having obtained Roman citizenship, as evidenced in the following in-  
scriptions:

Talanio / Plassi f(ilius) / Docleas / mil(es) ex coh(orte) V Da(l)/matarum / |  
(centuria) Capitonis / anno(rum) XXXV / stip(endiorum) VI h(ic) s(itus) e(st)  
/ Ziraeus po/ssuit mun(icipis) suo. (CIL XIII 7039; Germania superior [Mo-  
gontiacum]: AD 1st c.)

Sibbaeus Eron(is) f(ilius) tubicen ex / cohorte I / Ituraeorum / miles ann(orum)  
XXIV / stipendiorum VIII h(ic) s(itus) e(st). (CIL XIII 7042; Germania supe-  
rior [Mogontiacum]: AD 14-37)

Veiagenus / Sisgi f(ilius) mil/es ex coh/orte Raeto(rum) / an(norum) XLVI stip(endiorum) / XXIV natus M/onte... (CIL XIII 6240; Germania superior [Worms]: s. d.)

Consequently, it is not possible to affirm that Spratus obtained the Roman citizenship. Hence our initial assumption that the damaged portion of the inscription contained a Roman *nomen* and a *cognomen* is a mere conjecture. It is not even possible to know if he got his military service license. If he died before completing the mandatory 25 years of his military service, it is presumably that he died in Arindela during his service and that he was buried by his comrades in arms.

However, another alternative can be considered. Until now it has been assumed that Spratus was at Arindela as a member of a cohort permanently stationed there. However, his presence in the distant frontier of Arabia could be explained by the fact that he had been entrusted with a mission far from the unknown military garrison where he had originally been serving<sup>22</sup>. If so, it would be impossible to determine the military unit from which he actually came. In any case, we consider more plausible that Spratus was, as is logical, a soldier of the garrison of the fortress.

#### V. BY WAY OF CONCLUSION: A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ROMAN PRESENCE IN ARINDELA

Beyond the inevitable doubts arising from the paucity of information concerning our inscription, the appearance of a new Latin inscription in Arindela is good news, not only because it enlarges the short catalogue of Latin epigraphy in the area, but also because it enriches our knowledge of the Roman military occupation of Arabia in the first half of the 2nd century AD.

a) Emperor Trajan opens a new road linking southern Syria with the Red Sea in the new province of Arabia (112 AD):

Imp(erator) Caesar / diui Neruae f(ilius) Nerua / Traianus (...) redacta in formam / prouinciae Arabia(e) uiam / nouam a finibus Syriae / usque ad mare rubrum /

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<sup>22</sup> Let us remember, in this regard, the Book X of the correspondence of Pliny the Younger with Trajan, a valuable source of information about the great variety of tasks that were entrusted to the soldiers outside their provinces.



aperuit et strauit per / C(aium) Claudium Seuerum / leg(atum) Au[g(usti) pr(o) pr(aetore) co(n)s(ulem) des(ignatum)]. (AE 1897, 65; Arindela)<sup>23</sup>

At the same time as the *noua uia* was opened, the ancient Nabataean town was probably transformed into a strategic military fort defended by an unknown cohort (a *Cohors Ulpia miliaria*)<sup>24</sup>. Spratus, son of Gorias, was one of those soldiers. Almost certainly, this humble and unknown soldier did not become a Roman citizen. He died before he turned the 25 mandatory years of military service. On the other hand, the linguistic opacity of its name prevents any conjecture about its native land and, therefore, also does not give any information about the origin of the troopers that made up this cohort.

b) Another inscription dated in 162, at the beginning of the reign of Marcus Aurelius, attests the presence of the imperial government in Arindela:

Imp(erator) Caesar / [M(arcus) Au]relius Antoninu[s] / [Aug(ustus) p]ontifex maxim[us] / [trib(unicia) po]t(estate) XVI co(n)s(ul) III [et] / Imp(erator) Caesar / [L(ucius) Aur]elius Verus Aug(ustus) / [trib(unicia) potes(tate) II co(n)s(ul) III] (...) refecerunt per / Geminium Marcianum / leg(atum) Aug(ustorum) pr(o) pr(aetore) / VIII. (AE 1897, 66; Arindela: AD 162)

Although the inscription does not specify which is the direct object of the verb *refecerunt*, there fortunately is a significant series of very similar inscriptions that reveals the imperial purpose to repair the road opened by Trajan, a task

<sup>23</sup> The *Via Traiana Noua* was not really new, since it was the same road previously known as the *Via Regia*. It was given such a name in order to distinguish it from the *Via Traiana* in Italy. The road was completed under Hadrian (Browning 1982, p. 33), but the inscription shows that the Roman imperial government was firmly seated in the fort of Arindela during the reign of Trajan. Its construction, started after the annexation of Arabia, was supervised by Governor Gaius Claudius Severus. In fact, a surviving letter sent by Apollinarius, a clerk at the service of Severus himself, mentions that the construction work for the road was already in progress in 107 AD (*P. Mich.* VIII 466). On the other hand, the epigraphic testimonies on the construction of this road are very numerous. These are just a few examples: *CIL* III 14149 (Arabia [Wadi Waleh]: AD 111); *AE* 1995, 1606 (Arabia [Khirbat]: AD 112); *AE* 1899, 30 (Arabia [Jerash]: AD 112); *AE* 1996, 1610 (Arabia [Jabal al Ulu]: AD 112).

<sup>24</sup> It is not possible to know if these soldiers participated in the paving of that road. However, the aforementioned letter by Apollinarius mentions that some of work was carried out by soldiers of his legion (*legio III Cyrenaica*) in the vicinity of Petra: ...[ὅ]λης τῆς [ἡμέρ]ας λίθους κοπ[έ]οντων καὶ [ἄλλα] ποιούντων... (*P. Mich.* VIII 466, ll. 21-23 =...all day long were cutting stones and doing other things).

assumed by Geminius Marcianus, *legatus pro praetore* in Arabia, a high-ranking official with an extensive epigraphic record in the province<sup>25</sup>. In any case, this is the last known inscription in Arindela linked to the Antonine dynasty.

c) As aforementioned, there are no more epigraphic records in Arindela until the reign of Diocletian (AE 2015, 1691), when Arindela was defended by the *cohors secunda Galatarum*<sup>26</sup>.

This inscription allows us to know that already in the first half of the 2nd century Arindela was defended by the unknown Roman cohort in which Spratus was enlisted. We do not dare to be more precise since any conjecture in this matter without additional data would be mere speculation. However, it is possible that future epigraphic findings in the area will allow us to get to know its name and above all to know its history better.

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<sup>25</sup> See AE 2003, 1821 (Arabia [Ajloun]: AD 162); *CIL* III 14173 (Arabia [Philadelphia, Amman]: AD 162); AE 1904, 63 (Arabia [Bostra]: AD 162); *CIL* III 14149 (Arabia [Dhat-Ras el-Thawane]: AD 162); *CIL* III 14175 (Arabia [Gerasa]: AD 162). In fact, one of these inscriptions solves the pointed problem, since the verb *refecerunt* was replaced by *strauerunt*, a verb with a more specific meaning: *Imp(erator) Cae[s(ar)] / M(arcus) Aurelius Anto[ninus] (...) [et] / Imp(erator) Cae(ar) L(ucius) Aureli[us] Verus] (...) [st]rauer[unt] per P(ublium) Iul(ium) Gemini-um] / Marc[ianum] legatu[m] pro [pr(aetore)]*. (AE 2002, 1566; Arabia [Imtan/Mothana]: AD 162).

<sup>26</sup> After this date, the history of Arindela must have passed through the vicissitudes of the eastern part of the Roman Empire. And, obviously, the most significant of them was the implantation of Christianity in the region. In fact, the Christianization of the area started in the fourth century: «A fourth century church at Gharandal would be among the earliest purpose-built Christian structures in a military context found in the eastern Roman Empire and offer insight into changes in religious practices among soldiers stationed along the eastern frontier». (Duncan et al. 2017, p. 85).

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