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(Ilaguas ; Leuathae ; Louāta/Lawāta)

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- 1 The *Laguatan* (plural : *Ilaguas*) comprised a confederation of Berber tribes in late antiquity and though the history of the confederation cannot be reconstructed in detail, the importance of this tribal grouping must not be underestimated. From its first appearance in the late third century AD, the confederation played a significant role in the politics of late Roman, Vandal, Byzantine and early Arab Africa. It is to the *Laguatan* that we can look for a vital thread of continuity across this long period of successive upheavals.
- 2 The tribal ethnic is known in various forms from a number of Byzantine and Arab sources, though it is generally accepted that the transliteration found in the work of the African writer Corippus is likely to be the closest to the original Berber (*lagatan/Laguatan*). Alternative forms in Procopius (*Leuathae*) and early Arab writers (*Louāta* or *Lawāta*) hint at the soft pronunciation of the 'g' (Mattingly, 1983, p. 96 & 106 ; see also *inter alia*, Brogan 1975, p. 282-86 ; J. Desanges 1962, p. 82 & 101-102 ; Jerary, 1976). See further the complementary note by Chaker below.
- 3 Corippus wrote of sixth-century events, but he also specified that the emperor Maximian had made a campaign against the confederation in the late third century. This appears to be the earliest reference to the *Laguatan*, though it is likely that at that stage they were known under another name. In a previous study, I have argued strongly that the *Laguatan* can be identified with another tribal grouping known in the late fourth / early fifth centuries AD as the *Austuriani* or *Ausuriani* (Ammianus Marcellinus xxviii, 6, 1-5 ; 6, 10-14 ; Synesius, *Letters* 13, 57, 62, 67, 69, 78, 94, 95, 104, 107, 108, 113, 122, 125, 130, 132, 133, 134, *Catastasis*). The evidence in favour of such an identification seems overwhelming : the *Austur* appeared later as a sub-tribe or synonym for the *Laguatan* (Corippus, ii, 89-91 ; 209 ; 345 ; v ; 172 ; 283-85) ; the geographic heartlands of the *Austuriani* and the early *Laguatan* both corresponded with the desert oases of *Syrtica* and points east ; the complex tribal hierarchy of the confederation (best evident in Corippus, ii, 7-148 ; vi, 191-201) would explain the change in name as the result of the displacement of the *Austur* as the dominant sub-tribal group within the confederation (Mattingly 1983, p. 100). An alternative suggestion proposed by D. Roques (1983), that the *Austuriani*

raids on Cyrenaica represented the activity of the remnants of Gildo's defeated army, moving eastwards at the end of this rebellion in the 390's, is ingenious but implausible. Moderan's important work on the tribal situation of late antique Africa (1986 ; 2003) differs in a few minor points of emphasis from my interpretation and I am grateful for him for providing a further complementary note to this entry.

- 4 Historical references to the Laguatan and Austuriani were mainly concerned with chronicling destructive clashes between them and the authorities of the day, whether Roman, Vandal or Byzantine, but this is useful to the extent that it enables us to check the westward spread of the confederation and the growth of its power :
1. Trouble in Cyrenaica in the AD 260's caused by 'Marmaridae tribes - perhaps an early reference to the confederation. A campaign by the governor of Egypt into the Western Desert suggests that the oases centres of the northern Sahara were involved (SEG ix, 9).
 2. References to campaigns against the Laguatan by the Tetrarch Maximian, whose base of operations was in Africa. This implies that the Laguatan now had centres in the region of Syrtica and were pushing West (Corippus i, 480-483 ; v 178-180 ; vii, 530-533).
 3. Major crisis for Tripolitania in AD 363-65, with frontier overrun by Asturiani, presumably operating from bases in the desert oases to the southeast of the province (Ammianus Marcellinus, xxviii, 6, 1-14).
 4. The devastation of the Tripolitanian raids repeated in Cyrenaica by Ausuriani (sic) in the early fifth century and recorded in detail by Synesius (*Letters and Catastasis*).
 5. Further attacks on Tripolitanian lands in the first quarter of the fifth century by Austuriani (IRT 480, Reynolds, 1977, p. 13.)
 6. Major defeat for Vandal army in Tripolitania at hands of Laguatan tribes of region under leadership of Cabaon in AD 523 (Procopius, *Wars*, iii, 8, 15-29.).
 7. At the time of Byzantine reconquest of Tripolitania in AD 533 Lepcis Magna had been abandoned by the Vandals and much of the hinterland was occupied by Laguatan tribes (Procopius, *Buildings* vi, 4, 6-10).
 8. Initial Byzantine policy of alliance with individual Laguatan tribes to secure peace (Procopius, *Wars*, iii, 25,7 ; Pringle, 1981, p. 9-16, 23-50).
 9. Catastrophic failure of Byzantine diplomacy with slaughter of 79 Laguatan chiefs at meeting with dux Sergius at Lepcis in AD 543. Major revolt lasted until 548 and geographic extent of confederation spread to southern Tunisia through alliance with tribes under command of Antalas (Procopius, *Wars*, books iii-iv ; Corippus, *Iohannidos*).
 10. The first Arab invasion of Cyrenaica in AD 642 encountered Laguatan tribes, not 'Romans' on the plateau around Barce. A similar situation also existed on the Tripolitanian Gebel and it is apparent that in both areas direct Byzantine control had been limited to the coastal plains for some time (Abd-al-Hakam, Translated by A. Gateau, 1947, p. 35-37).
 11. Laguatan groups of tribes (Louāta) were identified by Arab sources at many locations from the Nile into Algeria. Some of the major sub-groups became important confederations into their own right - The *Hawwara*, *Nefusa* etc. (Ibn Khaldun, translated by the Slane, p. 231-236, 280-281).
- 5 These are the bare facts and it is clearly hazardous to attempt to create too detailed a hypothesis about the nature of the confederation, its origins or its mode of existence. Yet there are some few pointers towards a clearer understanding of the nature of the Laguatan and these must be given due consideration.

- 6 One element in the history of the Laguatan marks them out as notorious raiders and warriors. Yet we must be careful not to adopt the oversimplistic labels and explanations which have sometimes been applied to this phenomenon (Gautier 1952, 188-214 ; Courtois 1955, 102-104, 344-350). In particular, a careful reading of our sources indicates clearly that the Laguatan were not 'nomades chameliers' in the full sense of the term. As warriors, their preferred form of action was, in the long tradition of Berber tribes, as equine cavalry. Although camels were employed by them as baggage animals and as one element in crude cordon defences of tethered animals around their camps (Corippus ii, 91 ; iv, 597-619 ; viii, 33-40 ; Procopius, *Wars*, iii, 8, 15-29 ; Ibn Khaldun, trans. Rosenthal, II p. 78), a causative link cannot be established between the supposed diffusion of the camel and the greater mobility of the desert tribes of late antiquity. The second point that has often been missed is that the confederation extended well beyond nomadic groupings and that a large percentage were engaged in mixed or sedentary forms of land exploitation. The likely composition of the confederation and the cohesiveness of the links between the different groups must now be considered in some detail.
- 7 There is certainly some evidence to link the growth and spread of the Laguatan confederation with the movement of a groupe of neo-Berber tribes from east to west in the northern Sahara (Brogan 1975, p. 284-286 ; Euzennat 1984, 88-389 ; Camps 1980, 126-127 ; Mattingly 1983, 101, id, 1995, for a fuller discussion). The troubles in Egypt, Cyrenaica, Syrtica and Tripolitania from the mid-third century AD onwards may bear testimony to a single process. The chain of oases lying to the south of Cyrenaica and Tripolitania must have been crucial to the westward spread of a confederation or grand alliance of desert tribes. This gave the people who we can eventually recognise as Laguatan a series of bases from which the initial raids against those provinces were directed (Bates 1914, 8-14 ; Rebuffat 1970, p. 1-120). By the time of the Byzantine reconquest of Tripolitania in AD 533, it is apparent that the Vandal hold on the interior of the country had become marginal and the deep pessimism of Synesius' last letters suggests that the Cyrenaican plateau may likewise have slipped out of direct Roman control. This reflects more than the activity of persistent and efficient razzias ; the Laguatan succeeded not merely in destabilising the former frontier zones, they turned them inside out by recruiting the Libyans of these regions for their confederation. To some extent there was seizure of land, but this was concentrated in the former *territoria* of the Roman towns. The Romano-Libyan rural elites and tribal groups were absorbed into the loose confederation, whilst retaining something of their former identity. Here Moderan and I are in broad agreement that the oases and desert lands south of Syrtica were a key focus for the evolution of the Laguatan people. I still believe that the extension of Laguatan power well beyond this area represents a major change in the nature of the desert societies after several centuries of relative stability.
- 8 The great Laguatan revolt of AD 543-48 can serve to illustrate these points (for the value of Corippus as a source, see Moderan 1986 ; *Encyclopedie berbère*, s.v. Corippe). In his detailed account of the confederation, Corippus conveys the clear message that the name Laguatan pertained to innumerable sub-tribes (ii, 7) and that, whilst many of the names and synonyms mentioned had specific Syrtic or eastern desert connections (Syrticae, Marmaridae, Nasamones), others are recognisable from toponyms and tribal ethnics in the former frontier zone of Tripolitania. (*Arzugis**, *Talanteis*, *Tillibaris*-ii, 42-148). The revolt was sparked off by the well-known incident in which 79 Laguatan chiefs were murdered when meeting the Byzantine dux Sergius under safe conduct to redefine the traditional

diplomatic ties which operated between them and the governor to secure peace in the region (Propopius, *Wars*, iv, 21, 2-11). That these chieftains were not simply nomad 'sheiks' is demonstrated by the fact that a major point of contention between them and the Byzantine authorities was the fact that the Roman had been plundering their crops! The atrocity committed by Sergius seems to have reunited the diverse elements and interests of the confederation and for five years the Libyan tribes posed a considerable threat to Byzantine rule in Africa. During the revolt an alliance was made between the Laguatan and a further group of Berber tribes in Tunisia under the command of Antalas and this was of great significance for the future in that it marked the effective spread of the confederation/alliance west of Tripolitania.

- 9 In spite of their eventual defeat by the Byzantine forces in AD 548, the Laguatan remained a significant political and social force in the later sixth and early seventh centuries. When the first Arab invasions swept aside the Byzantine garrisons, many of the native Berber peoples with whom they sought to establish treaty relations were described as Louāta. Later Arabic sources, such as Ibn Khaldun, referred to the presence of Louāta in places as diverse as the major oases of the western Egyptian desert (Siwa, Bahariya, Farafra, Dakhla, Kharga) and close to the Nile delta, in Cyrenaica, Tripolitania (Gefara, Nefzaoua, Gebel Msellata, Nefusa) and the Syrtic oases, the region of Sfax and Kairouan* and in the Algerian Aures*, the oases of Zab and at Bougie* (De Slane, 1926-1956, I, 176-182, 232-236, 280-281).
- 10 The implications of the evidence for the composition of the confederation is that, in common with more recent Berber tribal structures, the principle of hierarchy was all important. For much of the time the confederation was inoperative but latent (note the attempts by the Roman/Byzantine authorities to confer the insignia of office on individual sub-tribal chiefs). As well as comprising a core of neo-Berber tribes, the Laguatan roll-call expanded to include most of the Libyan tribes and less Romanised people of the frontier zones of Cyrenaica, Tripolitania, the north-eastern Sahara and, later, lands further west also. When reunited under a single elected war leader, as in the extraordinary conditions of the 543 revolt, the confederation was a major force to be reckoned with. For much of its history, however, the unity of purpose or action was not so apparent, with smaller groups of sub-tribes perhaps acting in concert at a much more localised level, but with alliance remaining latent in the wider sense.
- 11 Given the eventual size and extent of the confederation it was only in quite exceptional circumstances that the principle of tribal confederation would have operated at its fullest extent. In the long term, there are clear signs from the Arab histories that the confederation did eventually fragment somewhat into regional powerbases, with the name Louāta becoming increasingly part of the hereditary mythology of particular tribes rather than a still active binding force. In this context it is interesting to note that there are some indications that the Louāta are identifiable with the Botr grouping of tribes at a later date still (Ibn Khaldun, trans De Slane, p. 168-182).
- 12 The history of the Laguatan, therefore, is not the preserve of the historian of a single time bracket, but has major implications for the study of the Roman, Vandal, Byzantine and Arab periods (see also Moderan 2003). Perhaps the greatest significance of the Laguatan lies in the fact that they represent in each period a native African response to invasion or outside political control.

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INDEX

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