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## **Between the Cults of Syria and Arabia: Traces of Pagan Religion at Umm al-Jimāl**

### **Introduction**

Umm al-Jimāl's location in the southern Hauran puts it at the intersection of the cultures of Arabia to the south and Syria to the north. While its political geography places it in the Nabataean and Roman realms of Arabia, its cultural geography locates it in the Hauran, linked to the northern Hauran. Seen on a more economic cultural axis, Umm al-Jimāl is between Syria as Bilād ash-Shām, the region of agricultural communities, and the *Badiya*, the region of pastoral nomad encampments. Life of society on these intersecting axes brought a rich variety of economic, political and religious cross-currents that gave special meaning to the problem of security. While the political and economic dimensions were largely exterior, imposed by the policies of regional powers (Nabataean) and empires (Roman), the religious dimension of security could be more local, or, at least, could be given locally independent meaning.

While religion is often treated in isolation from other cultural aspects (e. g., the classic by Sourdel, *Cultes de Hauran*) or as incidental to social and political dimensions of culture (e. g., the excellent works of Adam T. Smith and Villo Harle), I have chosen to treat religion as a central — possibly the central — component of the socio-political construction of security in ancient societies like those of Umm al-Jimāl. My operative definition of religion follows that of Peter Berger, “the establishment, through human activity, of an all-embracing sacred order, that is, of a sacred cosmos that will be capable of maintaining itself in the ever-present face of chaos” (1969: 51, further, 26-28). The language used is particularly apt because it places the issue of security in late paganism in the long tradition of the chaos-order paradigm of ancient Near Eastern myths.

Such a human construction of religion as a social mechanism to achieve security does not preclude the possibility that a religion may be based on theological eternal verities (Berger 1969: 180-181). However, it does open up the possibility of an archaeology of religion that transcends the customary descriptions of cult centers and cataloguing of altars, statues, implements and decorative elements. That is, it presupposes the possibility of a larger interpretive context for these “traces” of religion using the methodology of cognitive archaeology.

The term “traces” is meant in the technical sense of Assmann's theory of memory (2002: 6-11). At the core, these are the archaeological, material and inscriptional remains surviving at Umm al-Jimāl and its various geographic environments dated from the first to the fifth centuries AD. These not only testify directly to pagan religiosity known from symbolic shapes and the meanings of inscriptions, but also the larger archaeological socio-political context in which these specific traces had meaning. This context also testifies to the role of these traces in the “memory” of the succeeding phases of occupation.

The essay begins with a brief introduction of the nature of the political landscape — Nabataean and Roman hegemonies — to which Umm al-Jimāl belonged. The substance of the chapter will present the traces of paganism, limited to those artifacts and texts with direct references to deities and their role in society. The chapter will conclude with the long-term memory, which involved in fact a deliberate forgetting of their original religious functions and a recycling of these traces of paganism into the fabric of the Roman fortress occupation of the fourth century.

The results of this inquiry are expected to add insight into the social role of religion in the

achievement of local security under the domination of external regional and imperial power. It is the first part of a larger inquiry into the fate of local religiosity in a society subjected to imperial occupation — how communal religiosity may adapt and survive, but also how it may break down when the external source of security, imperial power, is replaced by destructive and fragmenting force (see de Vries 2007: 468-470).

### I. Background: the Political Landscape

The religious context of Umm al-Jimāl from the first to the fourth centuries is dominated by three socio-political circumstances: the local culture, Nabataean regional sphere of influence and Roman imperial domination.

#### A. Local Arab Culture

Evidences of the indigenous character of Umm al-Jimāl survive mainly in the Arabic names written in Safaitic, Nabataean and Greek scripts simultaneously (e.g., *Al-'Abd*, buried AD 208, Littmann 1913a: no. 275). In this, Umm al-Jimāl appears typical of the mixed agrarian culture of the Hauran and nomadic culture of the Badiya seen at many sites in the Hauran and territories immediately to the east. It is traditional to talk about Umm al-Jimāl in these centuries as “Nabataean” or “Roman”. However, it is the premise of this research that the dominant aspect of its culture is local Arab, on which a veneer of Nabataean and Roman cultures were superimposed as these two polities enveloped the settlement into its respective hegemonic spheres.

#### B. Nabataean Phase (ca. AD 50 to 106 and Continuing Through the Third Century)

The town became “Nabataeanized” as later kings added the exploitation of the agricultural terrain of the southern Hauran to their economic interests, and made Bostra the administrative center of this northern Nabataea during the reigns of Aretas IV, Malik II and Rabbel II (de Vries 1986). In terms of power politics expansion to the north was triggered by a protracted power struggle over the region with the Herodian Tetrarchic rulers (the two Agrippas and Philip), with the result that the Hauran was split in two, with the northern part incorporated into Roman Syria as the Herodian puppet dynasty outlived its usefulness, while the southern portion survived under independent rule until it was folded into the Province of Arabia as part of the Nabataean politi-

cal geography in AD 106.

Traces of this Nabataean veneer are visible at Umm al-Jimāl in the numerous Nabataean inscriptions dated from the mid first to the late third centuries AD, the survival of Nabataean-style architectural fragments, and the famous Dushara-Aarra text to be discussed below. In the larger political landscape of the southern Hauran, Umm al-Jimāl must be seen as a satellite village of Bostra. Inscriptional evidence of this is the identification of more than one person buried at the site as a member of the Bostra town council (Littmann 1913b: 343-344, no. 284).

#### C. Roman Phase (AD 106 to 411)

While local and Nabataean elements of cultural identity did not disappear, the Roman veneer imposed on this is most evident in several Latin inscriptions indicating the presence of Roman imperial authorities. These inscriptions mention the *Provincia Arabia* (Littmann 1913a: no. 234), the construction dedication of the northwest gate and wall in the names of the co-rulers Marcus Aurelius and Commodus (Littmann 1913: no. 232), and the construction dedication of an unidentified *burgus* in the co-regency of Valentinian, Valens and Gratian in AD 371 (Littmann 1913a: 132, no. 233). Formal Roman imperial construction, though mostly visible in fragments cycled into the later Byzantine buildings, survives in the so-called Praetorium (Brown 1998). A Greek funerary text commemorating Neōn, son of Ka'mih gives uncommon evidence of a local conscript in the third Cyrenaica, the Roman legion at Bostra, the provincial capital (FIG. 1; Littmann 1913a: 178, no. 349).

Though it is easy to interpret the local evidence for religion as being “Hellenized” or “Romanized,” it must be stressed that such outside influences have to be seen as a veneer which may have colored the outward appearances but did not penetrate to the core of local religious identity. This presupposition starts in the general perspective that the religious impact of Hellenization throughout the entire era from Alexander to Constantine remained superficial and that religion retained its Near Eastern character throughout, especially at the local level of society (that is, *pagan* in the original meaning of that word) in places like Umm al-Jimāl. Teixidor states this emphatically, “Popular religion must have remained practically unchanged in Greco-Roman times” (1977: 6). I would go further to say that

Roman manipulation of local religious cults for imperial political purposes contributed to their abandonment in favor of competing popular religious movements from the second century on.

## II. The Traces of Paganism: the Gods of Umm al-Jimāl

### A. The Three Gods in Altar Dedications

The three gods named on altars surviving in the Byzantine ruins of Umm al-Jimāl (FIG. 2) are Dushara Arra, the God Solmos and Holy Zeus Epekoos.

#### 1. Dousares Aarra

Dushara at Umm al-Jimāl is known from the famous bilingual on two sides of the altar die located in the debris of the House VI; it is 1.40m. high and 0.37m. wide at base (FIGS. 3, 4).

The Greek text is:

*Masesos Aoueidanou Dousarei Aarra*

“Masechos, (son) of Aweidanos of Dushara A’ra” (Littmann 1913a: 37-38, no. 238; Sourdel 1952: 60).

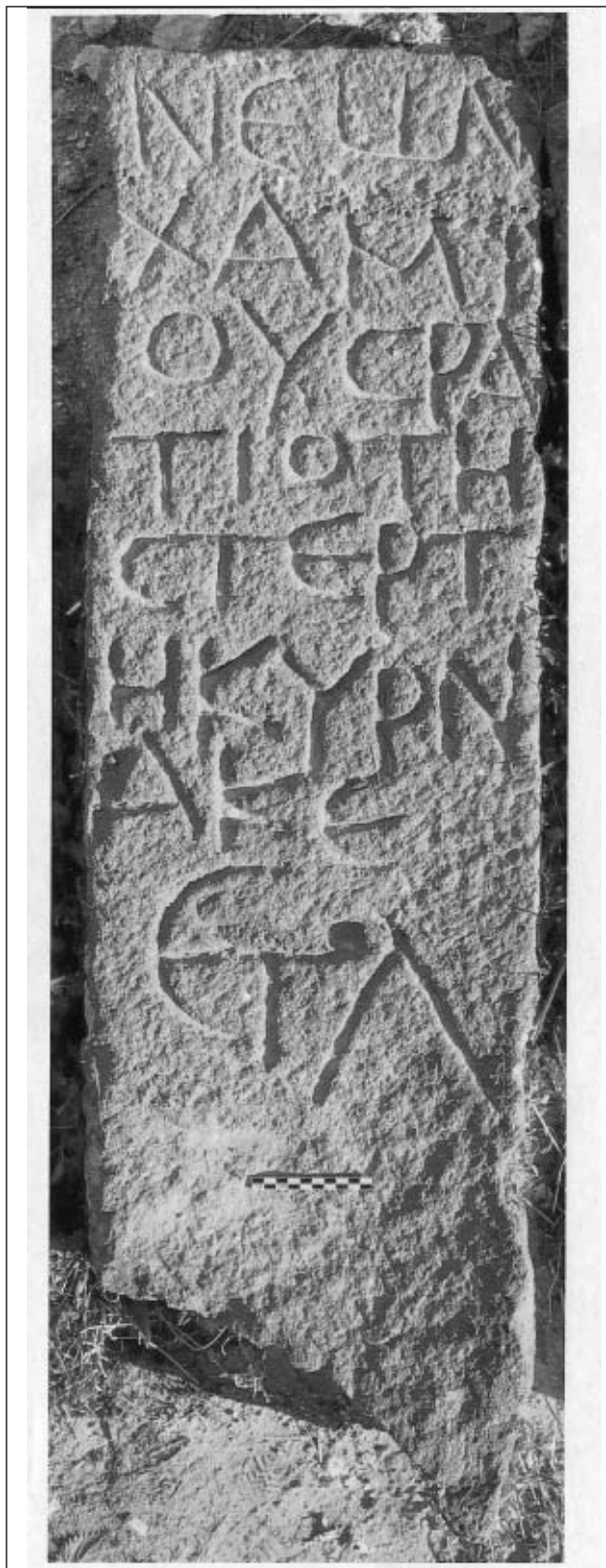
The Nabataean text (FIG. 5) is:

*msgd’ dy mskw br ‘wyd’ l-dwsr’*

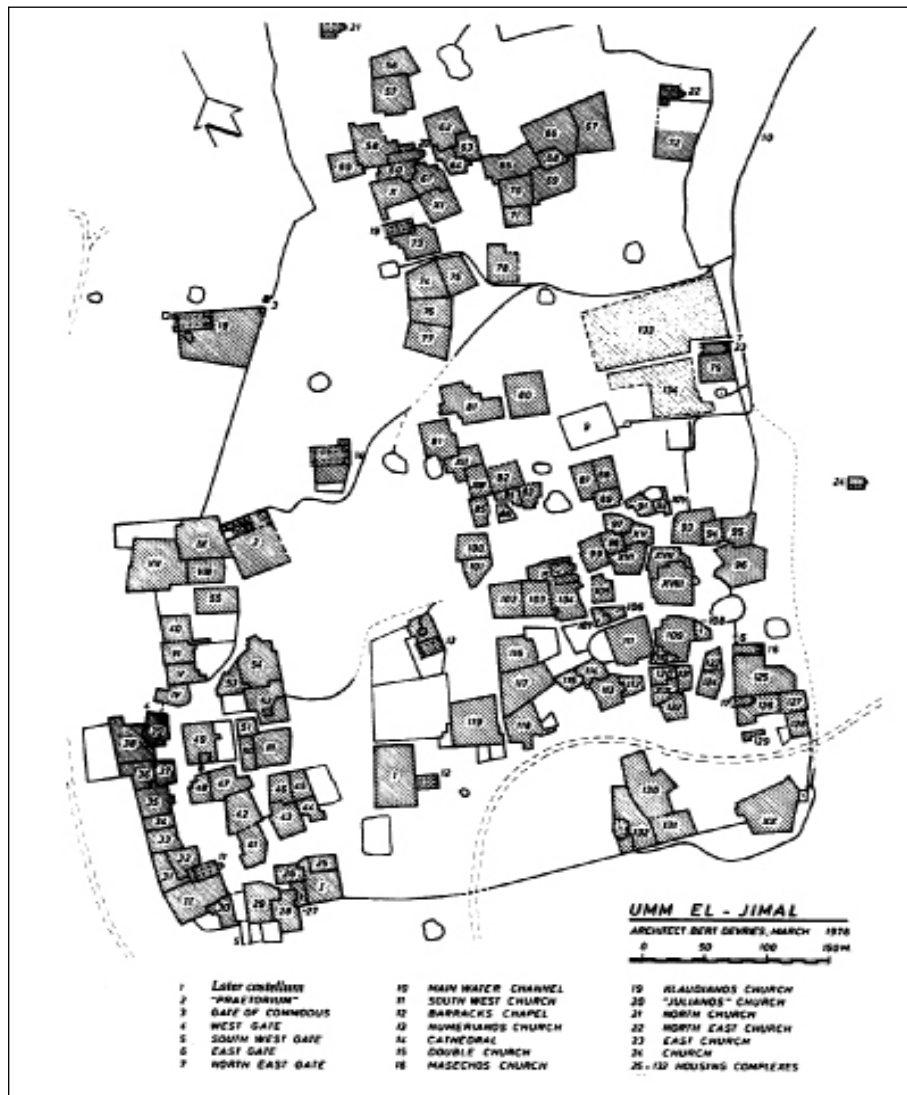
“The cult-stone which was made by Māsik, son of ‘Awidhā, for Dushara” (Littmann 1914: 34-35, no. 38).

The date of the inscription is probably mid-second century AD. Littmann asserts that the orthographic style of the Nabataean characters fits the late first to early second century. However, the date could be after the Roman annexation if the Māsik of the Umm al-Jimāl stone is the same as Māsik, the father of Yamlik, the donor of an altar to Dusares-Aarra at Bostra in AD 147 (Littmann 1914: 34). The name *Masesos* is common at Umm al-Jimāl and throughout the Hauran; it reflects the Arab-Aramaic *msk*, attested both in the Hauran and the Safaitic Ḥarra, and is translated as “(god) has taken possession” (Sartre 1985: 216). It is, therefore, a truly indigenous name, representative of the cultural uniformity of the Hauran and Ḥarra regions of Syria.

Littmann’s interpretation of *Aarra* as a stone *baetyl* (“idol” on which blood was poured (1913a: 138; Zayadine 2003: 59) was followed by Sourdel (1952: 60). In discussing the Nabataean text, he explains that *Aarra* (Gr.) is likely a transliteration of an Arabic term from the root *ghry* and conjectures that this is the true name of the deity, whereas Dushara (*Dhu esh-Shara*, “He of the Shara’ Moun-



1. Neōn, son of Ka’ mih, soldier in the Third Cyrenaica; found outside House 53 (Photo by the author).



2. Schematic map of Byzantine-Umayyad Umm al-Jimāl referred to for locations of stones discussed in the essay (Drawn by the author).

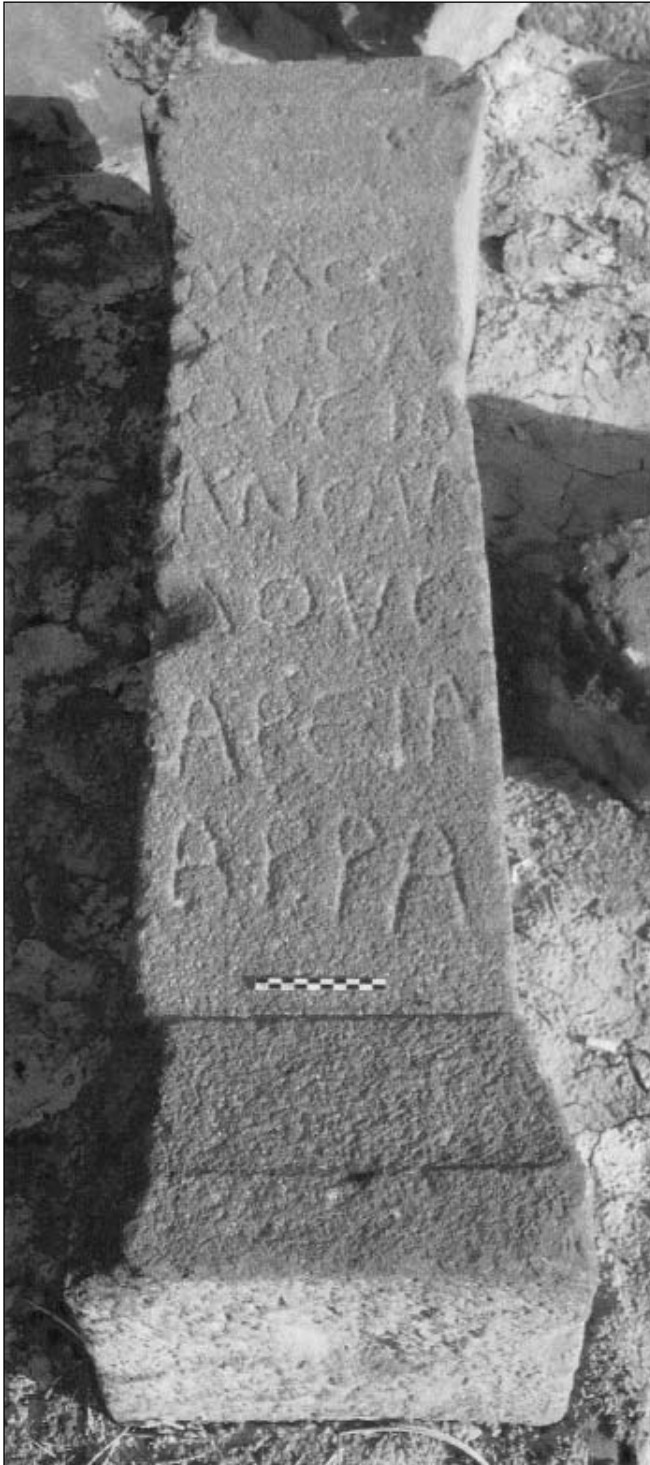
tains”) “was only the cognomen”. He ventures that, based on this Semitic root the full name was *al-Gharriyyu*, who was worshipped at Petra (Littmann 1914: 35).

However, Greek *Aarra* is a direct equivalent of the Nabataean *A’ra*, and linked to the name Dushara, which became associated with Bostra in the reign of Rabbel II (Healey 2001: 97-98). “A’ra who is in Bostra, god of Rabbel” occurs first on an inscription at Mada’in Saleh, early in the reign of Malik II (Sourdell 1952: 59-60; Sartre 1985: 60; Healey 2001: 98). In the Hauran itself Nabataean inscriptions from the reign of Rabbel II confirm this association. Another Hauran inscription states, Dushara A’ra, god of our lord, (god) who is in Bostra (AD 93, Healey: 2001: 98). Maurice Sartre argues that Rabbel’s adaptation of A’ra as the god of Bostra meant supplanting the original patron

goddess of the city, “Bostra”, but interestingly both Allat and al-Uzza (Littmann 1914: 57-58, no. 70) have been identified as goddess of Bostra (Sartre 1985: 59-60).

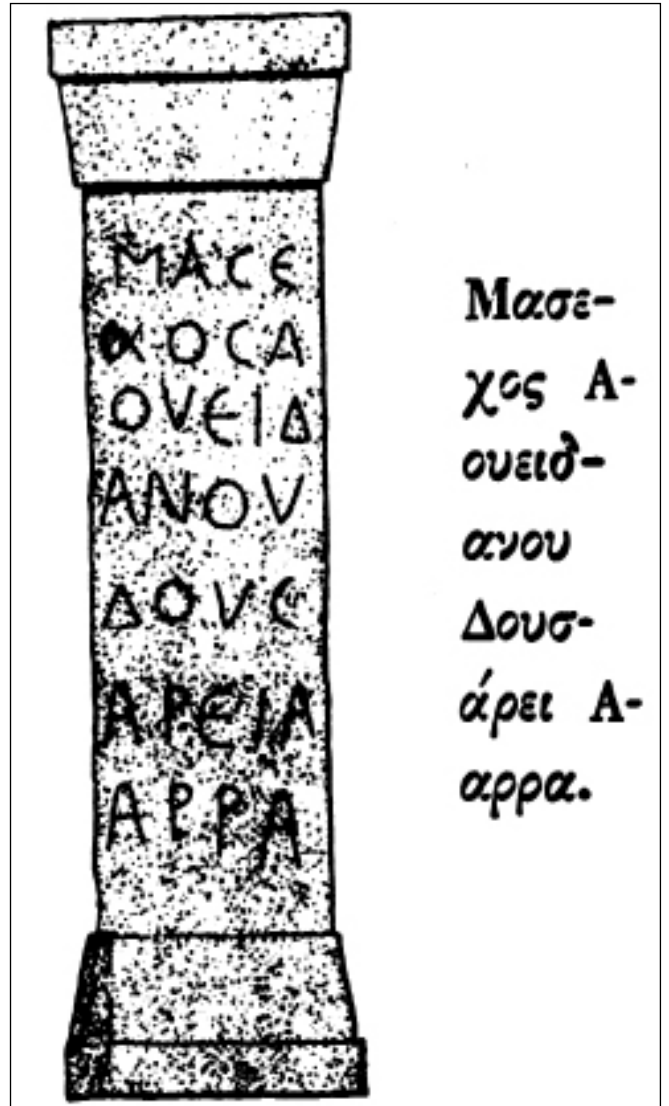
“Dushara, the god of Rabbel” occurs in a Nabataean inscription dated AD 75 from near Suwayda in the dedication of an altar by a Salamian, a designation indicating either someone from the village of Sulaym or from the tribe of Salam (Graf 1989: 364-365). The term Salamian also occurs in Nabataean at Umm al-Jimāl (Graf 1989: 365, note 78).

All this evidence appears to substantiate that the god Doushara Aarra on the cult-stone dedication at Umm al-Jimāl, is meant to be the specific manifestation of this deity in his cult center at Bostra. Doushara continued as the god of Bostra while it was the capital of the Roman province of Arabia. Coins from Bostra still depict Doushara as its deity



3. The “cult stone” dedicated by Masik to Doushara Aarra (Photo by the author).

during the reign of Commodus (Morey 1914: xxvii - xliv). In this political setting the god was presented in anthropomorphic form, and the Romans may have ‘Hellenized’ him with an association with Dionysus here and at Si’a (Butler 1916: 390, Ill 334, Frag P and 337). Beginning in mid-third century,



4. Greek version of Masik’s cult-stone bi-lingual dedication (Littmann 1913a: 37, no. 238).

the *Dousaria* quadrennial games at Bostra were called *Dousaria Actia* on coins to commemorate the battle of Actium (Sartre 1985: 156-158), some of which are associated with the reign of Philip the Arab (Sartre 2005: 473, note 412; 515, note 51).

Finally, it is clear from the numerous occurrences of the name Doushara in inscriptions in Greek, Nabataean and Safaitic throughout the southern Hauran and eastern *Badiya* that the god became very prominent in the Bostrene sphere of influence after his late Nabataean import there.

## 2. *Solmos*

While evidence for Doushara is copious, that for *Solmos* is scarce. At Umm al-Jimāl the main reference is a dedication inscription on a carefully fin-



5. Nabataean version of the Masik dedication (Littmann 1914: 34, no. 38).

ished broken altar-stone with a Roman cartouche on the upper part — with small floral rosettes in the triangle — and a wreath on the die, located at the ash mound in the open area east of House 73 and the Klaudianos Church. Its cap dimensions are 0.60m. wide by 0.39m. high (FIG. 6). The inscription is written rather sloppily inside the cartouche and the last two words spill over onto the molding below it. The inscriber’s skill clearly was not up to the same high standard as that of the stone mason. *Theō Solmō Sareidos Aoueidou eu[seb]ōn anetheken* Sareidos, (son of) Aweidos, dedicated (it) in reverence to the god *Solmos* (Littmann 1913a: 139-132, no 239).

Sareidos, the dedicator, could be the same person who claims credit for constructing monumental Tomb no. 19 (*Sareidos Aoueidou epoesen*, Littmann 1913a: 159, no. 279; de Vries 1998: 33, fig. 15.) A two-word Nabataean inscription, *mwtbw slm* (Littmann 1914: 43, no. 45) gives a possible parallel for *Solmos*, but is difficult to interpret. *Salm* here could be a peace greeting, “Mautab! Greeting!” A remote alternative interpretation given by Littmann is “Throne of [the god] *Salm*” (1914: 43).

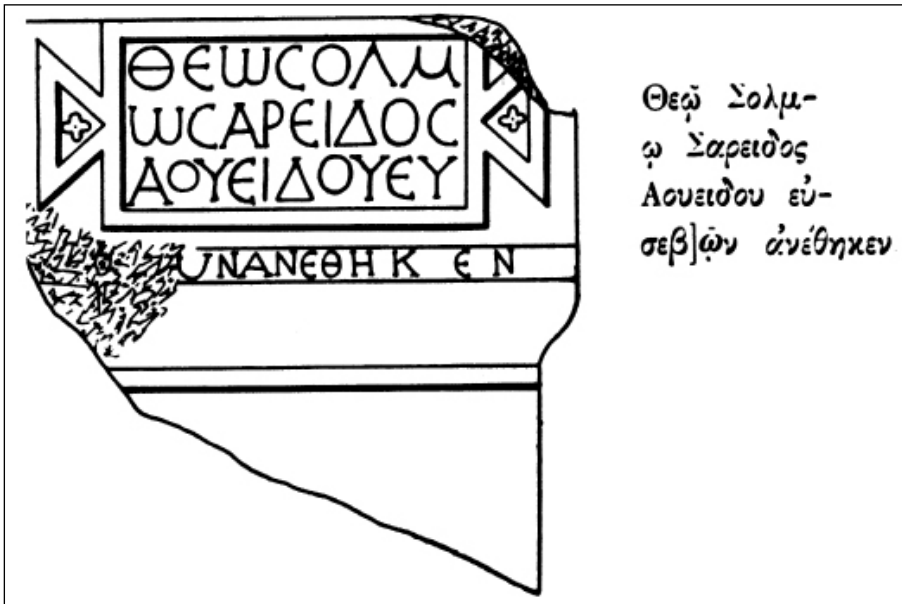
Sourdel found no equivalent occurrences of the name of this deity except for references to a god *SLM* (or *SLMN*) at Palmyra and the Jebel Sha’ar. He concludes from this scant evidence that the deity is at home among “*les milieux arabes*” (Sourdel 1952: 87). Another tentative possibility is that *Solmos* has an etymology connected to the *salm*, the word for “image, statue”, which in inscriptions at Tayma in Arabia may have been the name *Salm*, the Moon-god worshipped centuries before by Nabonidus (Winnett and Reed 1970: 91-93; Teixidor 1977: 73-76). Though these alternatives are interesting, they do not counter Sourdel’s thesis that *Solmos* was a deity venerated in local Arab society; I shall follow this hypothesis.

### 3. *Holy Zeus Who Listens*

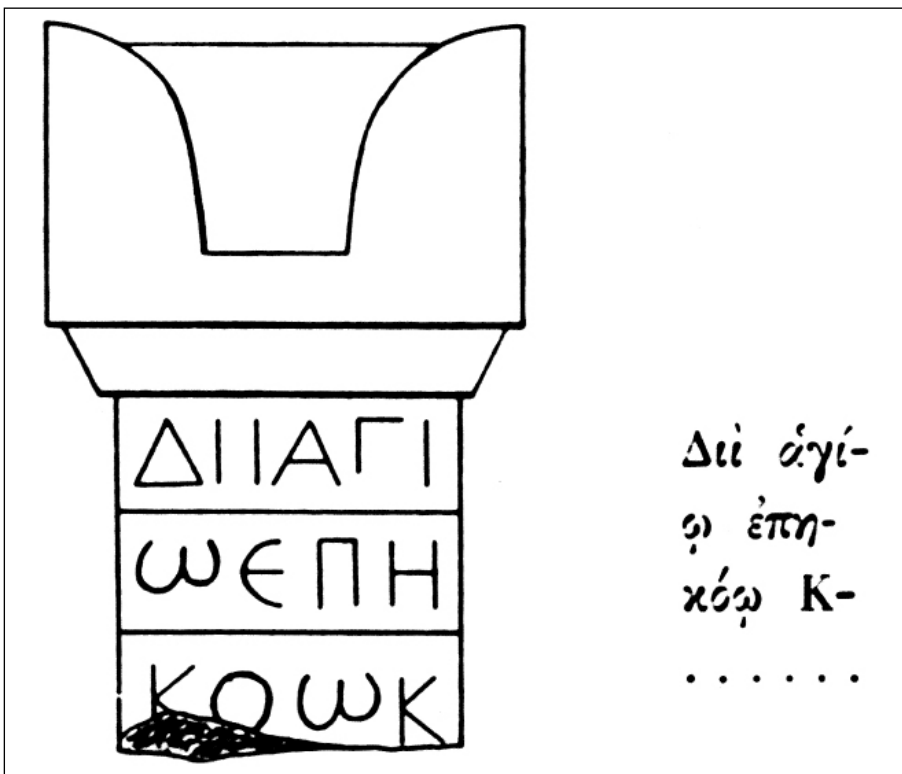
A dedication to Holy Zeus Who Listens is on the die of a small altar found by Littmann “in the courtyard of a house to the east of the so-called ‘Barracks’ ” of which only the top half is preserved so that all but the first letter of the name of the devotee is missing. Its cap dimensions are 0.25m. high x 0.34m. wide (FIG. 7). The Greek inscription is as follows:

*Dii agiō epēkoō K...*

“To Holy Zeus Who Listens (by) K[...] ...” (Litt-



6. The altar Sarid dedicated to the god Solmos (Littmann 1913a: 139, no. 239).



7. The altar K[...] dedicated to Holy Zeus Who Listens (Littmann 1913a: 141, no. 241).

mann 1913a: 140-141, no. 241).

As expected, Zeus occurs frequently in Greek dedication inscriptions throughout Greater Syria. While some of these may refer to the Greek god of Olympus, most instances cover the identity of a variety of local and regional deities, whose degree of identification with the Olympian god may vary from none to a lot. A fine catalogue of occurrences is given by Sourdél (1952: 21-27). However, he gives

this in a chapter on Baalshamin, on the assumption of the identification of Zeus and Baalshamin at his temple in Si'a (1952: 22). It seems more realistic to consider each instance of the use of the name Zeus as reference to a distinct deity defined by qualifying epithets. (On the distinction between Zeus Kurios and Baalshamin see Sartre 1985: 155). Thus the name-use may be generic ("ancestral deity"), local (Zeus of Phaena, see below) or defined

by qualifying characteristics, as in our case.

The epithet *Hagios* is specific to the Levant, especially Phoenicia, Palestine and their hinterlands (Sourdel 1952: 27, 98), and could be the Greek rendering of the Semitic “*qadosh*” (98, notes 1 and 2). It is possible in those contexts that “Zeus” designates “Baal” in Greek.

The other epithet, “Who Listens” occurs frequently in the north in Syria, but especially in the Palmyra region (Sourdel 1952: 26, 98). It occurs twice in the Hauran region outside Umm al-Jimāl. An altar from Damatha (Dāmith al-‘Aliyā) in central al-Lija is inscribed with: “To Zeus of Phaina (*Phainēsīou*), Hearer of Prayer. Seleukos, son of ‘Akarān (fulfills) a vow, in piety” (Littmann 1921: 434-435, no. 800(1)). The interesting thing here is that Seleucus dedicates this personal altar to the god of Phaina (Mesmiyyeh), the town 20km. north of Damatha. The other case is from an altar inscription stored at Souweida, a dedication to Zeus Epekoos (*Dii Epēkoō*) by Julianos, a cavalry soldier (Sourdel 1952: 26).

The impression one gets from these epithets is that the specific responses elicited by the attributes are personal: reverent in response to holiness and prayerful in response to approachability (cf. Saffrey 1986). In two of the above instances the devotees have Hellenized names and are away from home, perhaps using “Zeus” to reference their distant personal god.

Among numerous other “versions” of Zeus (according to epithets like *Kurios*, *Ammon*, *Megistos*, *Epikarpios*) one of special contextual significance is “Zeus of Safa” who is addressed in a petition at Bostra: *Zeū Safatēhnē, prokopē Archelāw*

*‘Ioulīou*, “O Safathene Zeus, (grant) success to Archelaos, (son) of Julius!” (Littmann 1913b: 246-247, no. 558). Interestingly, this Bedu god is petitioned by two sendentized persons with Hellenized names, Archelaos and Julios, whose father, however, is Masechos.

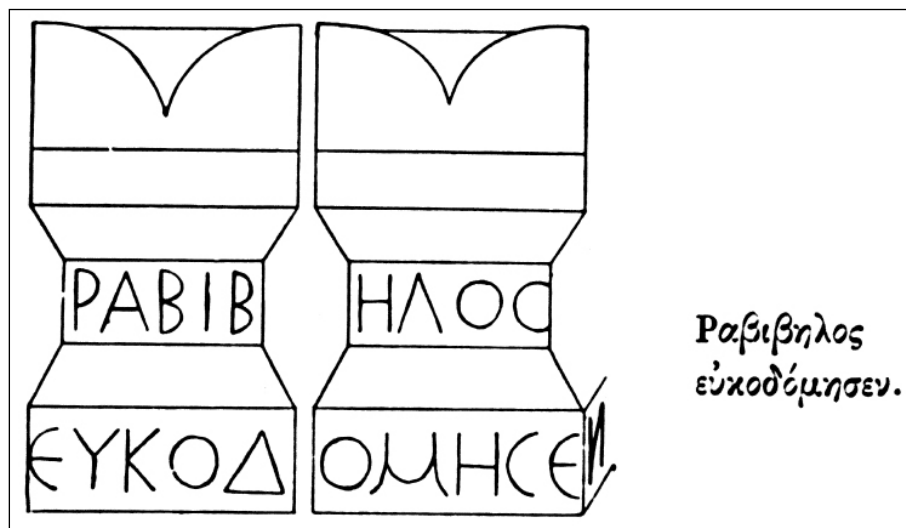
The diversity of epithets and contexts indicates that use of the name of Zeus in the Levant, though in general a product of Hellenization and Graeco-Roman imperial influences, is mostly merely a Greek way of designating one of a variety of local Levantine deities with underlying Semitic names. Umm al-Jimāl’s Holy Zeus Who Listens may be a regional god with central Syrian and Phoenician affinities. Given the reverent and pious nature of the epithets, he may also have been the object of personal devotion of an individual known only as “K[...].”

#### 4. Altars Without Divine Names

Littmann and Butler documented four additional small altars without attribution of deities. One found in the cloisters of the Numerianos Church, 0.47m. high by 0.26m. wide at cap (FIG. 8), is dedicated by Rabīb-’Ēl: *Rabibēlos eukodomēsen*, “Rabīb-’Ēl built (or edified) it” (Littmann 1913a: 140, no. 240). For the theophoric name, see below.

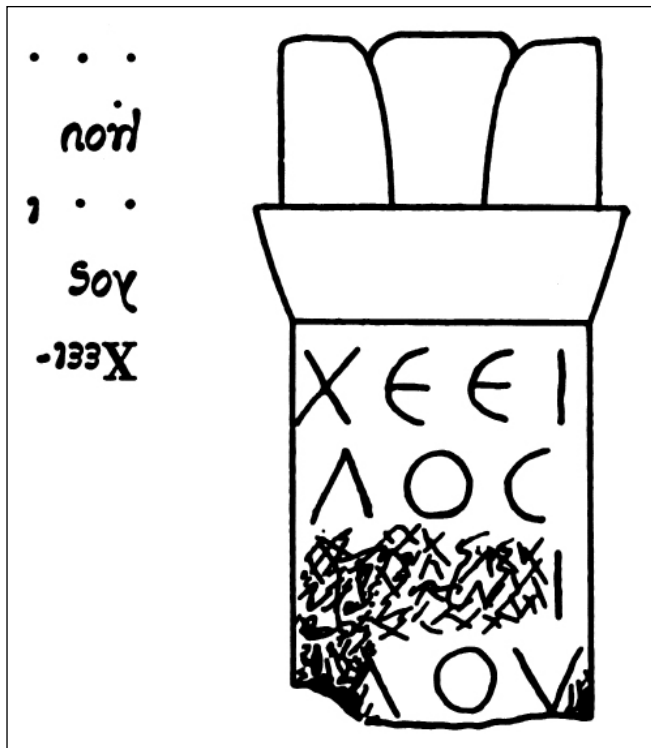
Another, from the courtyard of House 125, with cap dimensions 0.26m. wide by 0.20m. high (FIG. 9), is dedicated by *Xeeilos...*, “Kahil...” (Littmann 1913a: 141, no. 242). This name also occurs on a tombstone, naming a Kahil the father of the deceased woman Ta’mar (Littmann 1913a: 194-195, no. 413).

A very small uninscribed altar is described as



8. The altar Rabīb-’Ēl dedicated; no god mentioned (Littmann 1913a: 140, no. 240).





9. The altar dedicated by Kahil; the god’s name is lost (Littmann 1913a: 141, no. 242).

part of a stone slab, which H. C. Butler interprets as being of a type usually installed on a house doorpost: “The top has a slight depression and this suggests that they may have been actual altars of libation to protect the entrances from evil influences” (Butler 1913: 211, ill. 193).

*B. The Nature of the “Altars” at Umm al-Jimāl*

The altars described at Umm al-Jimāl are typical of numerous altars found in similar communities throughout the Hauran. In fact, small altars with a base, die and cap supporting a decorated emblem or ritual vessel similar to those in the Hauran are not unique to the area, but are fit into a typology with variants all over the Levant, with precedents as far back as the Neo-Assyrian period, and ranging east across Palmyra to Sassanid Persia and Ghandara (Invernizzi 1997: 51-67).

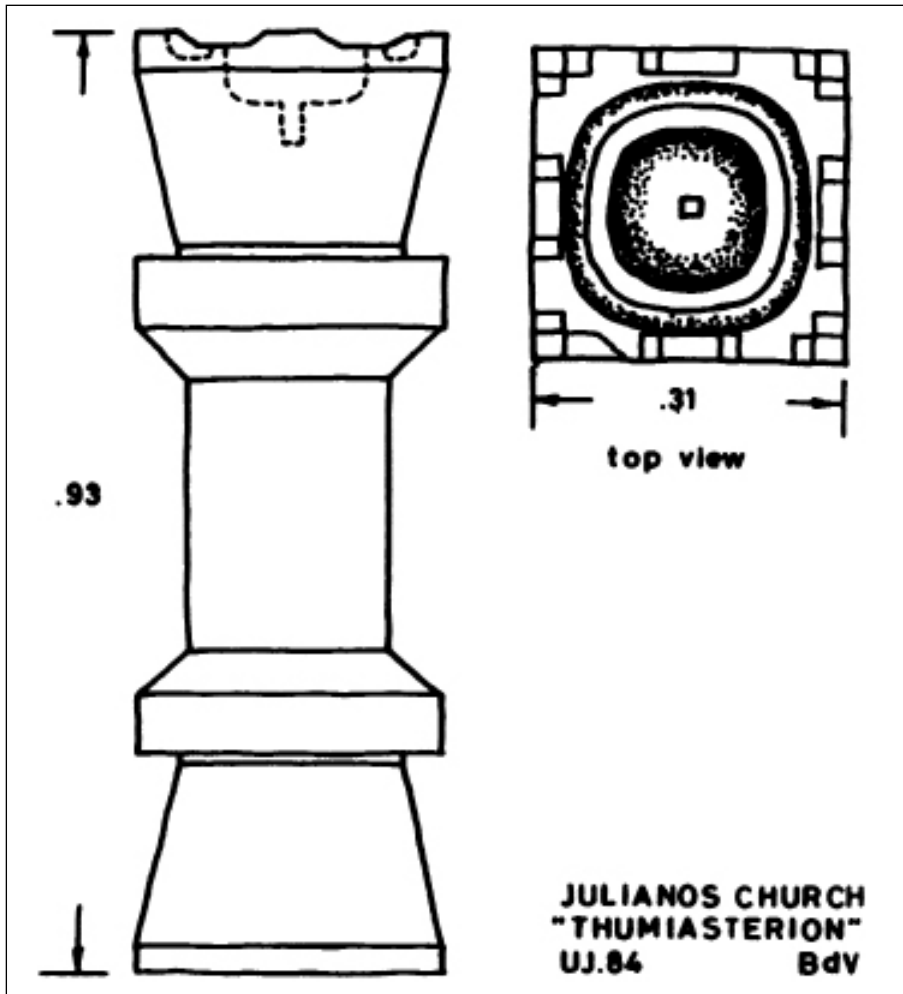
The names on these Umm al-Jimāl altars indicate they belong to the same social milieu as that of the numerous persons written on tombstones, that is Umm al-Jimāl’s society of the Nabataean-Roman period dated from the first to the third centuries. These altars may be explained as “liturgical” contributions by members of the family to the local cult of the community.

One explanation for the role of such small personal altars is that they represented the temple dedications contributed to a major cult-center by residents of outlying communities or mobile nomadic tribes without local temples of their own. Such a case for tribal “altars” may be made for the row located in the great courtyard of the Temple of Jupiter at Baalbek. K. Butcher displays them in a photograph (2003: 353, fig. 162) and calls them “dedicatory stone altars” in the caption. However, while some in the Hauran located in the context of local temples could be explained that way, others, like those at Umm al-Jimāl cannot be, for in that case you would expect them in a nearby cult-center like Bostra or Si’a.

At Umm al-Jimāl this could be explained by the fact that they were not found *in situ*, but in the collapse debris of the later Byzantine houses. However, given the re-dating of the so-called Nabataean Temple to a later period (see below), there is no evidence for the remains of any temple in which these altars may actually have stood. As the inscriptions indicate, these “altars” are the private dedications of individuals for whom these cult monuments may represent their private, rather than communal, relationship to these deities. In this case, these altars may symbolize / invoke the local presence of deities whose cult-centers were in fact distant, like Doushara-Aarra in Bostra, or Zeus Epēkoos in Phoenicia, or Solmos, in an unknown or non-existent location.

Another issue is whether all the so-called altars described above were really altars or cult-stones, actual images of the deity. A clear example of an altar at Umm al-Jimāl is the small *thumiatērion*, “incense altar”, found in the interior collapse debris of Julianos Church during excavations in 1984 (FIG. 10, de Vries 1993: 437). This square pillar stands 0.93m. high and has a scooped receptacle for burning offerings in its top, with the typical “horns” of traditional altars at its corners. By contrast, the cult-stone of Doushara-Aarra stands 1.40m. tall, awkwardly high for servicing by an attendant. The cap has no receptacle and is squared off — without horns — at the top, unlike the other altars described above. It is therefore more fitting that the Nabataean term, *msgd’*, which Littmann translates as cult-stone, be taken in the sense of image or *baetyl* of the deity as described above, rather than an altar to the deity.

It should be clear that this depiction of the de-



10. Uninscribed incense altar found in collapse debris of Julianos Church (De Vries 1993: 437, fig 5).

ity as a stone pillar is not a more primitive representation of the deity who *later* was presented in an “improved” anthropomorphic form. Such is the interpretation of C. R. Morey in his discussion of the image of Doushara on the coins of Bostra. Morey tends to discuss the various depictions of Dushara on a culture-evolutionary model (1914: xxvii-xxxv). He calls the *baetyl* images at Petra and Adraa “primitive idols” (xxxviii), “ancient and barbarous” (xxix). Thus the Roman assimilation of the Nabataean cult is given the weight of Rome’s powerful civilizing impact: “One could still worship Dusares in the form of a pillar at Petra, and at Adraa as an ovoid stone, but at Bostra, the capital, it was to be expected that the god should appear in human form, under the steady pressure of Hellenistic materialism” (xxxix). To substantiate this, he cites René Dussaud that this Roman insistence on anthropomorphic forms was “en harmonie avec

la civilization occidentale” (xxx).

This assertion about the exclusive anthropomorphism of Roman Bostra ignores the specific context, namely the depiction of the deity on Roman imperial coins, and ignores consideration of the possibility that in other contexts the deity might well be viewed in pillar form. An outstanding example of this is the Doushara “altar” at Umm al-Jimāl, which in fact is a stone pillar without any apparent sacrificial basin — or other accoutrement like oil-lamp receptacles. In Nabataean, this “altar” is called a “cult-stone” (*msgd'*), and could be interpreted as a *baetyl*, not an altar (Littman 1914: 34, no. 38) for which *bwmos* would be used in Greek. Though it is uncertain but likely that the cult-stone dedication dates to Roman era of Arabia (Littmann 1914: 34), it is at least clear that the version of the deity to which the cult-stone is dedicated is the God of Bostra.

That Umm al-Jimāl was structurally connected to Bostra under Roman rule is indicated by the funerary inscriptions with the *BB* (*Bouleutēs Bostrēnos*, “Senator of Bostra) title used on two Umm al-Jimāl tomb stones (Littmann 1913a: 248). Such relationships with residents of surrounding villagers are attested elsewhere. One such funeral dedication by a son from an unidentified village (the stone is broken) to his senator father was found at Bostra itself (Littmann 1913b: 240-241, no. 548). One would expect, therefore, that a member of Umm al-Jimāl’s elite, which one presumes Māsik son of Sarid was, would be politically correct about the iconic designation of the divine patron of the realm.

The alternative interpretation to consider here is that the Roman coins depicting Dushara are propagandistic, and represent the deliberate transfer of authority from Nabataean kings as the recipients of Dushara’s patronage to the Roman emperors’ usurpation of such patronage. As such the anthropomorphic representation of the god combines the Roman habit of using Hellenistic imagery with the imperial expedient of incorporating defeated local deities into the Roman imperial constellation of gods. This Roman politicized iconography does not challenge the validity of the traditional depictions by local populations in their religious practices, but superimposes upon that the stamp of overriding Roman religio-political authority.

*C. Theophoric Names*

Personal names occur in large numbers in local texts throughout Syria and in the Hauran, many on building dedications of public civic and religious structures, of private ones, like houses and tombs, on altars like those described above, on walls, columns, doorways and statue pedestals. Even more numerous are names on tombstones, which nearly always give the name of the father and the deceased, sometimes permitting interconnected genealogies. Because the motives for name giving are complex and not well understood for local culture, one has to be careful not to draw superficial conclusions. Nevertheless, says Rey-Coquais, one can learn a lot from using onomastics to picture the broad cultural trends of Roman-era Syria (1997: 149). Because of the large trove of names available at Umm al-Jimāl and its neighboring communities, this is especially true for the southern Hauran, where a select body of names written in Nabataean is contemporary with more numerous ones written in Greek.

Among these names a large minority are theophoric. For these, too Rey-Coquais’ caution is apt. Because a person’s name is identified with a certain deity, it does not automatically follow that he or she is specifically devoted to the cult of that god. Nor does it necessarily mean that that person’s community sponsors cult rituals in devotion of that deity.

An annotated catalogue of the theophoric names from Umm al-Jimāl, categorized by the divine element, follows. Much more can be learned from setting these names in the much larger context of the entire Hauran, but space does not permit that in this chapter.

1. *Taim-Doushara*, a name on a typical funeral stele 0.69m. high by 0.32m. wide (FIG. 11): *Iamaros*



11. Funeral stele commemorating Ya’amar, son of Taim-Dushara (Littmann 1913a: 219, no. 508).

*The(i)mo-Dousarou*, “Ya’mar, (son) of Taimu-Dushara” (Littmann 1913a: 219-220, no. 508).

The name, Greek derivatives of Arabic *Taim-Doushara* and ‘*Abd-Doushara*, “Servant of Dushara,” occurs six times across the Hauran plain in locations not far from Bostra (Sourdel 1952: 61, notes 7-12). Other Taim-theophoric names at Umm al-Jimāl include Thaimalas (Gr.) = Taim-Allāh (Ar.) *Th[im]al[as A]bd[ou]* (Littmann 1913a: 170-171, no. 318) and *Matheathē Themallou* (205-206, no. 456).

Other Umm al-Jimāl theophoric names with Allāh include: *Authallou* (Gr.) = Ghauth-Allāh (Ar.) (Littmann 1913a: 218-219, no. 504) (Ghauth also occurs in nos. 385 and 483) and *Zedalas* (Gr.) = Zaid-Allāh (Ar.) (Littmann 1913a: 208, no. 463). Note that the name ‘Abd-Allāh also occurs commonly in contemporary inscriptions of the Hauran: a building inscription at neighboring Umm al-Quttayn gives the earliest time-frame for the usage of the “Allah” theophoric names, the year 160 of the Bostrans = AD 265 / 266 (MacAdam and Graf 1989: 183, no. 7).

2. *Taim-Yitha’*, “Servant of Yitha’” (Littmann 1914: 48, no. 53) occurs on an Umm al-Jimāl Nabataean funeral stele reused as a corbel in House XIII: “Hāni’, son of Taim-Yitha’”.

This deity, *yt’w* [ya-ta-‘ayin-waw], was not previously known in Nabataean to Littmann, but occurs in Safaitic (*yt’* or *t’* [aliph-ta-‘ayin]) and in Greek Ethaos (1914: 48). In Safaitic texts in the Ḥarra east of Umm al-Jimāl studied by V. A. Clark, Yt’ is appealed to for “vengeance and delivery from misfortune”, for “relief and for “help”, in the last case in the company of another Arabian god, Ruda (Clark 1979: 131).

3. ‘*Abd-‘Obodat*, “Servant of (King) ‘Obodat”

This name occurs in a Nabataean inscription at Umm al-Jimāl, on a lintel over the easternmost doorway in the south wall of the Julianos Church:

[...]h ‘bd ‘bd-‘bdt bar Naqdhat. Slm

“This ... was made by ‘Abd ‘Obodat, the son of Naqdhat (?). Peace!”

(Littmann 1914: 40-41, no. 42).

While not unusual in Nabataean, Littmann only recorded two examples in Greek, both at Bostra. (Littmann 1913b: 253-254, nos. 256, 567).

‘Obodat was the famous Nabataean king after whom the Negev city ‘Oboda was named and where the temple to ‘Obodat the god was located. It is not clear to me whether the divine element in

the personal name indicates the deified king, as is usually presumed, or the patron god of the city, or both. Lest we make too much of the unique deification of ‘Obodat, note that ‘Abd-Rabb-’ēl is also attested (at Jemarrin (Littmann 1914: 70, no. 94)).

4. *Isi-Doulos*, “Servant of Isis” on a Nabataean inscription built into an Umm al-Jimāl house.

... I]sidoulos(?) of the tribe of Rawāh (Littmann 1914: 41-42, no. 43).

The inscription block is broken on the right and the *aleph* of *Isi-Doulos* is restored. According to Littmann there is a possibility that the “I” and “r” have been interchanged, so that the actual name could have been *Isidōros*. Nevertheless, the name could be a Nabataeanized rendering of the Greek name as a translation of ‘*Abd-‘Is*, which occurs in Safaitic. The female equivalent, ‘*Alimat-‘Is*, “Handmaid of Isis,” occurs in Nabataean.

5. *Wahb-Allāhi*, “Gift of God,” on a damaged stone in rubble of Umm al-Jimāl House XIII. The Nabataean text reads: “*Wahb-Allāhi* son of Mun’im of the tribe of Salam” (Littmann 1914: 42-43, no. 42).

Wahballah is well known from Palmyra and elsewhere. The tribe of Salam may be identical with Salamia mentioned in a Nabataean inscription from Hegra (Littmann 1914: 42). The name Wahb is known from a Safaitic inscription at Umm al-Jimāl, mentioned by Littmann: “By Wahb bin Shāmit of the tribe of Rawāh” (1914: 42). In Nabataean Wahb bar Shāmit occurs on a Umm al-Jimāl funeral *stèle* in the Byzantine ruins (Littmann 1914: 45, no. 49) and Wahb appears as the father of Zabūd on another (1914: 46-47, no. 50). Shāmit and especially Zabūd are recurring names in the genealogy reflected in the stele lining the *dromos* of the Nabataean Tomb (Littmann 1914: 52-55, nos. 60-67). One concludes that the Nabataean (and Greek) funerary inscriptions cover a significant Safaitic heritage at Umm al-Jimāl, and that this popular veneration of Allah is a component of that.

6. *Mathga Soemou*, “Handmaid of Gā’, [daughter of] Suhaim” (Littmann 1913: 220-221, no. 512). The Greek *Mathga’* is the equivalent of Semitic *Amat al-Ga’*. At Umm al-Jimāl a parallel name is *M[a]thelē*, Math-‘Ēl (Littmann 1913: 206-207, no. 457). Gā’ is the same as Gadd, a Safaitic tribal deity of the ‘Awidh, Gadd-‘Awidh and the Dhaif, Gadd-Dhaif (Graf 1989: 362, 363). “At Namārah, Gadd-‘Awidh is invoked by a member of the *d[’]*”

*l slm*” (Graf 1989: 365, note 78). Salam is a tribe associated with Umm al-Jimāl. Obviously, among the Safaites the tribal deity Gadd was worshipped alongside Dushara and other Nabataean gods. Note that the dedicators of the Dushara and Solmos altars, Masechos / Māsik and Sareidos / Sarīd, each have a father named Aoueidōs / ‘Awīdh.

7. *Math-‘Ēl*, on a tombstone at Umm al-Jimāl: *M[a] thelē Seouadou*, “Math-‘Ēl, (daughter) of Sawād” (Littmann 13a: 205-206, no. 457). Another El-theophoric is Hann-‘Ēl, builder of a tomb, known from a Nabataean inscription built into a wall near Umm al-Jimāl’s House VI:

This is the tomb (*nfs*) of ‘An’am, son of Hūr, and of ‘Uzzai, his wife, which was built by Hann-‘Ēl, their son (Littmann 1914: 36, no. 40).

Littmann dates the inscription to the first half of the second century on orthographic considerations (1914: 37). “Hann-‘Ēl was a favorite name among the Nabataeans and the Arabs of the Safā. In Safaitic script it is written with the same letters, and also *hnn-‘l*” (Littman 1914: 11). Finally, Rabīb-‘Ēl is the dedicator of an altar to an un-mentioned god discussed above.

8. *Ban-Allāt. Banalathē* (Littmann 1913a: 190, no. 394) at Umm al-Jimāl is the only allusion to the role of the goddess Allat.

9. Summary of divine elements used in theophoric names at Umm al-Jimāl

<i>Nabataean:</i>	Doushara, Obodat
<i>Nabataean/Egyptian:</i>	Isis (tentative)
<i>Arabic:</i>	Allah, Allat, ‘El
<i>Safaitic:</i>	Yitha’, Gadd

Thus, the fact that theophoric names at Umm al-Jimāl specify the names of at least nine different deities testifies only vaguely to what gods might actually have been worshipped at Umm al-Jimāl. This fact does, however, say a lot about the larger religious context of the gods actually revered, as known from altars for example. Notably, just about all the gods in these names are local and regional, with the exception of the (tentative) Isis. There is an especially strong interconnection in personal names and deities worshipped between Umm al-Jimāl and the Safaitic tribes of the Harra. This substantiates D. Graf’s thesis (1989: 379) that the Safaitic tribes were not marauding nomads, but an integral part of the social fiber of the north Arabian

Arabs within the Roman province of Arabia. One can add that they were a foundational influence on the popular religiosity of society at Umm al-Jimāl in the southern Hauran.

Perhaps even more notable is that *none* is Greek or Roman. Thus, while local and regional deities were used, one may surmise that the gods of the more distant imperial powers, Greece and Rome had not penetrated to the level of popular and common name usage at Umm al-Jimāl.

By studying this data in a wider context, as planned, a lot more can be said about the role of Umm al-Jimāl’s populace in the larger religious landscape of the Hauran and Greater Syria, and the religious mobility of its population across that landscape. Such a study has been done as part of this research, and will be published in a monograph on religion at Umm al-Jimāl.

### III. Towards a History of Religion and Society at Umm al-Jimāl

#### A. Gods and Society (First - Fourth Centuries AD)

The three gods on the altars discussed above symbolize three facets of local religiosity: Solmos represents the personal religion of a local Arab family. Dushara ‘Arra represents Nabataeanized religion connecting local population to the urban — Nabataean — and eventually imperial — Roman — authorities at Bostra. Holy Zeus Epēkoos represents the larger Phoenician-Syrian religious world hidden under the veneer of Hellenistic nomenclature.

The imperial Roman veneer of the second and third centuries AD is more visible in political inscriptions than in religious texts or remains. Known remains constructed in this period are the Praetorium (Brown 1998: 166), the Commodus Gate and the large reservoir.

At Umm al-Jimāl, the imperial religion — patronized with temple architecture of power such as the Hercules Temple in Amman, the Artemis Temple at Jerash and the Jupiter Temple at Baalbek — is lacking. It is therefore a better barometer of the survival of local religiosity under imperial control than those larger cult-centers.

Like the more mobile Safaitic tribes, the villagers of early Umm al-Jimāl may have considered nearby cult-centers at Bostra as their sacred centers, to be visited during appointed times in the religio-political calendar, such as attending the imperial Actia Dousaria in the third century. In between

times, veneration of personal and clan gods, using locally dedicated cult-stones and altars, served ongoing routines of religious piety.

Deeper understanding of this symbiotic polarity between local and external religiosity is gained from the incidence of numerous theophoric names, which not only indicate the presence of a larger diversity of gods in the popular culture, but also an especially intimate connection with the group of gods the people of the sedentary Hauran village share with their Safaitic tribal “cousins” of the nomadic Ḥarra.

Not included in this paper, but to be published separately, is what I’ve called a “Theology of Death” — the socio-religious implications of the funerary inscriptions at Umm al-Jimāl. A tantalizing example is the recurrent formula *Thársi, ‘oude-is aipi gē ‘athánatos*, “Be of good cheer, no one on earth is immortal!” (Littmann 1913a: 160, no. 281-282) from the tomb of Sareidos described above.

### *B. The Traces of Pagan Religion as Fragments in the Transformation of the Third - Fifth Centuries*

What follows is a brief outline of ongoing research, to be published as this study of religion and society progresses.

The assertion above that a temple was absent may be shocking to those who are aware of Butler’s famous “Nabataean” Temple (Butler 1913: 1551-156). Interpretation of excavations done in 1977 and 1981 have determined that this “temple” was constructed in the fourth century, and therefore belongs to the following phase in the history of Umm al-Jimāl (De Veaux and Parker 1998: 153-160). It is therefore better interpreted as an imperial Roman temple constructed to serve the troops at the Tetrarchic Castellum built to the east of the great reservoir (de Vries 1986), typical of the wave of Roman small-temple construction associated with the fortification craze of the fourth century.

In this period Rome replaced its policies of entente with local rulers and population groups being represented by the patronage of large temple construction (Antonine and Severan Dynasties) with more oppressive strategies of order keeping, viz. the pitting of local tribes against one another and resorting to an “Architecture of Power” (Adam T. Smith 2003: 161-169), the construction of monumentally towered and gated fortifications.

This strategy proved destructive to local cultures in the transitional culture zones located between

the Levantine coast and the Arabian desert. One indicator is that the writing of popular inscriptions and graffiti stopped (Graf 1989: 379-380) in the Nabataean and Safaitic text-regions. This includes Umm al-Jimāl, where last Nabataean text is late third century, and Greek texts expressive of communal and family life are largely absent from then until the sixth century.

In the process, much of Umm al-Jimāl’s built environment - the buildings and tombs of the first - third centuries - were destroyed and spoiled for the new fortification construction. Thus, the traces of religion described above became “collapse debris” and recycled masonry, that is, fragments that symbolize the “memory” of a former religiosity now deliberately ignored and replaced with the culture of Roman military power.

In northern Arabia and southern Syria, the end of paganism has to be attributed not to the coming of Christianity, but to the destruction of religious-cultural identity in the Roman suppression of rebellion and the subsequent establishment of army bases used to keep the populace of the surrounding countryside subdued.

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