

The Late Roman fort at 'Ayn Gharandal, Jordan: interim report on the 2009-2014 field seasons

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Previous exploration of the site

The site of 'Ayn Gharandal lies c.70 km north of the Gulf of Aqaba, c.40 km south-west of Petra, and c.200 m west of the mouth of Wadi Gharandal on the E edge of the Wadi Arabah (fig. 1). The ruins lie alongside a paved track running east from the Dead Sea highway. The presence of a spring and small oasis at the mouth of the wadi presumably prompted the first human occupation. Its location controlling an overland pass through the Shara mountain range will have attracted the attention of the Nabataeans and, later, the Roman army, which established an outpost here at the start of the 4th c. A.D.

'Ayn Gharandal and its surroundings were visited by many of the early 20th-c. explorers.¹ A. Musil was the first (1902) to record the ruins of a Roman *castellum*.² His description includes at least two further structures near the fort, as well as miscellaneous walls, towers, and a basin near the spring, although many of these do not appear in his drawing. T. E. Lawrence passed through in 1914 for the Palestine (Wilderness of Zin) Survey, noting the presence of two structures.³ Over the past three decades the site has received some attention within the work on larger regional surveys;⁴ the surface pottery collected suggests occupation from the Nabataean through Roman and Byzantine periods.⁵

Already Musil claimed that the name Gharandal is derived from the *Arieldela* of the *Notitia Dignitatum* (Or. 34.44), the location of the *Cohors II Galatarum*,⁶ but only in 2013 was a monumental Latin inscription found (see below) to prove that it is the base of the

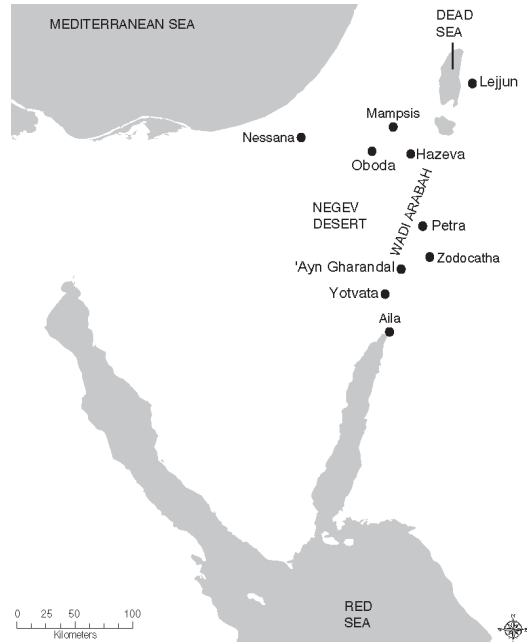


Fig. 1. Map showing 'Ayn Gharandal and other Late Roman military sites in the region (after W. Ward).

1 A. Musil, *Arabia Petraea* II. *Edom* (Vienna 1907) 193-97; F. Frank, "Aus der Araba," *ZDPV* 57 (1934) 231-32; N. Glueck, "Explorations in eastern Palestine II," *AASOR* 15 (1935) 39-40.

2 Musil *ibid.* 193-97, fig. 142.

3 C. L. Woolley and T. E. Lawrence, "The wilderness of Zin," *Palestine Exploration Fund Annual* 3 (1915) 14-15.

4 D. Kennedy, *The Roman army in Jordan* (2nd edn., London 2004) 209-11; D. O. Henry *et al.*, "Survey of prehistoric sites, Wadi Arabah, southern Jordan," *BASOR* 323 (2001) 3-8; G. R. D. King *et al.* in *ADAJ* 33 (1989) 207; T. D. Raikes, "The character of the Wadi Araba," in *Studies in the history and archaeology of Jordan* 2 (1985) 101; A. M. Smith, M. Stevens and T. M. Niemi, "The south-east Araba Archaeological Survey: a preliminary report on the 1994 season," *BASOR* 305 (1997) 59-60.

5 Smith, Stevens and Niemi *ibid.*; King *et al.* *ibid.* 212-13.

6 Musil (*supra* n.1) 195, n.20.