

# *Castra Legionis VI Ferratae*: a building inscription for the legionary fortress at Udruh near Petra

David Kennedy and Hani Falahat

## Introduction

The rolling hills east of Petra offer relatively good soils and adequate precipitation for rainfall farming. The valleys and hilltops are studded with the remains of ancient ruins, many dated to the consecutive Nabataean, Roman, and Umayyad periods (c.300 B.C. A.D. 750). Especially important are the perennial springs, an attraction for ancient pastoralists, farmers and travellers. One of the most important of these lies c.15 km due east of Petra (c.12 km from Wadi Musa) beside the small Wadi Udruh (Abudanh 2007, esp. 487, fig. 2), at a height of c.1300 m. Beyond Udruh the landform is flatter and progressively more arid, increasingly reliant on man-made harvesting of water in reservoirs. The effect is to give a still greater significance to the Udruh spring lying on an environmental boundary (cf. Abudanh 2007).

Survey in the 1980s recorded over 200 new sites within an area of c.800 km<sup>2</sup> (Killick 1986a, 432; 1987b, 26); a more recent survey will bring much of this to fuller attention (Abudanh 2004; 2006; 2007). Although most sites lie west of Udruh, it is clear that the pre-desert too was exploited, most notably in the Late Roman to Umayyad periods (c.300-750). There are traces of at least 4 *qanat* systems (*foggara*). One is extensive, three main branches tapping water sources beginning just 1 km to the south and southeast, then running eastwards for c.3 km to join up and, it seems, run in a surface channel to the reservoir and field-system of Birket Udruh c.3 km farther east again (cf. Abudanh 2007, 486-89, 492-93). Even more impressive is the settlement c.10 km south-southeast of Udruh at Tahuna (also fed in part by a *qanat* to its west), about half-way to Ma'an (Kennedy 2004, 182-83; Kennedy and Bewley 2004, 210-11). Throughout a wide swathe of land between Udruh and Ma'an are to be found traces of channels, field-systems and areas of stone heaps and walls (including a section of the enigmatic Khatt Shebib: Kennedy and Bewley 2004, 138-39). In short, there is extensive settlement west of Udruh, and more isolated but still significant settlement eastwards towards and including Ma'an and the complex of buildings, reservoirs, channels, walls and fields to its east (Genequand 2002, 2003; Kennedy 2004, 184-86).

Udruh was a nodal point on ancient routes. One ran east from Petra, then southeast to the major oasis at modern Ma'an. There it intersected with a N-S route running roughly on the course of the modern Desert Highway. The latter too is surely an ancient route, marked in places by a built road and by Roman milestones nearby (e.g. those reported just north of Jurf ad-Darawish and again just before Qal'at al-Hasa: Thomsen 1917, 57-58, nos 177-84; Findlater 2002, 140-41). It continued in the Islamic period as the desert Hajj road. Beyond Ma'an, one branch ran southeast into the Arabian peninsula (today it is another section of the Islamic Hajj road). A second branch ran south, eventually joining a route marked by Roman milestones (the *Via Nova Traiana*) across the Hisma desert and through the narrow mountain valleys to Aqaba on the Red Sea. This desert route and its branches doubtless follow pre-Roman trade routes. A second route ran N-S past the Udruh spring; it too was probably a pre-Roman route, but milestones and an inscribed altar beside the road north of Udruh confirm its use as an imperial Roman highway (Brunnow and von Domaszewski 1904, vol. I, 463; Thomsen 1917, 56, nos. 172-73; Killick 1983b, 127). In short, there is a definite Roman road running N-S through Udruh, a probable Roman road passing from Petra to the Ma'an area, and a third probable one passing from the north through Ma'an.

The modern village of Udruh is growing but still modest, some 60 houses in 2007. There is a major Iron Age tower on Tell Udruh just 700 m to the east and an Ottoman(?) mill beside the wadi to the southeast. The major ruins, which lie beside and partly beneath the modern village (fig. 1), consist of a large walled structure and traces of other buildings, including a recently-excavated early church just beyond the SW corner tower. The ruins cover an area of more than 6 ha. In modern times Udruh was first noted in 1812, in a single sentence, by Burckhardt (1822, 444), and it was not until Wallin (1854, 127-28) stopped here in 1845 that we are given a