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The Druze Experience at Umm al-Jimāl: Remarks on the History and Archaeology of the Early 20th Century Settlement

The ancient town of Umm al-Jimāl, on the edge of the southern Ḥawrān plain, is notable among Jordan's premier archaeological sites for its wealth of Late Antique ruins. During the early decades of the 20th century, many of these ruins were transformed as the site was rebuilt and reoccupied first by Syrian Druzes and later by Lebanese Druzes, the former as refugees and the latter as deportees. This study introduces the social and political events that encouraged renewed settlement in northern Transjordan, the practical challenges the Druzes faced at Umm al-Jimāl, the material remains of their community, and the international dispute over the territorial jurisdiction of Umm al-Jimāl during the Mandate era that followed World War One.

Umm al-Jimāl – From Late Antiquity to Abandonment

Throughout Late Antiquity there were numerous basalt villages on the vawran plains¹ and an even greater density of settlements in the adjacent hills of al-Jabal (also Jabal Ḥawrān, Jabal ad-Drūz, Jabal al-‘Arab)² to the east and southeast. Bostra, once the capital of *Provincia Arabia* and later a chief entrepot of *Palestina Tertia*, was the predominant urban center within this agricultural district. Having reached their height of prosperity in the sixth century AD, most of these villages were subsequently abandoned, but in many cases the Late Antique

architecture remained remarkably well-preserved through the 19th and into the 20th century owing to the exceptional strength of basalt as a construction material (see Schumacher 1897; Butler 1913; 1914; 1915). Umm al-Jimāl, situated south of what is now the town of Buṣrā (Buṣrā ash-Shām, Buṣrā aski-Shām), was one of many sites in the southern Ḥawrān where multi-storied structures continued to stand for centuries after their abandonment.³ Having been a relatively large town in Late Antiquity, the site has over 150 structures built of laboriously chiseled black basalt ashlar and long beams.

The most significant studies of Umm al-Jimāl are Howard Crosby Butler's architectural survey (*The Princeton University Archaeological Expeditions to Syria*), conducted in January 1905 and presented in a landmark publication (Butler 1913; see also Stoeber and Norris 1930: 34-35; Butler 1930: 91), and Bert de Vries' extensive architectural and archaeological investigation (The Umm al-Jimāl Project), which began in 1972 and continues to the present day (de Vries 1979, 1981, 1982, 1985, 1993, 1995, 1998). These projects documented the standing remains and archaeological deposits of a 4th - 8th century settlement that was supported by grain production and livestock husbandry. As a fortified post along the Roman *limes*, Umm al-Jimāl grew haphazardly from a 4th - 5th century village into a flourishing 6th century town. The ruins with-

¹ During his 1812 travels, Burckhardt described the Ḥawrān as follows: “*Belad Haouran*. To the south of Djebel Kessoué and Djebel Khiara begins the country of Haouran. It is bordered on the east by the rocky district El Ledja, and by the Djebel Haouran, both of which are sometimes comprised within the Haouran; and in this case the Djebel el Drouz, or mountain of the Druses, whose chief resides at Soueida, may be considered another subdivision of the Haouran. To the S.E. where Boszra and El Remtha are the farthest inhabited villages, the Haouran borders upon the desert. Its western limits are the chain of villages on the Hadj road, from Ghebarib

as far south as Remtha... (t)he Haouran comprises therefore part of *Trachonitis* and *Ituræa*, the whole of *Auranitis*, and the northern districts of *Batanæa*. *Edrei*, now Draa, was situated in *Batanæa*” (1822: 285-86).

² For *Ard al-Bathanyeh* see Porter (1855: 57); for *Jabal ar-Rayyān* see Pascual (1991: 101).

³ Studies of basalt architecture in the Ḥawrān and Jabal ad-Drūz include Aalund (2001), Bopp (2006), Dufourg (1951), Glück (1916) and Thoumin (1932); see also Ball (2002: 238-43).

in the town walls include a *praetorium*, a *castellum*, barracks, over a dozen churches, scores of domestic structures, several reservoirs, and a number of other features. Umm al-Jimāl's prosperity is also reflected in the sophistication of its architecture, as 128 of the town's structures once stood three stories in height (de Vries 1985: 252).

Umm al-Jimāl, whose Late Antique name remains undetermined (de Vries 1994, 1998: 36-37), was abandoned either by the end of the 8th century or during the 9th century, as were its neighbouring black basalt villages, including Umm al-Quṭṭayn and Khirbat as-Samrā' (see Kennedy *et al.* 1986: 148; Bauzou *et al.* 1998: 14). With the end of sedentary occupation, the Late Antique structures at Umm al-Jimāl became a resource for pastoral nomads. Bedouin tribes crossing northern Transjordan routinely used the site as a campground, constructing livestock corrals and taking advantage of shelter and whatever rainwater had collected in the reservoirs. This centuries-old, seasonal pattern of land use was altered during the first decades of the 20th century when the site attracted new attention as a strategic resource for Syrian Druze families coming into Transjordan as refugees.

Druze Settlement in Jabal Ḥawrān, Southern Syria

The arrival of Druze settlers⁴ at Umm al-Jimāl in 1910 was linked to dramatic events that engulfed Lebanon and Syria during the second half of the 19th century and first decades of the 20th century. During this period, the region experienced economic shifts, political reforms, social upheavals, new forms of government and large-scale dislocation of ethnic populations. The circumstances behind these transitions were international in both scope and impact.

During the later Ottoman centuries, Druze farming villages were widespread in parts of Mount Lebanon, including the Shuf and Wādī at-Taym; additional communities were situated in the Syrian Jabal Ḥawrān, an isolated, rural, hill-country south of Damascus and on the edge of Transjordan. With the inception of the *tandhimāt* era of reforms

(1839-1876), non-Muslim groups experienced greater equality as citizens yet social and economic tensions flared (Fawaz 1994: 22, 27ff). European states, seeking to profit from trade, patronised specific religious communities, thereby drawing all of Lebanon's major confessional groups, including the Druzes, into fierce competition as the distribution of wealth and debtor-creditor relations became increasingly sectarian. In 1860, Mount Lebanon was ravaged by civil conflicts that destroyed 200 villages and caused the dislocation of much of the population. During the summer of 1860, further conflicts arose in Damascus where the wealthy Christian community, which included prominent businessmen and money-lenders, was destroyed (Fawaz 1994: 100, 164).

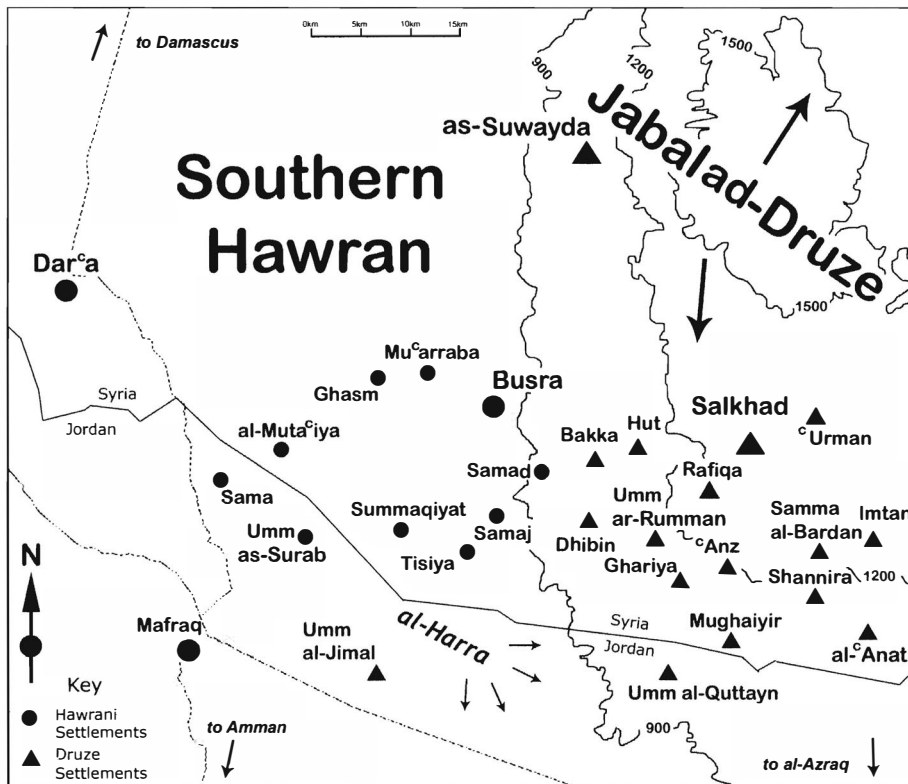
Faced with the devastation of Lebanon's rural economy and the threat of Ottoman tribunals and punishments in the aftermath of the conflicts, thousands of Druzes, including prominent clan leaders, fled from Mount Lebanon and the Damascus basin to take up residence in the remote Jabal Ḥawrān, which lay beyond the immediate reach of the Ottoman administration and already hosted a Druze population (see Gentelle 1985: 27-30; Pascual 1991: 101-103). In the years after 1860, recurring tensions on Mount Lebanon and the desire to escape Ottoman demands of taxation, registration and conscription, as well as the allure of cultivable land, continued to draw new Druze immigrants into Jabal Ḥawrān, which by 1861 appeared in official records as Jabal ad-Drūz (Firro 1992: 138, n. 35).

Jabal ad-Drūz and the Growth of 19th Century Village Settlements

The Jabal ad-Drūz (presently Jabal al-'Arab) is a series of dormant volcanic hills whose cones once deposited a mantle of basalt over a limestone plateau (Huguet 1985: 5-7; see also Allison *et al.* 2000). These hills stand between the Ḥawrān plain to the west, which is well-suited to wheat and barley cultivation, and the dry, basaltic *al-ḥarra* lands of the Syrian Desert to the east and south (FIG. 1). The al-Jabal hills contain fertile soil and the relatively moist west slopes receive over 300mm of

⁴ The Druze faith was established in Cairo under the Fatimid caliph al-Ḥākim (A.H. 400 / A.D. 1009-10); by the end of his reign, pockets of Druze followers were established in south Lebanon, the Wādī at-Taym, and Jabal al-A'lā to the west of Aleppo. By the Crusader era, Druzes were well established in these areas and on

the Ghūta plain of Damascus (Betts 1988: 7-9; 70). Despite major defeats while facing the Mamluks in 1305 at Kisrawan and the Ottomans in 1585 at 'Ayn Sāfūr (see Kheirallah 1952: 161), Druze settlements in the Levant continued to grow.



1. Map of the southern Ḥawrān plains and southern Jabal ad-Drūz with 19th and early 20th century Druze and Ḥawrāni settlements.

annual rainfall, which is sufficient for grain crops and some vegetables. Precipitation decreases to the south and east, leaving these flanks of al-Jabal on the agricultural margins as they are less productive and more likely to experience drought and crop failure.

During the early Ottoman period, agricultural communities flourished on the southern Ḥawrān plain and west slopes of al-Jabal, as documented in the 1596-97 tax register (*daftar al-mufaṣṣal*) for *Qadā' Ḥawrān*. This lists a large number of wheat and barley-producing villages extending east as far as Ṣalkhad and south to Dhibin, Ghāriya, and Muḡhāyr (Hütteroth and Abdulfattah 1977: 211-20).⁵ By the beginning of the 19th century, however, many of these villages and their agricultural fields had been abandoned owing to the failure of Ottoman governance in southern Syria, which enabled bedouin tribes to exert authority over peasant pop-

ulations and the lands they cultivated (Lewis 1987: 19, 2000: 35).⁶

The pastoral tribes that frequented southern Syria often competed with one another for access to resources, particularly water and pasturage. During the first half of the 19th century, the al-Jabal hills were dominated by the *Ahl al-Jabal* (also '*Arab al-Jabal, Jabaliyya*'), a local confederation of bedouin shepherd tribes. In summer and winter, these pastoralists herded flocks of sheep (as well as some camels and goats) belonging to the villagers of the Ḥawrān plain in exchange for a share in the butter and newborn animals produced (Burckhardt 1822: 307-308). With the sharp increase in the population of Druze farmers in al-Jabal during the mid-19th century, the *Ahl al-Jabal* soon became the keepers of Druze livestock (Provence 2005: 32).⁷ The shepherd tribes and Druze cultivators also formed a firm and enduring alliance of lasting mutual ben-

⁵ Umm al-Jimāl, some 20-25km. to the west and southwest of these outlying villages, lay beyond the scope of Ottoman fiscal administration, no doubt because it did not support a sedentary population during this period (see de Vries 1998: 21).

⁶ Lewis (1987: 19) noted that the land between Dar'ā and Buṣrā was the driest and least productive part of the Ḥawrān plain and that the rival tribes of Wuld 'Alī, Ruwala, as-Sardiya and Bani Ṣakhr fought for its control during the 18th and 19th centuries. In this district and further to the south and southeast, farming communi-

ties abandoned their villages.

⁷ In describing her 1905 journey to Umm al-Jimāl, Gertrude Bell stated "(t)he Arabs who live at the foot of the Hauran mountains are called the Jebeliyyah, the Arabs of the Hills, and they are of no consideration, being but servants and shepherds to the Druzes. In the winter they herd the flocks that are sent down into the plain, and in the summer they are allowed to occupy the uncultivated slopes with their own cattle" (1987: 75). See also Lees (1895: 23).

efit.⁸ Among the Ahl al-Jabal tribes, the al-Masā'id, al-'Adhamāt and ash-Shurufāt grazed their sheep across the southern margins of al-Jabal, spending the summer months around Şalkhad and the winter months either to the east in the ḥarrat ar-Rājil or to the south around Tall al-Aşfar or al-Azraq (Oppenheim 1939: 345-48). In so doing, they frequently encamped at Umm al-Jimāl.

Bordering the hills of al-Jabal, the Ḥawrān plain hosted bedouin tribes whose dīra(s) were dispersed from al-Balqā' northwards. Amongst them, the as-Sardiya, Sirḥān and Banī Şakhr often pressed the Ḥawrāni villages for *khuwwa* (*khāwa*) protection payments (Burckhardt 1822: 307). During the summer months, camel-herders of the north Arabian steppe, including the 'Anaza confederation tribes of Wuld 'Ali and Ruwala, passed through the Wādī Sirḥān and into the Ḥawrān. There they claimed traditional rights to pasture and water supplies for their livestock, which included tens of thousands of camels. Whilst in the Ḥawrān, the Wuld 'Ali and Ruwala would obtain grain stores for the winter and collect *khuwwa* from the Ḥawrāni villagers (Burckhardt 1822: 308; Lewis 1987: 8-10, 12, 2000: 34-35). In years when relations between the 'Anaza tribes and the Damascene authorities were hostile, the former remained on the remote fringes of the Ḥawrān, south of Buşrā, in the area of Umm al-Jimāl or farther to the south around az-Zarqā' (Burckhardt 1822: 309). The Druze population in al-Jabal was largely successful in defending its property and fields from these *khuwwa*-seeking tribes.⁹

By 1860, villages had been established on the west, north, and north-east slopes of al-Jabal, whereas only a few settlements lay south of the principal town of as-Suwayda'. Seeking farm land, the newly-arriving Druze refugees from Lebanon and the Damascus basin turned to the less-populated southern part of al-Jabal where they planted wheat and barley, adapting their traditional agricultural practices to local conditions. The southern al-Jabal also offered numerous abandoned villages with standing architecture, which often needed little more than cleaning out or partial reconstruction to provide homes (Porter 1855: 38; Graham 1858:

234, 244; see also Dufourg 1951: 412; Firro 1992: 149-51; Lewis 1987: 84, 87-88). Şalkhad became the principal southern settlement after it was established in 1861, and 14 "daughter" villages soon sprang up around it (Lewis 1987: 87). As Druzes continued to move into al-Jabal throughout the second half of the 19th century, additional villages were established along the southern slopes (Firro 1992: 150; Lewis 1987 80-81; 2000: 40). Christian and Muslim villagers also resided in al-Jabal but the more numerous Druzes exercised authority throughout the hill-country (Provence 2005: 31-32, 34). In contrast, the village population on the Ḥawrān plain was predominately Christian and Muslim.

From their villages in the hills, the Druzes viewed the rich grain lands of the Ḥawrān with intense interest. As early as 1861, their attempts to extend influence over the population of the plain led to armed clashes with Ottoman troops sent from Damascus to force a Druze withdrawal (Schilcher 1981: 165-66). Notwithstanding this initial setback, Druze efforts to exert control over the resources of the Ḥawrān remained a significant aspect of the social and economic fabric of the region. With increasing regional and international demands for grain during the second half of the 19th century, Druze and Ḥawrāni farmers found ready markets for their produce and were eager to cultivate as much land as possible (Lewis 2000: 39). As the pressure on land resources intensified, unclaimed agricultural fields became scarce in al-Jabal and on the Ḥawrān plain, and conflicts became frequent. Druze villagers clashed with one another in the al-Jabal hills and al-Lajā (the largely desolate lava-country to the north), expropriated land from non-Druze villages and moved out on to the plain to seize Ḥawrāni villages (Lewis 1987: 90-91).

At this time, there were also attempts to expand the zone of cultivation to the south. Although the plains south of Buşrā were on the agricultural margins, where rainfall was sparse and bedouin tribes exercised authority over grazing lands and water resources, Ḥawrāni settlements were established in the 1880s and 1890s at Summāqiyāt and al-Muta'īya¹⁰ as well as at Umm as-Surab and Samā

⁸ Personal communication: Hayl as-Surūr, shaykh of al-Masā'id. The author interviewed Shaykh as-Surūr (now deceased) in his home at Umm al-Jimāl in 1981.

⁹ Even as early as 1853, the Druzes claimed to have drawn tribute from the pastoral tribes in exchange for access to Druze-con-

trolled water supplies (Porter 1855: 191).

¹⁰ Al-Muta'īya was also known locally as "Lesser Umm al-Jimāl" and "Umm al-Jimāl West" (after *umm ed-dschimāl eş-şaghire* and *umm ed-dschimāl el-gharbije* in Schumacher 1897:140-41; see also Stoeber and Norris 1930: 32).

near the Wādī al-Buṭum. These satellite communities of Buṣrā met with limited success; Umm as-Surab was soon abandoned and Samā was occupied only periodically (Lewis 2000: 40-41).¹¹ Similarly, the Druzes had moved into a dozen villages south of Ṣalkhad by the early 1880s (Firro 1992: 150). When Butler visited the region in 1904-1905, the southern-most villages of Buṣrā were Summāqiyāt and Tisiya, while the southern-most villages of Ṣalkhad were Mughāyr, al-‘Anāt, and Khirbat ‘Awād (Stoever and Norris 1930: Southern Hauran map). In this belt on the edge of Transjordan, villagers not only faced rainfall shortages and marginal harvest returns, but also pressure from the ‘Anaza and Banī Ṣakhr tribes.¹² The Ḥawrāni villagers in this marginal zone were additionally challenged by their Druze neighbours to the east. Further south, Umm al-Jimāl¹³ remained beyond this expanding network of Ḥawrāni and Druze settlement until the first decade of the 20th century when the Druzes asserted a claim (Stoever and Norris 1930: 33-34), thereby expanding their sphere of settlement and influence south of Buṣrā and into Transjordan.

Umm al-Jimāl on the Fringes of the Southern Ḥawrān and Jabal ad-Drūz

Umm al-Jimāl is situated in semi-desertic steppe, 25km south of Buṣrā and 40km southwest of Ṣalkhad, at the point where the southern Ḥawrān plain meets al-ḥarra, the formidable basalt plateau of north-eastern Transjordan. This remote lava-country is interspersed with pockets of soil and vegetation, and today hosts a few villages, including Ṣabḥa and Umm al-Quṭṭayn, which built-up around Late Antique ruins as local bedouin settled, and a scattering of Druze families.

The environs of Umm al-Jimāl now average a scant 150 to 200mm. of annual rainfall. However, from the late Nabataean period to the early centu-

ries of the Islamic era (ca. 1000 years), this area¹⁴ hosted quite a few villages and an even larger number of small farms that were engaged in a mixed economy of herding and wadi-bottom grain agriculture, as indicated by co-occurrences of wadi terraces and animal corrals (Kennedy 1998: 70-72, 84, 1982: 331-41).¹⁵ These ancient farming communities were skilled at creating and maintaining water management systems, particularly the construction of cross-wadi walls to harness seasonal water flows and create basins of moist, silt-rich soil where grain crops could thrive to maturity.¹⁶ Such grain cultivation is indicated at Umm al-Jimāl by extensive wadi terracing in the immediate vicinity of the site. Animal husbandry was also an important part of the local economy, as indicated by substantial animal pens outside the town walls (see Kennedy 1982: 338; 1998: 58-59; Glueck 1951: 4) and a scattering of purpose-built stables within the settlement (see de Vries 1998: 109). The Late Antique water catchment and distribution system at Umm al-Jimāl included numerous cisterns, which captured seasonal rainwater runoff, in and around the town. The wadi bed running west of the site (a seasonal tributary of the Wādī az-Za‘tarī) held a dam and a connecting aqueduct extended around the town walls and into the settlement in order to fill the main reservoir and subsidiary basins (Butler 1913: 159-60; see also de Vries 1993: 437, 443).

The ancient rainwater reservoirs at Umm al-Jimāl were attractive to the Transjordanian Banī Ṣakhr during their seasonal movements, as well as to the Ruwala and Wuld ‘Alī who would visit the site whilst traveling west towards the Ḥawrān (e.g. see Buckingham 1825: 203). Similarly, the al-Masā‘id and other shepherd tribes of the southern al-Jabal frequented Umm al-Jimāl while herding livestock, including flocks belonging to Druze farmers of al-Jabal, as observed by Butler’s team (Stoever and

¹¹ Both settlements were later occupied by Druzes.

¹² The tenuous relationship between the southern villagers and the seasonally migrating, camel-herding tribes is reflected in Butler’s description of Summāqiyāt in 1909. “We found the people of is-Summākāyat in a pitiful state of mind. This village is situated on the border of the desert, at the southern end of the cultivated plain of the Ḥaurān: it is the southernmost of the inhabited villages, and the inhabitants cultivate the fields that lie to the north of them, irrigating them from the Wādī Buṭm when melting snows on the mountains fill the wadi with water. Now the ‘Anazeh had come and gone, leaving not a trace of green in the fields, for the hungry camels had eaten every blade and spear down to the ground. The Bedawin had not attacked the village, so that the poor people still had the remains of the winter’s straw in their barns and a little

seed for replanting against the late harvest; but they would have to suffer bitterly meanwhile” (Butler 1930: 91).

¹³ Also known locally as “Greater Umm al-Jimāl” (after *umm ed-dschimāl el-kebire* in Schumacher 1897: 77).

¹⁴ As delimited by the K737 1:50,000 map series, Sheet 3254 I, Khirbat Um el Jimāl.

¹⁵ It is yet to be determined whether rainfall in this region was greater during the 4th to 8th centuries than it is today. However, the *Water, Life and Civilisation* project at the University of Reading may shed new light on this question in the near future.

¹⁶ Survey data show that the relative proportion of cross-wadi walls is particularly high in the Umm al-Jimāl region, in comparison with the Umm al-Quṭṭayn and Dayr al-Kahf regions to the east (Kennedy 1997: 80-82, 1998: 67-68).

Norris 1930: 34-35) and later by Horsfield (1937: 457), amongst others.¹⁷ These tribes made good use of the ruins, where domestic courtyards provided corrals and additional walled pens could easily be created from the scatter of stones that littered the site.¹⁸ In drought years, Umm al-Jimāl was the scene of inter-tribal conflicts over access to pasture and water (see Hill 1896: 26).

The Establishment of a Druze Settlement at Umm al-Jimāl in 1910

By 1875, the long-standing Late Antique architectural features at Umm al-Jimāl had attracted new attention. As observed by Merrill (1883: 85), Ḥawrāni(s) quarried the site extensively for building stone, being particularly avid in the gathering up of long basalt roof slabs, even to the extent of knocking over supporting walls to bring down the ceiling beams. In this instance, the beams were transported from the site by a caravan of 30 to 40 camels. This anecdote indicates that, at the time that the Ḥawrāni(s) were expanding their settlements around Buṣrā in the 1870s, Umm al-Jimāl was valued as a source of raw materials rather than as a potential site for re-settlement.

Thirty years later, when Howard Crosby Butler of Princeton University arrived at Umm al-Jimāl to survey the ruins (in January 1905), he found bedouin shepherds of the al-Jabal hills camped in some 20 tents and tending Druze flocks. One of his companions observed with trepidation "... the Druses are creeping nearer... already the(y)... claim Umm idj-Djimāl as a part of Dhibîn, 12 miles to the northeast, and soon they will need the cut stone, and one by one the ancient buildings will be demolished" (Stoever and Norris 1930: 34). During their two-week survey, approximately 30 Druzes arrived on horseback and settled down with their bedouin shepherds to observe Butler's camp (Stoever and Norris 1930: 34-35).

Returning to Umm al-Jimāl in the spring of 1909, Butler remarked "... the Druses of the Djebel have

been active recently in the ruins, having scratched their names on the portals of many of the large buildings" (1930: 91). The handful of bedouin tending camels on the site informed Butler that, a few months earlier, Druzes had attempted to clear an ancient branch conduit linking the main aqueduct with the large reservoir (Butler 1913: 159). In light of this unsuccessful and apparently half-hearted effort to create a functioning water channel, Butler asserted that renewed settlement at Umm al-Jimāl would be possible only if water could be directed to the site. Furthermore, he concluded that the tributary of the Wādī az-Za'tari along the west side of the site was now perennially dry and that any new settlers would have to build an aqueduct from the Wādī al-Buṭum, several kilometers to the north, in order to survive at Umm al-Jimāl (Butler 1913: 159-60).

Several circumstances may have given the Druzes of Dhibîn village cause to view Umm al-Jimāl as a desirable resource during the first decade of the 20th century. As the Ḥawrāni(s) around Buṣrā and the Druzes in the region of Ṣalkhad enlarged their respective areas of cultivation, fierce and bloody competitions for agricultural land ensued (Lewis 1987: 91). By laying claim to the ruins at Umm al-Jimāl, the Druzes expanded their territory whilst curtailing any potential Ḥawrāni ambitions regarding the site and its environs.¹⁹ At this time, established Druze villages in al-Jabal were facing population pressures, resource shortages and internal divisions between landowners and peasants, all factors that encouraged some villagers to establish new settlements. However, the immediate catalyst for the first Druze settlement at Umm al-Jimāl was the need to house refugees.

In 1910, a protracted dispute over rights to agricultural land culminated in a violent Druze assault on Buṣrā and its villages in an effort to seize land occupied by Ḥawrāni(s). The harsh Ottoman reprisals that followed led to the deaths of thousands of Druzes and included imprisonment of Druze

¹⁷ Horsfield observed, "(a)round the buildings the ground is divided into a crazy pattern of enclosures; some ancient, others made by the Rowallah Bedouin who pass this way each spring on their migration northwards with their herds of breeding camels, and use the whole ruin as a khan, camping alongside whilst water and fodder last" (1937: 457).

¹⁸ Presently there is no indication that the locally transhumant al-Masā'id, or other pastoralists utilising Umm al-Jimāl, attempted to sow grain in the nearby wadi beds, despite this being feasible in years of plentiful rainfall. In 1884, Schumacher (1889: 21) ob-

served "(t)he soil of basaltic regions is, as a rule, very fertile, and the Fellahîn and Bedawin of Haurân have therefore but little trouble in raising magnificent crops, if rain only falls in sufficient abundance...". More recently, Kennedy observed tent-dwellers a few miles southwest of Umm al-Jimāl threshing a crop of dry-farmed grain (1982: 335).

¹⁹ By 1895, the area between Dar'ā and Buṣrā was wholly under cultivation and villages that had been reoccupied during the mid-19th century had grown quite large and become surrounded by outlying farms and hamlets (Lewis 2000: 40).

leaders and state-imposed census, registration and conscription throughout the hills of al-Jabal. In this respect, the Druzes were dealt the full force of the Young Turk policy of direct, centralised and uniform application of the law, which had been established in 1908-09 (Firro 1992: 242; see Rogan 1999: 192, 1994: 53). As state policies and authority penetrated al-Jabal during this crisis, the more remote locale of Umm al-Jimāl represented much-needed haven.

Druze tradition, as related by Shaykh Mazyad al-Atrash,²⁰ refers to the first settlers as a party of mostly women and children, who arrived at Umm al-Jimāl in 1910 as a result of the Ottoman reprisals in Jabal ad-Drūz. The Druze occupation is said to have continued intermittently until 1927 (when the Syrian revolt against French rule ended). The practice of creating safe havens for the protection of women and children during times of social stress was common in the Druze community, while the men formed armed bands or retreated into the lava-lands of al-Lajā or the eastern wilderness.²¹ However, as a Druze refuge, Umm al-Jimāl was problematic as it lay deep within bedouin territory and offered no reliable water supply. Under such circumstances, both agriculture and the rearing of household livestock would have been problematic. Nevertheless, although there were no water management facilities at the site during this period, other than the ancient basins fed with rainwater, the Druzes invested substantial efforts in the rebuilding of dozens of Late Antique structures, including the laborious replacement of roofs (see de Vries 1998: 99-109). Furthermore, Umm al-Jimāl was not the only settlement rebuilt by the Druzes at this time. Other ruined villages in northern Transjordan received Druze populations in the early decades of the 20th century as well, most notably Umm al-Quṭṭayn and al-Azraq. Other examples include brief Druze occupations at Umm as-Surab and Samā, which were no longer occupied by Ḥawrāni(s) at this time.

Archaeological Remains of the Druze Settlement at Umm al-Jimāl

The Druzes of Dhibīn (a village of the al-Atrash clan, situated 18km southwest of Ṣalkhad) divided Umm al-Jimāl amongst themselves in 1909, allocating houses to specific families as indicated by names carved on doorways (reported by Butler, 1930: 91). The reconstruction of roofs and insertion of doors, amongst other structural modifications, was undoubtedly underway when the site was settled in 1910. Over the next 20 years, the Druze community at Umm al-Jimāl fluctuated as a result of volatile social and political conditions in the southern Jabal ad-Drūz and, probably, as a result of variable annual rainfall and episodic drought. Given the ebb and flow of Druze residents at Umm al-Jimāl, it is unlikely that all of the Druze-reconstructed dwellings were occupied simultaneously. Druze claims to the site and individual family claims to specific houses within the ancient town did not necessarily imply residency, but were nevertheless maintained as tradition long after the site was abandoned by the Druzes, settled by the al-Masā'id and then turned over to Jordan's Department of Antiquities.²²

Although the *Umm al-Jimāl Archaeological Project* focused primarily on the Nabataean to Early Islamic occupations, the excavations also revealed traces of early 20th century occupation in the upper layers. The relatively sparse remains in this debris are consistent with domestic activities and include sherds of "Late Ottoman" pottery, traces of fires and hearths, modest stone features built of reused blocks and one instance of a child burial. Not surprisingly, the Druze presence at Umm al-Jimāl is most clearly evident in the architectural reconstruction of many Late Antique buildings. Some of these reconstructions have already been studied (de Vries 1998: 99-109), whilst others are presently being documented as part of de Vries' recently initiated, comprehensive campaign to record all of the 20th century reconstructions at the site (the results are forthcoming). This ongoing investigation will be

²⁰ Personal communication: the author consulted Shaykh Mazyad al-Atrash in his home in 'Ammān in 1981.

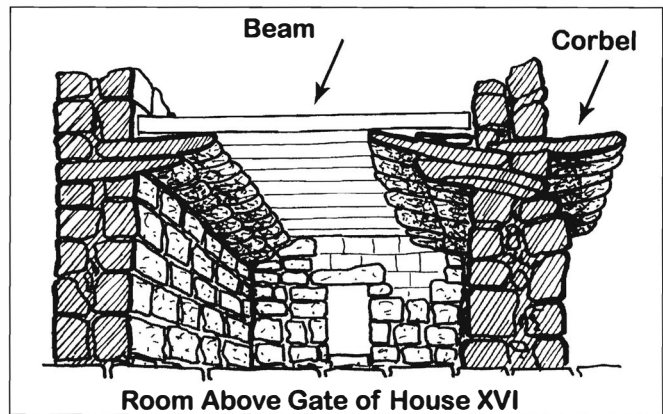
²¹ Bouron described this practice; "(t)he Druze's first concern is to safeguard his women-folk against harm and molestation. It is, therefore, their custom to remove their women and children to the hills and other inaccessible places and get them beyond the possible research of their enemy when trouble brews. The fighters then abandon their villages and normal habitations and retire

to the rugged terrain and prepare for engagement" (1952: 60-61). Referring to conflicts during Ibrahim Pasha's occupation of Syria (1832-1840), Bouron noted "(t)he Druze fighters put their women away beyond all hazards and went into their stronghold, al-Laja" (1952: 113). With the Syrian revolt of 1925-27, a large number of families were sent to al-Azraq (Provence 2005: 142).

²² These notions were conveyed by members of the Druze community in 'Ammān during informal conversations.

particularly important for Late Ottoman and post-Ottoman village architectural studies in Jordan, as the Druze reconstructions occurred after Butler's detailed architectural study of the site in 1905.

The Druze builders at Umm al-Jimāl went to considerable efforts to replicate the original masonry techniques, which were highly suited to the properties of basalt as a constructional medium. The reconstructions demonstrate capable and sometimes highly-skilled workmanship, clearly derived from extensive experience in rebuilding the abandoned basalt villages of al-Jabal. In converting the ruins into habitations, the raising of roofs was a major challenge, particularly as most of the original long slabs of cut basalt used for roofing beams had been robbed from the site in previous decades. Shorter stone slabs had to be substituted and to accommodate them the Druzes applied the same arch-and-corbels construction techniques perfected in Late Antiquity (FIG. 2) (see de Vries 1998: 99ff). By inserting a corbel-bearing arch through the centre of a large room, the short beams could be laid to rest on top of the corbels, perpendicular to the arch. The result was a ceiling with two or three sets of short slabs, depending on the number of interior arches. The roofs were finished with chinking stones, then paved with a layer of earth. Once reconstructed, these rooms provided the settlers with living and storage space, as well as with winter shelters for livestock. In some instances the Druze work is irregular, particularly in the fitting of voussoirs and the assembling of springers. Druze constructions also tend to display recent cut-marks in the stone, corbels, beams of various sizes and irregular masonry at the tops of walls (de Vries 1998: 99). However, some Druze builders achieved such fluency in replicating Byzantine construction techniques that their work is difficult to distinguish from Late



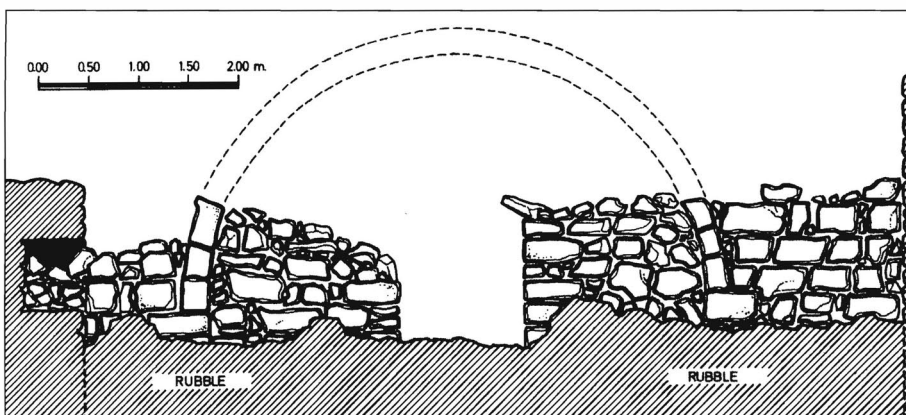
2. An example of corbel and beam roof construction from House XVI at Umm al-Jimāl (adapted from de Vries 1998: fig. 65).

Antique masonry (de Vries 1998; for the same observation at Umm al-Quttayn, see Kennedy *et al.* 1986: 148).

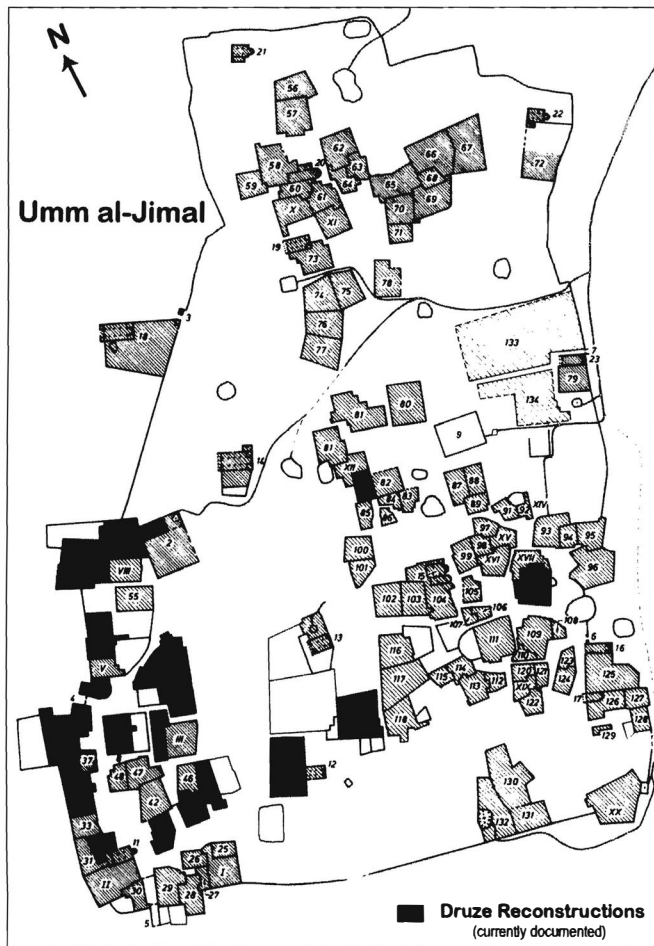
The Druze reconstructions at Umm al-Jimāl appear to span two decades, for a few half-finished transverse arches (FIG. 3) indicate that renovations were still in progress when the site was permanently abandoned by the Druzes, probably between 1928 and 1932. Druze reconstructions and / or occupation layers have previously been described for several houses (XIII, 35, 49, and 119), the later *castellum* and the *praetorium* (de Vries 1998: 99-109; de Veaux and Parker 1998: 158-60; Parker 1998a: 141-42; Brown 1998: 184-88). De Vries' current documentation project has, to date, identified Druze reconstructions in at least 15 additional houses within the town site (FIG. 4).

Colonial Rivalries over Umm al-Jimāl and the End of the Druze Settlement

World War One brought an end to Turkish rule in 1918, followed by the creation of the French Man-



3. An unfinished transverse arch from the Druze occupation of House 119 at Umm al-Jimāl (adapted from de Vries 1998: fig. 58).



4. Plan of the Late Antique town of Umm al-Jimāl with Druze reconstructions and occupations, as recorded to date (adapted from de Vries 1998: fig. 6).

date of Syria and the British Mandate of Transjordan in 1920. While Britain recognized Abdullah as the *amīr* of Transjordan in 1922, it continued to represent its own interests through civilian and military advisors to the Hashemite government. In the absence of an officially demarcated border between Syria and Transjordan, the French and British agreed to a temporary *Frontière de Fait* that approximated the boundary described in the notoriously secret Sykes-Picot agreement (Amadouny 1995: 533-34). Initially the two entities performed joint military operations along the *Frontière de Fait*, including an exercise at Umm al-Jimāl in March 1923 (see Priestland 1996a: 121), at which time there were apparently no Druzes at the site. Yet this interim border (also “*de jour* frontier” in British correspondence), which existed more in principle than in re-

ality, soon became a point of contention.

During the summer of 1925, the grain-producing Druze villagers of al-Jabal sparked a revolt against French rule in Syria that quickly spread to Damascus and other parts of the country. When the revolt ended in 1927, thousands of destitute, civilian Druze refugees from al-Jabal had fled to Transjordan, most of whom eventually arrived at al-Azraq oasis, which was also an organisational base for Druze resistance fighters. The presence of Druze leaders and militias at al-Azraq, in addition to the refugee families, was a matter of grave concern within both Transjordan and French-administered Syria (Khoury 1987: 204). Druze movements in northern Transjordan were closely monitored by British officials, yet their detailed intelligence reports make no mention of Druzes at Umm al-Jimāl or Umm al-Quṭṭayn (farther to the east), and one 1927 dispatch asserts that there were no occupied villages in this part of northern Transjordan (see Priestland 1996a: 738-39, 1996b: 82 ff).²³ Given Umm al-Jimāl’s history as a refugee haven, it may have been occupied periodically through the war years of 1925-27. However, if that were the case, the resident population would have had difficulty sustaining itself. During the summer of 1925, the Ḥawrān harvest failed and whole villages were abandoned when their wells and springs dried-up (see Destani 2006a: 358). Furthermore, as severe episodic drought persisted until 1936, settlement at Umm al-Jimāl and other villages along the southern margins of the Ḥawrān would have been precarious.

After the revolt, colonial attentions were drawn to issues of authority and jurisdiction that had arisen in the absence of an officially demarcated boundary between Syria and Transjordan. The French quickly claimed Syrian authority over all Druze-inhabited territories, including the landscape south of al-Jabal and into Transjordan as far as al-Azraq oasis, situated at the head of the strategically significant Wādī Sirḥān (Wilson 1990: 100-101). In 1927, French troops moved into Transjordan and established military posts at Umm al-Jimāl and Samā, a site 20km to the northwest and close to the Ḥijāz railway line.²⁴ These actions, in what were considered the Transjordanian villages of Jabal ad-Drūz, caused consternation within the Transjordan

²³ In May 1927, the 200 armed Druzes occupying Umm as-Surab were expelled (Priestland 1996b: 97).

²⁴ For archaeological remains of the French post at Umm al-Jimāl, see Parker (1998a: 142).

government (see Priestland 1996b: 189-90, 199). The French further extended their *de facto* administration by placing new colonies of Druze settlers at Umm al-Jimāl and Samā. According to British intelligence, the settlers claimed to have been removed from their villages in Lebanon and installed in these frontier communities in 1927. There they had been instructed by the French to assert claims of land ownership dating from the Ottoman era (Amadouy 1995: 537-38). In addition, there were clashes between French troops and the Transjordanian Banī Ṣakhr tribe; the latter was also the object of multiple raids carried out by the Ahl al-Jabal (see Priestland 1996b: 96, 105, 194-96). In 1928, the French penetrated further into Transjordan in an unsuccessful attempt to collect taxes from a Banī Ṣakhr encampment southeast of Umm al-Jimāl (Amadouy 1995: 537-38). In 1929, British intelligence again reported a French military presence at Umm al-Jimāl. When F. G. Peake investigated the situation on behalf of British Transjordan, he was captured and threatened by the al-Masā'id, who controlled the land north of the Baghdad road, and subsequently rescued by a French officer stationed at Umm al-Jimāl (see Destani 2006b: 77-79).

These incidents reflect the French determination to define the scope of Syrian authority and jurisdiction on the basis of the distribution of Druzes residing in Transjordan (including refugees and recently transplanted settlers), thereby encompassing Umm al-Jimāl, the lands to the southeast and their tribal population. This policy was well in excess of the tacit Anglo-French understanding and spirit of the *Frontière de Fait*, under which French authority was allowed in Transjordan "... up to the limits of the southernmost lands cultivated by the Druzes" of al-Jabal (see Priestland 1996b: 337), a reference to Syrian border villages whose traditional agricultural fields extended into Transjordan. While the French ultimately realized that a Syrian claim to al-Azraq was unrealistic, the contention over Umm al-Jimāl and Samā persisted. Amir Abdullah opposed land concessions and the British were anxious to secure this area in order to protect their plans to build a railway and oil pipeline extending from Iraq, across northern Transjordan and on to Haifa (Amadouy 1995: 538-39).

In the final Franco-British Protocol of October 1931, the French relinquished claims to Umm al-Jimāl and Samā (Amadouy 1995: 548; see Priestland 1996b: 642) and in 1932 the boundary be-

tween Syria and Transjordan was demarcated by a bilateral commission (Kirkbride 1956: 82-91). By this time, most of the Druzes in Transjordan had returned to Syria. However, the social and economic repercussions of the border demarcation were profound, as the long-established patterns of land use that sustained the region's villagers and bedouin tribes were disrupted by new restrictions on movement and access to resources. The southernmost Druze villages of al-Jabal were now severed from their traditional agricultural fields and grazing lands in Transjordan. The Ahl al-Jabal, close allies of the Druzes, were divided on either side of the new border (Longrigg 1972: 208-209). The 1932 demarcation also put an end to Druze proprietary rights to Umm al-Jimāl, where they had resided intermittently for two decades. Similarly, the Druze population at Umm al-Quṭṭayn appears to have returned to Syria at about this time, in this case taking "... much of the town with them..." as they dismantled Late Antique buildings and carted the finest masonry to the village of Muḡhāyr, just north of the Syrian border (Kennedy *et al.* 1986: 147).

In the following years, population movements continued all along the northern border of Transjordan. By the 1940s, the al-Masā'id, led by the as-Surūr family and still the largest of the Ahl al-Jabal bedouin tribes, began to settle in and around Umm al-Jimāl, on the fringe of the black basalt desert where they had herded Druze livestock since the mid-19th century. Despite the intrusion of an international boundary and its impact on traditional patterns of social and economic relations in the southern al-Jabal, the Druzes and the al-Masā'id retain a closely shared history and have continued to acknowledge an enduring alliance, whilst at the same time viewing Umm al-Jimāl both as an asset and as an integral part of their histories and traditions.

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