

## THE PROTO-AEOLIC CAPITALS FROM MUDEIBI'A, IN MOAB(\*)

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The purpose of this paper is to report the existence of four Proto-Aeolic capitals in Mudeibi'a, to the south east of Moab, close to the Fajj Useikhir<sup>1</sup>.

In the 1930's Glueck published a short note on the existence of a "Proto-Ionic" capital<sup>2</sup> in the ruins of Khirbet Mudeibi'a. He included a photograph and the measurements of the piece, together with a sketch of the Iron Age II fortress and of the Nabatean wall inside it.<sup>3</sup>

More recently, in 1979, Shiloh published a book on the Proto-Aeolic capitals<sup>4</sup> in which he referred to Glueck's discovery while deploring the lack of data on the piece. In spite of his comments Shiloh republishes the same photograph as Glueck though suggesting that it is a new and better one.<sup>5</sup> He also reproduces Glueck's measurements, which are basically correct.

As a part of the Research Programme of the Spanish Archeological Mission in Jordan, I paid a visit to Mudeibi'a in August 1982 with the kind permission of Dr. Adnan Hadidi, General Director of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan. I was

happy to discover that the capital was still there, as Mr. Miller had already led me to believe, the only additions being some irrelevant arabic sentences scratched on the capital. It lies 3 meters west of the towers of the Eastern Gate of the wall, i.e. inside the precinct (fig. 1 and 2; Pl. CXLV, 2).

To my surprise I was to find in the same place three other pieces, hitherto unknown to scholars: the first one is 1 meter away from Glueck's capital. It stands almost vertical but for the most part covered by earth. From the part of the stone projecting above ground level, a small section of earth along the face of the piece had been sufficiently cleared to enable me to identify, with some difficulty, the moulding. It appeared to be a piece of the same type as Glueck had described. (fig. 1, no. 2; Pl. CXLVI, 3)

The second new piece (fig. 1, no. 3; Pl. CXLVII, 5) was found two meters west of the previous one. Only a small part of it was uncovered but sufficient to see very clearly one of the concentric circles of the decoration of the upper part; unfortunately, it was broken.

\* I wish to thank Maxwell Miller, of the University of Emory, Atlanta, and Michael Pinkerton, a member of his team, for their help in the precise localisation of the site; it is included in the area which over several years they have been surveying. See Maxwell Miller: *Archaeological Survey South of Wadi Mujib: Glueck's site revisited*. "A.D.A.J.", XXIII, 1979, pp. 79-92. IDEM: *Archaeological Survey of Central Moab*. "B.A.S.O.R.", 234, 1979, pp. 43-52.

Drawings and photographs are by the author except photograph no. 2 kindly lent to me by Fawzi Zayadine.

The English version has been read by Dr. De Larios, of Madrid, and Terence Volk, of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. My thanks to them.

1. This work is the result of the survey conducted on the site, as described in the text; it was undertaken by the author as part of the 1982 Research Programme of the Spanish Archaeological Mission in Jordan (S.A.M.), directed by Professor

Almagro. The Moab survey aims to carry forward the researches in the Iron Age period, which are being undertaken by Dr. Olavarri in Aroer and Medeinek North. E. Olavarri: *Sondages à 'Arôer sur l'Aron*. "Revue Biblique", no. 72, 1965-1, pp. 77-94. IDEM: *Fouilles à Arôer sur l'Arnon. Les niveaux du Bronze Intermediaire*. "Revue Biblique", no. 76, 1969-2, pp. 230-259. Summarised in "Encyclopaedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land", Aroer, Vol. I, pp. 98-100. E. Olavarri: *Sondeo arqueológico en Khirbet Medeinek, junto a Smakieh (Jordania)*. "A.D.A.J.", XXII, 1977-1978, pp. 136-149.

2. N. Glueck: *Explorations in Eastern Palestine, I*. "A.A.S.O.R.", Vol. XIV, 1933-34, pp. 1-114.

3. Ibidem: Fig. 26, p. 68 and Plate 11. In my opinion the attribution of this inner wall to the Nabatean period is not as yet secure.

4. Y. Shiloh: *The Proto-Aeolic capital and Israelite ashlar masonry*. "QEDEM", 11. The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1979.

5. Shiloh, op. cit. p. 13, note 82.

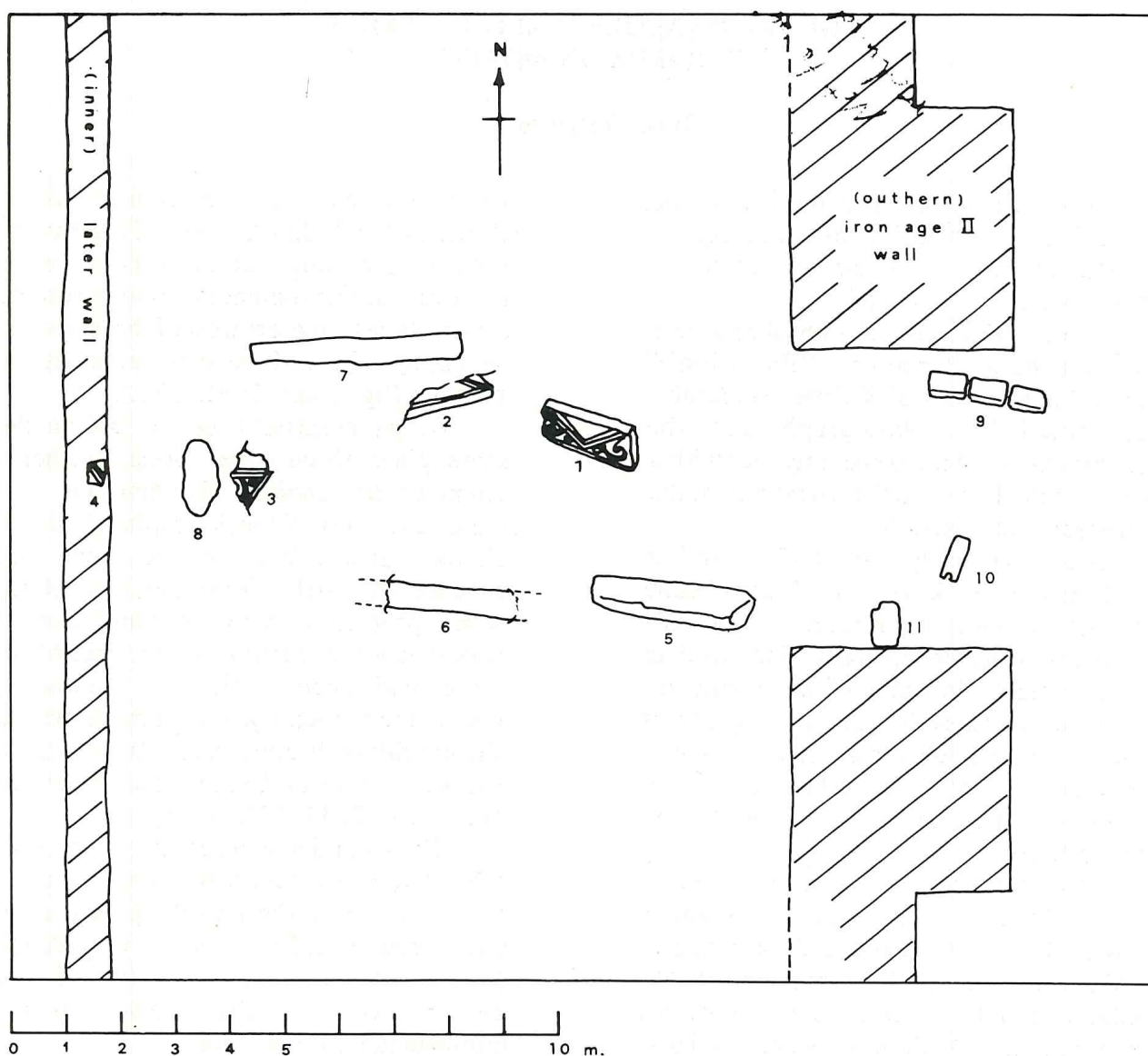


Fig. 1: Sketch plan. Measurements are roughly approximated.

The third piece (fig. 1, no. 4; Pl. CXLVIII, 7) is a fragment only; it was reused in repairs to the later inner wall (see note 3). This repair is characterised by the use of clay in fixing the stones, and hence is of a later period. In this same area, namely between the Iron Age II fortress Gate and the inner wall, there were other pieces that seemed to be related to the capitals (in fig. 1 the stones have been numbered): stone no. 5, a monolith of 3.05 x 0.55 x 0.70 meters roughly carved on two of its three visible faces and smoother on its third; stone no. 6, another monolith in a line with the previous one and half-unearthed; stone no. 7, a monolith

placed to the north of stone no. 6, also half-unearthed and measuring 3.85 x 0.69 x 0.40 m. (visible measurement only).

On the west side of the whole area and close to capital no. 3 there is a further irregularly shaped stone apparently vertical, stone no. 8. Finally and more closely related to the Gate itself there is to the north of the south tower still *in situ* a door-jamb, of which only half of its original length is preserved. The second door-jamb, fallen and broken in three pieces lies to the south-east of the north tower, stone no. 9. East of the Gate there is a fragment of the broken threshold, stone no. 10, evidently not in its original place.



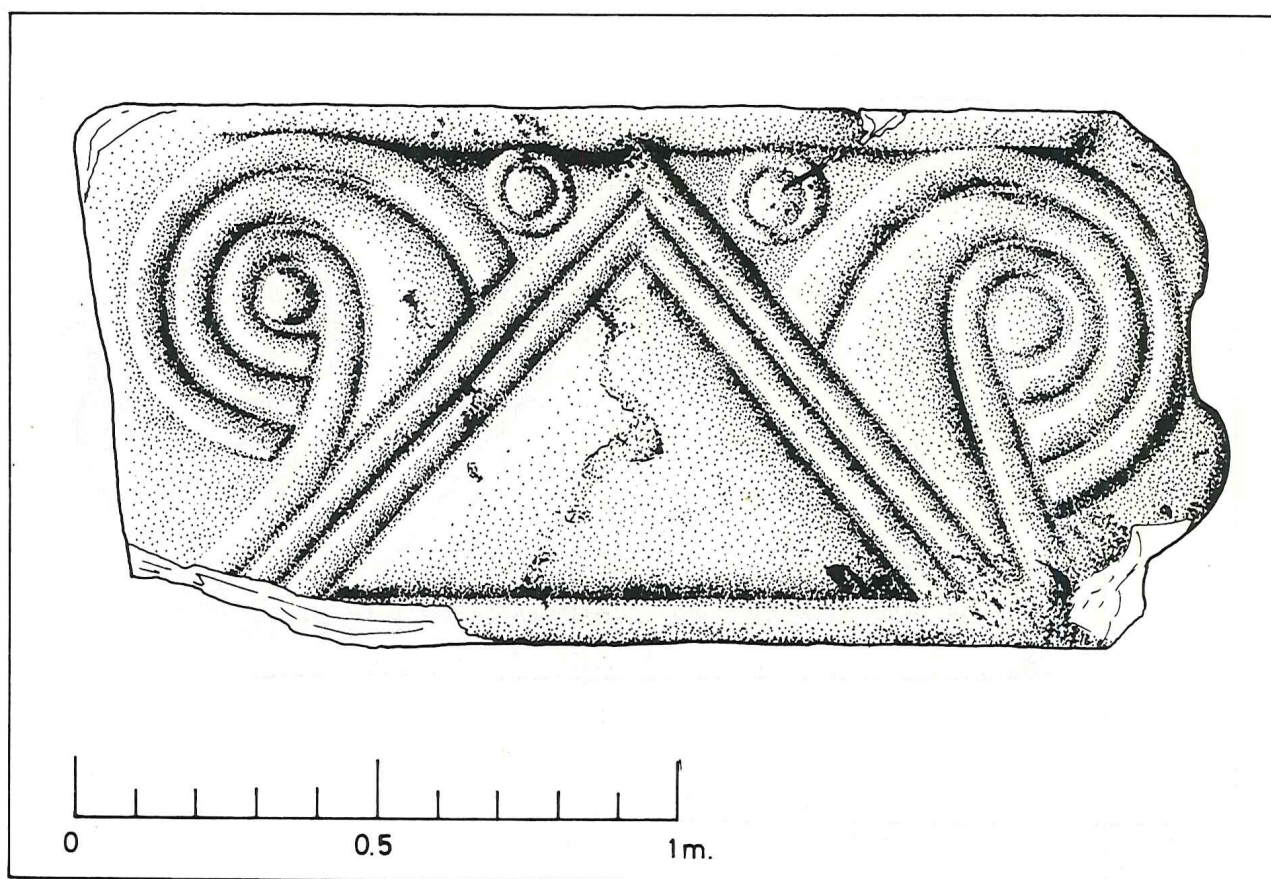


Fig. 2: Capital Md-1

Once the survey of the site had been completed<sup>6</sup> and given the existence of a monument of such importance and whose pieces were partially unearthed, I asked for the permission of the Department of Antiquities to draw and photograph the capitals before they might suffer irreparable damage. This permission included (i) the removal of earth from capitals 2 and 3 in order to draw them, and (ii) the clearing of monoliths 6 and 7 in order to establish their lengths.

On 22 September I returned to the site with Dr. Olavarri and M. Menendez, archaeologists of the Spanish Archaeological Mission, to complete the proposed work. Although it was not a proper excavation we prepared to record the levels with particular care although in the event this proved impossible. The soil unearthed consisted of an extremely thin

sand, practically dust, blown together by the wind. We did not reach the base levels of the capitals for two reasons: firstly because we wanted to avoid the destruction of those levels until we could perform a full-scale excavation in some future campaign; secondly because the positioning of the stones prevented us from removing them. In figs. 3 and 4 a heavy line indicates the limits of our present exploration. The existence of the above mentioned sand fill proves that after the fall of the capitals there has not been in this part of the site any substantial settlement. This leads us to think that the ruin of the monument must have happened after the Nabatean occupation of the site, documented by the finds of pottery and most of the structures today visible inside the fortress. Until future excavations confirm or deny this hypothesis, we can

6. The team directed by M. Miller surveyed the site and collected as many sherds from the surface as they could although such finds are now scarce. The results of the American survey in Moab will

shortly be published; in the meantime they have kindly placed at my disposal the data from Mudeibi'a.



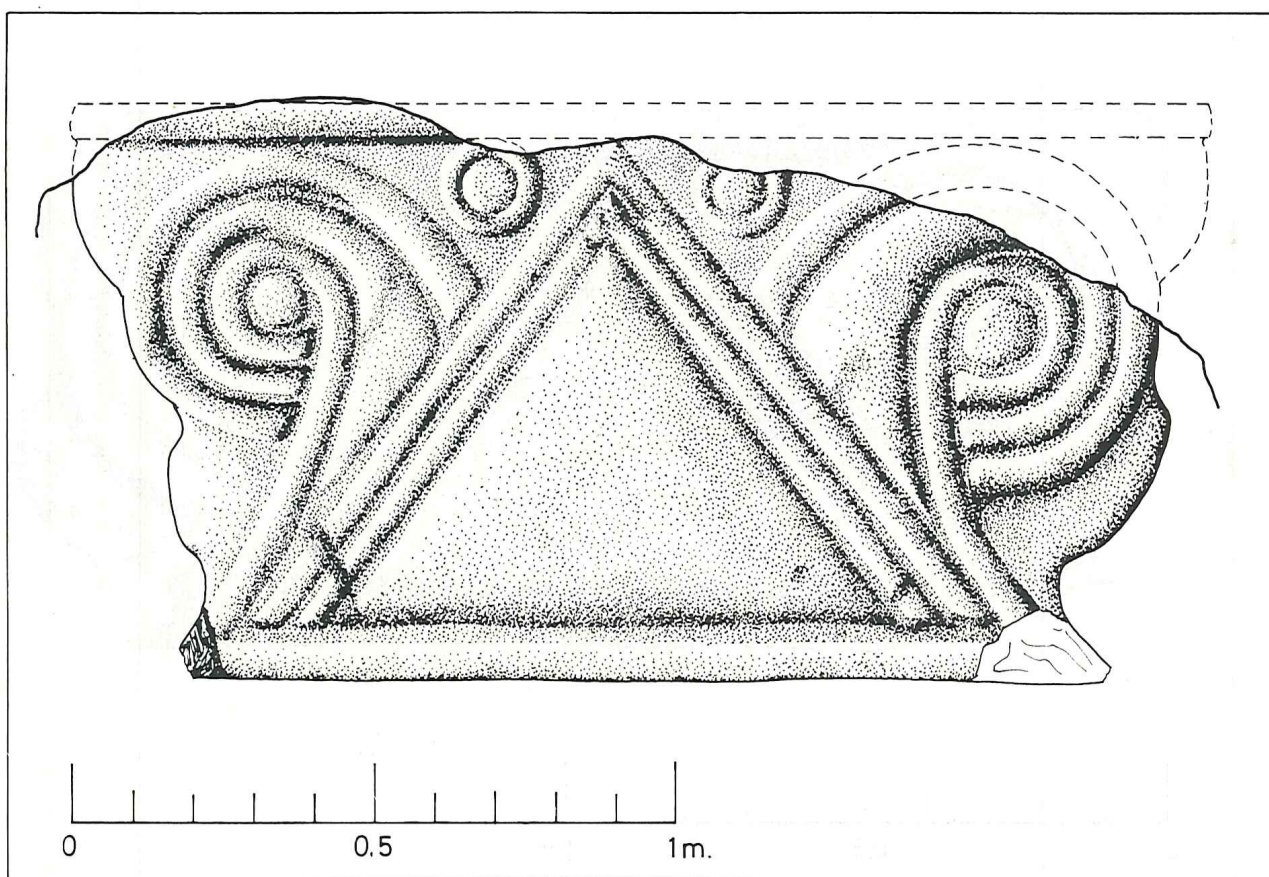


Fig. 3: Capital Md-2

assume that the Iron-Age II Gate must have been in use until the Nabatean period. In our opinion the destruction of the monument could be due to any of the several earthquakes that shattered Transjordan between the Late Roman period and Early Medieval times. The sketch at fig. 1 shows the generally regular alignment with which the stones have fallen.<sup>7</sup>

The data collected on the surface suggests that this monumental entrance of Mudeibī'a is substantially intact with all the structural elements needed for its reconstruction still in place. If this was so, we would have here the first such example

in the archaeology of the Near East. Its complete excavation will be a great help for a better understanding of similar cases (Meggido, Hazor, Ramat-Rahel...). For the present, therefore, any hypothetical reconstruction would be inappropriate, at least until a proper excavation can be undertaken.

A careful study of the Proto-Aeolic capitals, their style, evolution and relationship to their associated buildings has been undertaken recently by Shiloh.<sup>8</sup> His work, however, leaves open some questions that even now do not meet with easy answers. The origin of the circular moulding on the capitals of Ramat-Rahel,

7. The effects of such earthquakes have been progressively evaluated from an archaeological perspective in the recent works. Grumel: *Traité d'études Byzantines, I. La Chronologie*, 1958, p. 479. DH.K. Amiran: *A revised earthquake Catalogue of Palestine, I*. "Isr. Expl. Journal", 1950-51, pp. 223-246. IDEM: *A revised earthquake Catalogue of Palestine, II*, "I.E.J.", 1952, pp. 48-62. F. Zayadine: *Deux inscriptions grecques de Rabat Moab (Areopolis)*. "ADAJ",

1971, no. XVI, pp. 73-74. He records an earthquake, not noted by Grumel, shortly before 597 and offers several interesting ideas about it. Rabat-Moab, today Rabba, lies on the same plateau of Moab as Mudeibī'a, but north of Kerak. More recently K.W. Russell: *The earthquake of May, 19, A.D. 363*. "BASOR" no. 238, 1980, pp. 47-64.

8. Op. cit. in note 4.

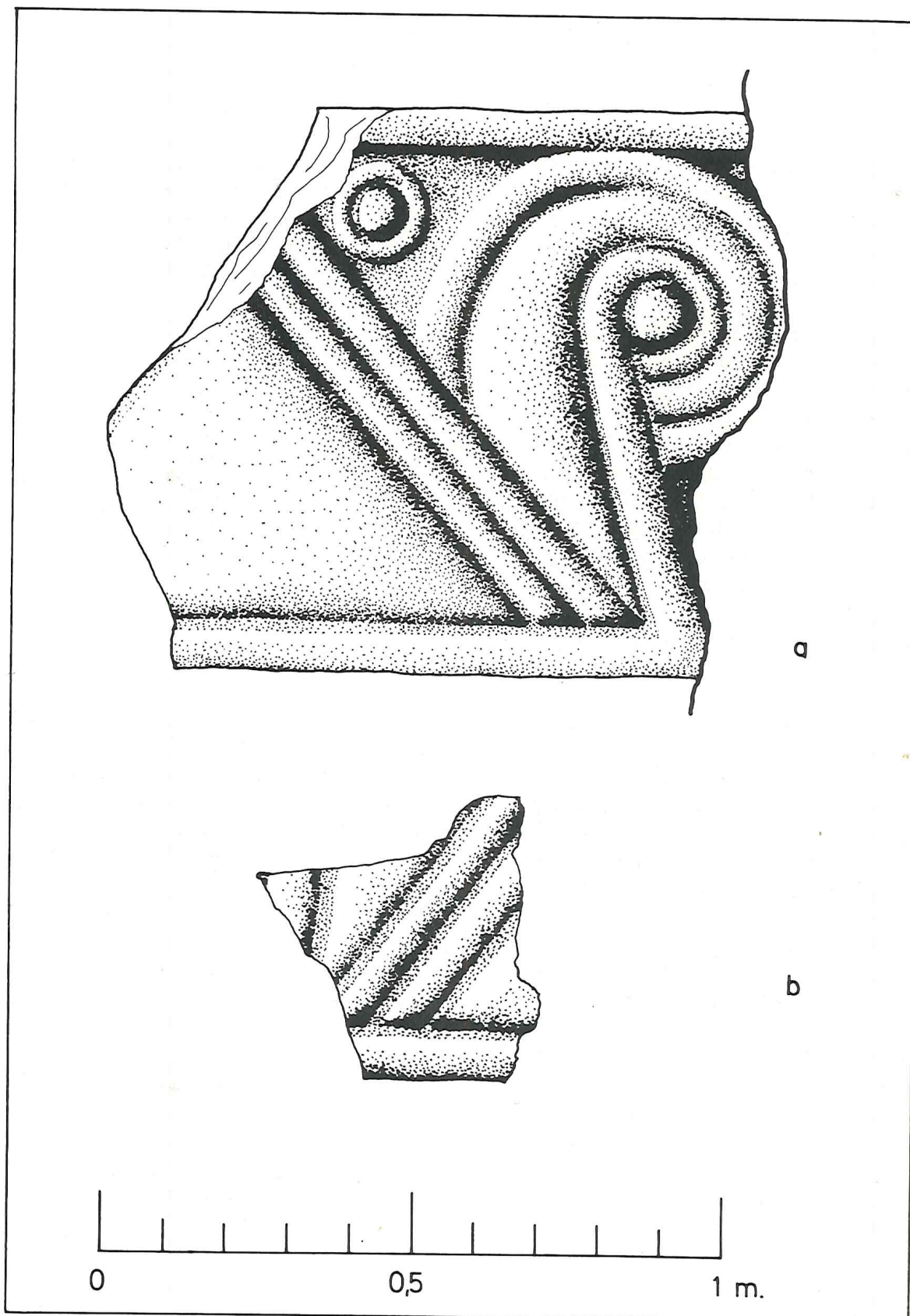


Fig. 4: Capital Md-3 & 4



Jerusalem and Mudeibi'a is not settled; the position of this capital in relation to the structure of the building is not definitely solved<sup>9</sup>, nor is the suggested attribution, in our opinion, wholly convincing<sup>10</sup>. Anyway it is surely premature to discuss the style of these pieces from Mudeibi'a as long as new data from stratigraphical analysis is lacking. The purpose of this paper is, therefore, limited to presenting descriptions of these pieces:

Capital no. 1 (Md-1) (Fig. 2 and Pl. CXLV, 2). On the decorated face the upper and lower borders are parallel. While the right-hand edge has been cut to a distinctively curved pattern, the left-hand one is straight, though not yet perpendicular. This contrasts with capital no. 2 and with those from Palestine: in all these capitals the spaces above and below the volutes which are similarly curved, contain leaves missing on our capital. The upper corners of the block are no longer sharp and the lower ones are broken. The most outstanding feature of the capital is the large size of the central isosceles triangle, itself rather well drawn. Its base is 1 meter long and its short sides are 0.77 x 0.75 meters. This inner triangle is flanked on its short sides by two parallel bands of moulding, giving three consecutive lines of engraving. The apex touches the abaco. Two asymmetrical volutes flank the short sides of the triangle; they almost cover the remaining free space. On both sides of the apex of the double triangle there is a circular device 'oculus' formed by two concentric incisions. The abaco can be seen clearly only in its central section where this characteristic "oculi" occur. Its line is broken by shallow curves where they

over-lap it (which is, of course, a mistake). The base of the triangle where it touches the base of the capital is formed by a single band of moulding. Under close examination the traces of the burin can still be clearly identified in the incised lines. The section of the engraved surface is never so sharp or so deep as those published by Shiloh<sup>11</sup>, but smoother: fig. 5. The back side of the block is irregular and rough.

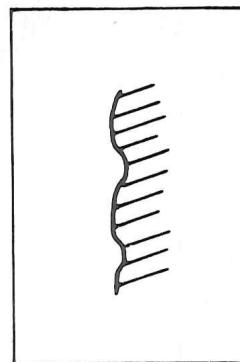


Fig. 5

Capital no. 2 (Md-2) (fig. 3 and Pl. CXLVI, 4). This piece is basically similar to the previous one but with an important difference: both left and right-hand edges of the decorated face are carved at those points, towards the top and bottom respectively, where the leaves characteristic of these capitals should appear. These blank spaces are about 8-10 cm. deep. Both flanks of the block are only lightly carved as in the case of the right flank of capital no. 1. Its back is irregular and rough.

Capital no. 3. (Md-3) (fig. 4-a, and Pl. CXLVII, 6). This shows an interesting feature: its height, 0.92 m., is much closer

9. He gives two variants of the same solution: the capitals topped pilasters placed in the gateway in the position of the door-jambs, that is facing each other; that within the same general arrangement there was a single pillar placed between the pilasters, a variant requiring three capitals. Crowfoot's reconstruction for Samaria is rejected by Y. Shiloh: *New Proto-Aeolic capitals found in Israel*. "BASOR", no. 222, 1976, p. 70, and in "QEDEM", 11, p. 8. With the few data we have, we can assume that a third solution is required for Mudeibi'a.

10. He demonstrates that the motive is common to

the great Asiatic cultures that surrounded Israel, but in its form as Proto-Aeolic capital he claims it as a purely Israelite creation. The earliest examples from Israel would be those of Meggido (M-2, 4,5, y 11) dated to the Xth. Century B.C., to the period of Solomon. We know from the Bible that the King used Phoenician architects. As far as Mudeibi'a is concerned, it is worth keeping in mind, at least as a possibility, that King Mesha himself tells us that he used (a century later) Israelite prisoners in some of his works.

11. Shiloh, Qedem, 11, cit., fig. 10.

to that of Md-1. 0.90 m., than that of Md-2, 0.97 m. Unfortunately we were unable to make a drawing of the right-hand side of this capital, although we suppose it to be complete. An hypothetical reconstruction suggests that this piece is from a different capital than the fragment here recorded as capital no. 4 (Md-4) (fig. 4-b, and Pl. CXLVIII, 7).

The very hard type of stone from which these pieces are made is readily found in the area. This suggests that it is unlikely that the capitals were imported from the West Coast. On the contrary the craftsmen required to carve them were most probably "imported". If Shiloh's date for Mudeibi'a is correct - IX century B.C. - the construction of an important fortress<sup>12</sup> which such an imposing entrance could well be due to the building fever of King Mesha for which we have the King's own testimony in his stele.

Shiloh included capital Md-1 among group-E of his classification, citing the

capitals of Ramat-Rahel as parallels. It is, however, important to emphasize that in the present capitals from Transjordan there are two decorative features which make them distinct from the other known pieces: the bands of moulding on either side of the central triangle are not three as in the other cases, but two: and secondly, the two upper and lower leaves emerging from the volutes are missing. Both features are common to all the pieces of the E-group; the second one is common to all the previously known capitals.

To summarise, we are dealing with an unusually well preserved monumental gateway an Iron Age II fortress and one which should provide many important data for our improved knowledge of this type of structures.

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12. The very regular plan of this Moabite fortress has as yet to be explained. None of the sites which have produced Proto-Aeolic capitals shares this shape. The closest is Ramat-Rahel

which of course does not serve as a useful parallel. Undoubtedly the best parallel is the fortress of Arôer, which was built ("rebuilt") by King Mesha.