

Fragments of Carved Stones

from Tulul adh-Dhahab in the Lower Wadi az-Zarqā

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The interdisciplinary joint project of Dortmund University of Technology (TU Dortmund/Germany) and the Department of Antiquities of Jordan (DoA) found pieces of fragments of carved stones firstly in the second season of excavations (2006) on the Western of the Tulul adh-Dhahab in the lower Wadi az-Zarqā /Jordan (Pola 2006). One fragment shows the head of a lion, another one shows a person standing behind an animal (goat?). This essay is the first publication of these drawings.¹ Othmar Keel (Fribourg University/Switzerland) stresses the relevance of these finds: “The carved stones from Tall adh-Dhahab al-Gharbi are unique under several aspects. First, it is unusual to have iconography of this size from this region. Second, it is unusual for this period and region to have work in stone which shows only the contours. Third, the iconography, particularly the small human person with a goat is unusual². According to Keel the carved stones found in 2006 should be dated into the time between 800-700 BC, i.e. the Assyrian time within Iron Age II.

The Setting

The Tulul adh-Dhahab are located eight kilometres eastwards of the Abu az- Zighan crossing in Dayr ‘Alla /Jordan Valley. The only archaeological work done before the start of the joint project was the survey by R.L. Gordon in 1980 and 1982 in the lower Wadi az-Zarqā region (Gordon 1983 and 1984). It included the Tulul adh-Dhahab. According to the conventions given by Gordon the carved stones were found on terrace I (= the top plateau of the hill, 80 x 60 metres) in a quite clumsily constructed wall (sq. 161/162; **Figs 1 and 2**). A sondage in the third season (2007) proved the theory that this wall was constructed in Late Roman time (obviously before the earthquake of 363 AD) in order to protect the buildings eastwards of the wall.

Periods of Settlement on the Western of the Tulul

The main periods of settlement as known after the fourth season (2008) are as follows:

- Neolithic period
- Late Bronze Age (two radiocarbon samples from the foundation of a building at the bottom of a Hellenistic-Roman tower in the city wall of terrace II indicated the time between 1.300 and 1.000 BC)³.
- Iron Age I and II.
- Late Hellenistic time (about 150-100 B.C.) to Late Roman (until 363 AD) period.

1. A report of the five seasons (from 2005-2009) by Th. Pola, F. Siegmund, and M. al-Balawnah is forthcoming in ADAJ. The project was realized because of the kind permission of the Director General of the DoA, Dr. Fawwaz al-Khraysheh and because of the generous support by the TU Dortmund, the Society of Friends of the TU Dortmund, Weckbacher Security Systems (Dortmund; Dirk Rutenhofer), Dr. med. Wolfgang Pola (Fehmarn/Germany), Dr. med. Roswitha Batereau-Neumann (Dortmund), Dr. med. Eugen Floren (Marl/Germany), Dr. Rüdiger Stolle (Meerbusch/Germany), and other private donators.

2. In a written statement from May 16th, 2007.

3. The authors thank Prof. Dr. Manfred Bayer (Faculty of Physics of the TU Dortmund) for his support.



Fig. 1. The carved stones found in 2006 *in situ*, partly collapsed after removal of the carved stones (2007).



Fig. 2. The wall in which the carved stones of 2006 were found,

Artefacts from the Persian period and from the Islamic time have not been detected yet.

How the Carved Stones of 2006 Were Found

In 2006, while surveying the stones on the surface of the upper terrace III one piece pertaining to the lion fragment was found (later called “fragment B”). It must have tumbled down from the above mentioned wall in sq. 161/162 of the western end of terrace I. This piece matched exactly one of the bigger stones in the wall which contains the main part of the carving of the lion head. While cleaning it for documentation one of our sponsors, Dr. Roswitha Batereau-Neumann another carved stone under the stone with the carving of the lion. It shows a person behind a domestic animal (goat?). A drawing *in situ* was made by Wolfgang Thiel (**Fig. 3**) in addition to photographs by Emmanuel Rehfeld. It is clear that the carved stones were taken from any ancient building on terrace I in order to be reused in the wall. The carved stones are presently kept in the archives of the Archaeological Museum of as-Salt.⁴

In 2008, in sq. 94 on terrace I (towards the eastern slope) a fragment with three parallel bended lines was found. Although it is a carved stone, too, it seems to pertain to a fragment independent from the carved stones found in 2006.

Descriptions and Possible Parallels

As the “drawings” are no reliefs but *carved* there has been no parallel found yet in the literature concerning the iconography of Ancient Syria in the second and first millennium B.C. The carved stones found on the Western of the Tulul adh-Dhahab are obviously *unique*. Consequently it is difficult to determine its place within the history of iconography in Ancient Syria.

A. The Lion Head

The yellow, partly reddish sandstone showing the roughly carved silhouette of a lion head (**Fig. 4**)

⁴ The lion head was registered in the files of the excavation with the number TDW06.I.161/62.1500/1502, the person with the animal was registered with TDW06.I.161/62.1503.

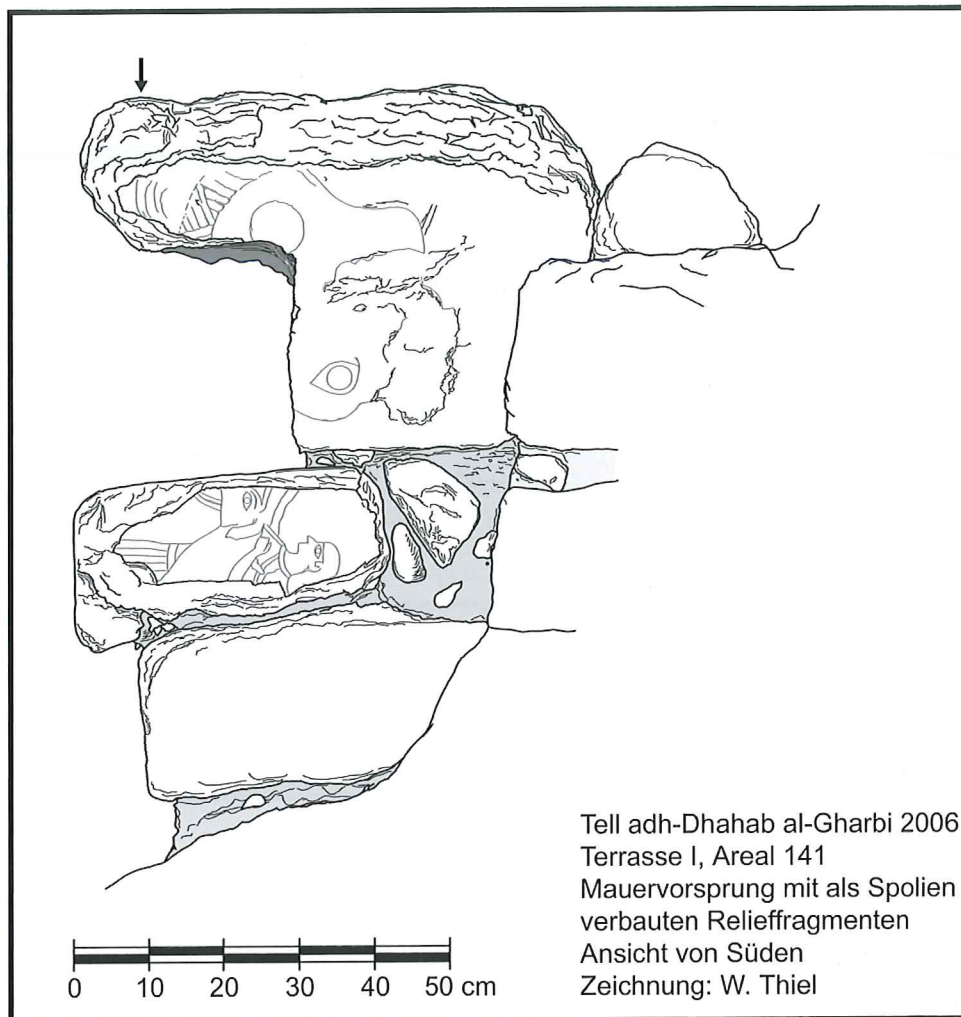


Fig.3. Drawing of the carved stones of 2006 *in situ* (without fragment B) by Dr. Wolfgang Thiel.

weighs about 300 to 400 kilogram and was obviously was taken from the local bedrock. It consists of three exactly matching pieces: Fragment “B” was found on the upper terrace III, fragments “A” and “C” (formally *one* piece) were found in the above-mentioned Late Roman wall near the west slope of terrace I, in sq. 161/162. In 2007, unfortunately it broke into two pieces while moving it in the Museum of as-Salt. The drawing as a whole covers 45 x 35 centimetres.

The head of the lion is directed towards the left. Fragments “A” and “C”: The lion’s nose is not preserved. Although it is a silhouette the eye is carved from frontal perspective like the multiplicity of approaches in Egyptian Art. The lightly opened mouth with visible teeth and the throat make it plausible to identify it with a lion. Moreover, there are only few depictions from leopards known until now. The motif of the lion is much more frequent for apotropaic purposes. Fragment “B” shows the ear and a kind of stripe leading downwards and obviously continuing in fragment “C”. Iconographic parallels demonstrate that this stripe is not a kind of decoration but typical for depicting the hair of a male lion (Strawn 2005)⁵. It must be presumed that the lines right of the stripe belong to the hair of the lion, too. Among the parallels which can be found in the monograph of Strawn (2005) there are also some concerning the eyes,⁶ the mouth,⁷ and the ears.⁸ Although striking parallels are the seal of “Shema, the servant of Jerobeam” from the eighth century B.C. (Strawn 2005: Fig. 3.96) and the Baal stela from al-Qadburn (kept in the museum of Tartus) from 1.200 to 1.000 BC

5. Strawn fig. 4.112; 4.179; 4.198; 4.254; 4.315, and photograph 1015.

6. Strawn fig. 3.23; 3.96; 4.122; 4.235; 4.254 (= ANEP 471).

7. Strawn fig. 3.92; 3.96; 4.122; 4.235.

8. Strawn fig. 3.92; 4.112; 4.198; 4.235; 4.254.



Fig. 4. Photograph of the stone showing the silhouette of a lion.

(Strawn 2005: Fig. 4.235) it is very difficult to find hints for the date of the carving. In view of the weight of the stone it is almost sure that it was taken from an ancient ruin on terrace I in order to be reused in the Late Roman wall.

B. The Person behind an Animal

Compared with the carving of the lion the “drawing” of the person behind an animal on yellow local sandstone (**Fig. 5 and 6**) shows much smoother lines. It cannot be excluded that the side to be carved was prepared with a thin layer of plaster in which the carving was achieved (**Fig. 7**). This explains why the carving is slightly damaged. The stone, however, is as big as the stone showing the lion. It weighs about 300-400 kilogram (**Fig. 1**). It was broken before its removal from the wall but the carving has not been damaged. The carving covers 35 x 11.5 centimetres.

The stone fragment depicts the silhouette of a human standing behind an animal which is carved as a silhouette, too. Regarding the animal only its head (the mouth is incomplete) and its throat are visible. The head contains an eye, a lop ear, and a horn. The horn and especially the lop ear direct towards an identification with a *goat*. Not typical for a goat is the shape of the throat. Consequently, the identification with a goat is not completely sure.

The person behind the animal has his/her hair covered, his/her eye is directed towards the viewer (like the lion’s eye) in accordance with the rules of Egyptian iconography, and is beardless. As there is nothing known about eunuchs (in the literal sense) in Ancient Syria the person should be identified with a woman or a child. An adult woman appears to be too small in comparison with the goat (provided there is no hierarchic scaling in this carving)⁹. This leads to the conclusion that it might be a child, female or male. The person’s dress is characterized by pleats visible under the goat. The right hand is possibly seized over the goat’s head; the left hand possibly lies on the neck of the animal.

⁹ The opposite case (a person too big compared with the associated animal) can be seen in a bronze plastic from Syria depicting a person on a donkey (Staubli 1991, 103-104 and fig. 21).



Fig. 5. Photograph of the stone showing a person behind an animal, front view.



Fig. 6. Drawing (1:1) of the stone showing a person behind an animal (by Emmanuel Rehfeld and Tobias Krause).

A person before an animal is known from a group of persons “bearing offerings and making gesture of the upraised hands” (ANEP) on a relief on the Ahiiram sarcophagus.¹⁰ But the carved stone from the western of the Tulul adh-Dhahab can not have been part of the depiction of a political tributary scene because in these only adult *men* would have been presented in this context (Bär 1996: 57-213).

Moreover, a goat was not valuable enough to be depicted within a tributary scene. Consequently, the alternative to a tributary interpretation is a *cultic* one: The carving is a fragment of a scene depicting a family with many persons of different age and gender bringing an animal (or several animals) for a sacrifice (compare the Ahiiram sarcophagus¹¹). This leads to the conclusion *that this carved stone was primarily created for a sanctuary*¹²



Fig. 7. Thin layer of plaster on the stone showing a person behind an animal.

The dress¹³ of the person shows a type of pleats (in German: “Quetschfalten”) added to a textile fragment without pleats below the hips which can be found in Neo-Assyrian art in the time of Tikulti-Ninurta II. (early ninth century BC; Wäfler 1975)¹⁴. Another parallel can be found in the Neo-Hittite art (1.000-600 BC; Watson 1987: 41 with fig. 77). The third parallel is a relief from Zincirli (Sam’al) from the grave of a rich woman depicting a woman sitting on a throne and dressed by a garment with pleats covering the legs of the person. Moreover, Reimpell demonstrated that this kind of dress with added pleats at the bottom is also known in Late Babylonian time (Reimpell 1921)¹⁵.

To sum up, as there are no direct parallels to the technique of carving stones on the one hand and to the motif of the cultic scene on the other hand it must be concluded that the carved stones were made by *local* craftsmen who only show little influence from Egypt (eyes of the lion and the person) and from Mesopotamia including Ancient Syria (dress of the person).

Conclusions

The carved stones from sq. 161/162 point to a settlement in the ninth or eighth century BC. As the stones have an approximate weight of about 400 kg it is likely that they were taken from a ruin on the plateau for constructing a protective wall at the boarder of the settlement of the plateau. Moreover, as these fragments possibly were not taken from different but from *one* building it is possible that the lion head had apotropaic function at an entrance construction. The other fragment (goat with woman or young person) seems to belong to a *cultic scene*. The iconography of the presentation of tribute in the Assyrian and Babylonian (even Persian) time (Walser 1966) is restricted to depict adult male.

διαγράψω (“to draw a line”).

13. The authors thank Ms. Petra Waterman (Dortmund) for her kindly investigation concerning the dress.

14. Page 206 and in the plates volume, map no. 3 from Nimrud, central palace, room F.

15. Page 28, 64, 66-67.

Consequently it is quite unusual to show a woman or a male/female child. As the person behind the goat is too small for an adult person (even a beardless adult man) it seems to be a young person, male or female. As the depiction of children is only known from Elamite art of the second millennium, which is geographically and chronologically really far from the az- Zarqā Valley the depiction of a goat and a child behind it might have been part of a *cultic scene* originally comprising a whole family walking towards (or within) a sanctuary. *This implies the possibility that there was a sanctuary on the top of the mountain in Iron Age II time.* Of course, further investigation in the site is necessary in order to find more fragments of the carved stones, hopefully.

Appendix (August 2009)

After this manuscript had been kindly accepted by the DoA new fragments discovered in the fifth campaign (2009) confirm the analysis given above. Five fragments simply show carved lines which can only be interpreted within their primary context¹⁶. Another fragment was found by Miguel Ximénez-Carillo in the slope near sq. 161/162 on terrace I (Fig. 8). Its smoothed surface is partly covered by ornamental lines which can be interpreted as fire (?), water (?), or a botanical motive¹⁷. Its style is comparable with the style of the lions hair from the finds of 2006. Another fragment¹⁸ reveals the technique of the carving: A chain of small pits was made with the help of an iron pencil. In a second working step these pits were linked with each other. Another fragment was found on terrace I in a square pertaining to the roman building(s) east of the southern peristyle court (Fig. 9). Two smoothed surfaces are situated in a rectangular way (270°). This proves that the carved stones pertained to a *composition of motives* within a room (cf. above Ez 8:10: “all around”) or several rooms. On one surface there are only three parallel lines visible. The other surface shows the silhouette of the head and the upper part of the breast of a young and beardless person carved in a manner comparable with the person behind the goat found in 2006 (esp. hair, eye, nose, and mouth are very similar). In contrast to the find of 2006 the person is directed towards the right margin (this supports the thesis that the carved stones found until now belong to a composition of motives). Moreover, the person is closely directed to an item which can be interpreted as a kind of musical instrument (of a cultic scene or ornaments of a palace?). What is very peculiar is that there are three parallel lines between the mouth of the person and this instrument. The carved stones found in 2006 and 2009 doubtless need further investigation and intensive scholarly discussion.



Fig. 8. TDW09.I.93.23.7062 (preliminary photograph). Fig. 9. TDW09.I.77.21.7022 (preliminary photograph).

16. TDW09.I.177.0.10000, TDW09.I.177.0.10008, TDW09.I.109.0.7040, TDW09.I.0.0.10010, TDW09.I.0.0.10011.

17. TDW09.I.93.0.7062.

18. TDW09.I.109.0.7040.

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