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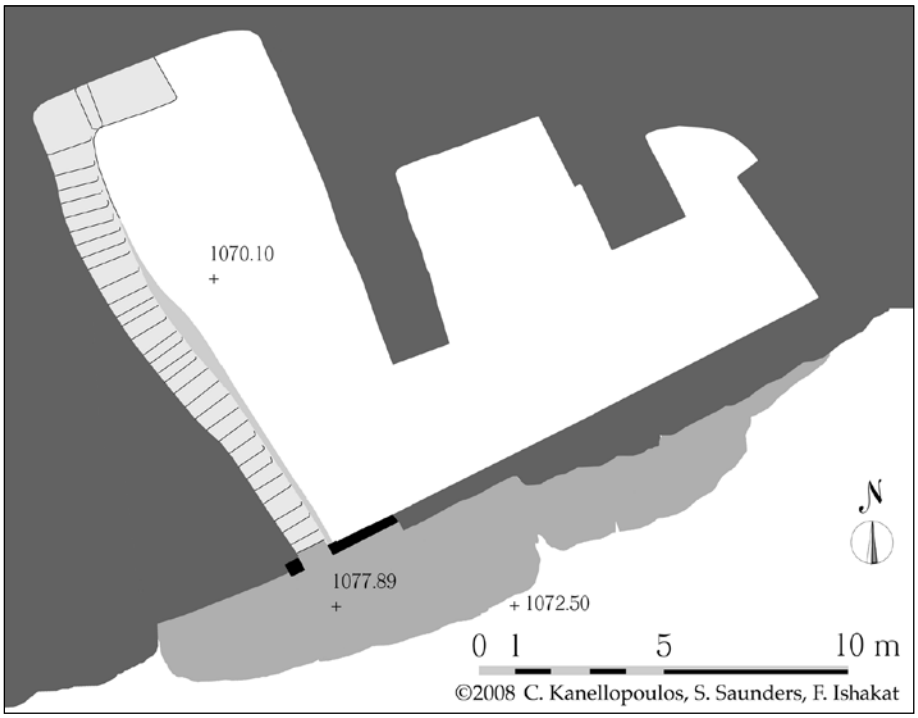
Bayḍā Documentation Project

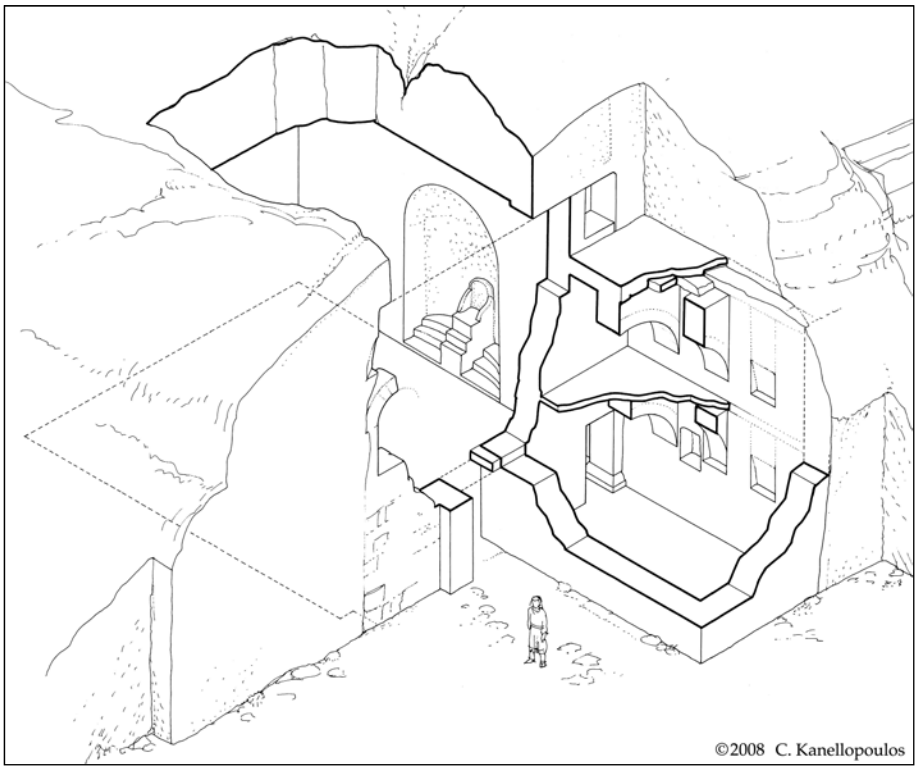
Introduction

The objectives of the Bayḍā Documentation Project are to detail all features in a specific area of Bayḍā (see map in Bikai, Kanellopoulos and Saunders 2007: 370, Fig. 1), to contribute to tourism development; and to create employment. Work began in 2003 in the northern canyon, Sīq al-Imṭī, where a large unroofed enclosure approached by elaborate walkways was excavated. The multiple wine presses nearby indicate that vineyards had surrounded the enclosure. The building may therefore have had some function, perhaps a ritual one, related to wine. Just east of Sīq al-Imṭī , a rock-cut cistern was documented in a later season. This cistern (FIG. 1) is known locally as Bīr al-'Arāyis (Cistern of the Brides) and has a capacity of over one million cubic litres. It is the largest covered cistern in the region and we can now say that it probably supplied water to the monument that is the main focus of this paper.

In the spring of 2004, work concentrated on an area featuring a large open-air cistern with a capacity of 1.4 million cubic litres. In the fall of 2004, a Nabataean hall cut into bedrock was cleared and it was found to have been reconfigured as a church (FIG. 2) in the Byzantine period and reused again by the Crusaders. The interior dimensions are 10 x 10 x 10 metres. The modifications in the Byzantine period included the cutting of an apse, which featured a bishop's chair, into the eastern wall of the chamber. A set of holes in the cave's walls must have been used for a large chandelier. A two-storey



1. Plan of Bīr al-'Arāyis. Drawing by C. Kanellopoulos, S. Saunders and F. Ishakat.



2. Church. Drawing by C. Kanellopoulos.

structure with arched ceilings was added in the area of the cave's entrance. To the west of that hall were numerous walls indicating habitation. Some of the habitation area was tested and found to be from late antiquity. The structures are poorly built but are so regularly laid out that they may have all been constructed at one time, probably by the Crusaders, perhaps to accommodate agricultural workers. We would later discover two mosques nearby.

A Royal Complex

In May 2005, the fifth season, the focus was on a high bedrock formation in the east of the study area. At its top, this formation had a large rectangular platform into which a long feature had been cut. The debris in that cut yielded a plethora of classical-era material, including many capitals and stone heads. In time, it became clear that the heads were the bosses on the capitals and that the cut into bedrock was the basement or *cryptoporticus* of a large room that once existed on the rectangular platform above; nothing remained *in situ* of that room. Excavations continued in September 2005 with the result that it is now known that the *cryptoporticus* and the room above it were one part of a large complex that covered almost all of the bedrock formation (Bikai, Kanellopoulos and Saunders, in press).

The complex begins at the west with a paved walkway leading to a gate. There would have been about 50 steps leading to the top of the knoll where all that remains today is the compound's infrastructure: the basement including, of course, the *cryptoporticus* at the eastern end. There is a square area directly west of the *cryptoporticus*. From its location, it is reasonable to hypothesize that a square, possibly colonnaded, *atrium* existed above that square. The Ionic capitals recovered can be restored conveniently into the *atrium*'s colonnade or to an *exedra*. These canonical, two-faced Ionic capitals (FIG. 3) are unique to Petra and suggest a date in the first century BC (McKenzie 2001: 100-

3. Ionic Capital. Photo by P. Bikai.

101; Fiema *et al*. 2001: 171, Fig. 38). The pseudo-Ionic capital with elephant heads could have been combined with the larger Ionic order, perhaps as windows. Elephant-headed capitals are well known from the 130 columns in the Lower Temenos of the Great Temple at Petra (Blagg 1990; Joukowsky 1998).

Dining Hall

Moving east to the main hall, it appears that the colonnade material found collapsed in the *cryptoporticus* originally stood on top of the rectangular mass of bedrock. That rectangle was the starting point for the reconstruction. The floor of the elevated, colonnaded hall on the rectangle would originally have been at least 5.5 metres above the floor of the vaulted *cryptoporticus*. The heart-shaped piers recovered are suggestive of an interior colonnade in the hall. The width of the flattened bedrock can accommodate the exterior walls, two columns and two heart-shaped piers, for a total of four piers width-wise. Taking the average distance between those columns into account, the length of the building would accommodate a total of six columns and two heart-shaped piers. So, the capitals with heads can be restored to the hall. It is reasonable to restore two columns and two heart-shaped piers with Medusae and palmette capitals to the west part of the colonnade, directly across from the entrance. The apotropaïc role of the Medusa heads further corroborates their restoration in the area of the entrance.

The pilaster capitals recovered are much larger in height and width than the corresponding dimensions of the column capitals and therefore cannot be combined with the colonnade. These can be attributed to a feature such as the door frame of the colonnaded hall (FIG. 4). Plain door jambs with fully executed Corinthian capitals and a complete entablature occur elsewhere in Petra. Such are the door frames in the Khazna (McKenzie 1987: 297, Fig. 3c). Additionally, Corinthian *antae* frame the central *adyton* of Qaṣr al-Bint (Zayadine, Larché and Dentzer-Feydy 2003: 149, Fig. 15).

The smaller capitals with lion heads instead of volutes and small human heads instead of bosses are about half the size of the hall's capitals. These can reasonably be attributed to an upper level in the same architectural composition (FIG. 5). However, the exact arrangement remains unknown owing to lack of evidence. Nevertheless, the evidence for an upper storey with smaller supports of the same style indicates a possible elevated clerestory above the nave. The hypothetical clerestory is canonical to such basilican interiors. If this is accepted, the basilican plan with an elevated clerestory recalls the Egyptian-type banqueting / dining hall described in Vitruvius' architectural manual (6. 3. 9):

"*…Above their architraves and ornaments are decorated ceilings, and the upper columns have windows set in between them. Thus the Egyptian are not like Corinthian dining rooms, but obviously resemble basilicas*."

To put this building in a geographical and a chronological context, the setting at the edge of a cliff greatly resembles the contemporaneous palatial complexes at Machaerus and Masada (ca. 25BC), each of which has a number of palatial facilities (Netzer 2001: 92-95). Multi-storied compounds with luxurious reception areas and colonnaded courtyards gazing over dramatic views are common to these Herodian / Hashmonean complexes and to the one at Bayḍā. Egyptian *oeci* occur in the area, e.g., in the first palace at Jericho (ca. 32BC), in Herod's third palace at Jericho and in the Governor's Palace at Ptolemais (Nielsen 1994: 147, Fig. 78; 149, Fig. 80; 197; Netzer 2001: 40).

It seems that the main staircase led up from the

4. Pilaster capital with head of Pan and grapes. Photo by P. Bikai.

5. Photorealistic view to the west of the dining hall. Created by C. Kanellopoulos.

entrance to the south side or south-west corner of the elevated complex, as described above. Indeed, in a number of prominent residences with peristyles, the entrance is from the side, e.g. the Governor's Palace at Ptolemais (Nielsen 1994: 147, Fig. 78). There is also a lateral entrance to the house of the consul Attalos in Pergamon and in Herod's Promontory Palace (Schmid 2001: Fig. 7).

Decoration

The capitals from the Bayḍā complex have two main components: a lower half decorated with acanthus leaves and an upper half decorated with volutes, vines, poppies and grapes. The upper sections of the Bayḍā capitals are of the floral type. Between the volutes, the sculptors cultivated a verdant garden of intertwined vines and three different types of poppy. The workmanship of the capital decoration is of the same calibre as found at the Khazna, Qaṣr al-Bint, the Temple of the Winged Lions and Petra's Great Temple. The capitals belong to McKenzie's Group 1 of the Nabataean Floral Type capital, which she dates to before 20AD (McKenzie 1990: 40-41). Unique to the Bayḍā hall, however, are the pilaster capitals that graced the entrance. Here, the sculptors added grapes and grape leaves, almost as an introduction to the room.

Another rather extraordinary feature of the Bayḍā capitals was the addition of sculpted heads, although the use of heads as decorative bosses to embellish the centre point of the abacus is not unique to Bayḍā. (Webb 1996: 18; Kolb, Gorgerat and Grawehr 1999: 269 and Figs. 5-6). A total of 31 heads were recovered. Differences in the portrayal of the heads show that multiple sculptors were at work on the Bayḍā capitals and each head is quite individualistic.

The most identifiable figure in the Bayḍā assemblage is Dionysos, who is singled out by the vine wreath that crowns his head and the ribbon that crosses his brow. It should be recalled that the worship of Dionysos involved much revelry and often took place outside the city limits. The group of Dionysian worshippers and their religious procession are both called a *thiasos* in Greek. *Thiasoi* are portrayed often and in many different art forms in Greco-Roman art. The procession that includes elephants, panthers and perhaps giraffes

is a depiction of the god's victorious return from the East where he defeated Indians who refused to worship him (Nonnos, *Dionysiaca* 36). The cast of characters in a Dionysian *thiasos* is changeable, but many of the main characters join the god himself on the headed capitals of Bayḍā. Bearing in mind that we only have about half the original number of heads, these include Ampelos, Dionysos, Pais, Heracles, Pan and Silenos, in addition to satyrs and bacchantes. The two veiled females could be drawn from the main female characters in Dionysian mythology: Ariadne, Nysa or Ino. The presence of Isis can perhaps be explained by her popularity in Petra (Zayadine 1991). The other female figures may be Muses, bacchantes or nymphs. The cast of characters for the capital decoration of the Bayḍā structure was purposefully selected and implies a Dionysian function as a grand dining hall, whether ritualised or not. According to Strabo (16.4.26):

"*The Nabataeans prepare common meals together in groups of thirteen persons; and they have two girl-singers for each banquet. The king holds many drinking-bouts in magnificent style, but no one drinks more than eleven cupfuls, each time using a different golden cup.*"

The imposing and magnificent character of the basilican plan and the architectural decoration of the Bayḍā complex point to a wealthy, probably regal, owner.

Dating and Interpretation

Finally we may ask: who and when? The major conclusions of the preliminary study of the ceramics are:

1) The area under the courtyard was used for food-preparation.
2) Ceramics found in the food-preparation area date to the period just before the abandonment.
3) A study of these indicates that the use of the building ended more or less at the end of Stefan Schmid's Phase 2a, that is ca. 30/20BC (Schmid 2000: 38, see also 25 and Abb. 97).
4) Painted pottery of any type that is restricted to Schmid's Phase 1 (Schmid 2000, Fig. 97 and 2003, Figs. 52–53) seems not to occur at the site, so the building most likely was constructed after 50BC.

Dating to after 50BC but before ca. 30/20BC would make it likely that the complex was built during the reign of King Malichos (59/58-30BC) and abandoned at about the time of his death. It stood derelict, perhaps until the reign of Rabbel II (70-106AD), when the building was dismantled. At that time, most of its materials were taken away, but the capitals were abandoned at the site, indicating that they could not, for whatever reason, be re-used.

Dionysos was much favored by the kings as a role model and ancestor for several reasons: he was the conqueror and ruler of the East, a man who had become a god and the master of luxurious living (Smith 1991: 127). It may be that the Nabataean royal family associated itself with Dionysos, as did Alexander the Great and his mother (Plut. *Alex.* 2.5). Following in Alexander's footsteps was Ptolemy II Philadelphus of Egypt, Cleopatra's father Ptolemy XII, who called himself "Neos Dionysos", and Cleopatra's lover Mark Antony, who similarly portrayed himself as the new Dionysos (Fraser 1972: Vol. 1, 202-205).

On this high rocky promontory, overlooking many dunums of vineyards, there was a magnificent residence that included a hall with splendid decorations. The hall marked King Malichos' claim for association with Dionysos.

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