

Excavations at Petra

(April 1973)

A joint campaign of excavations at Petra was financed by the Naturhistorische Gesellschaft of Nurnberg, thanks to the initiative of its President, Dr. Manfred Lindner, who edited an excellent book on Petra and the Nabataean civilisation¹. The work of excavation was directed by Dr. F. Zayadine, of the Department of Antiquities assisted by Mr. Bassim Rihani and Mr. Mohammed M. Khadija. Members of the German Society, together with Austrian volunteers were of great help in the excavation.

The area selected for the dig was the western slope of the Khubtha cliff, which has some of the largest tombs of Petra, usually described as the "Royal Nabataean Necropolis." The main object of the excavation was to improve our knowledge of the sequence of occupation in that area. Four sites were investigated :

I. Tomb No. 813, at the end of the Siq facing the theater, decorated with half crowsteps, a cavetto cornice and pilasters, was searched in ancient and modern times. Nevertheless, we decided to excavate it, in hopes of finding inscriptions. Only two loculi out of eleven were cleaned out and on the first day our intuition proved to be right for a fragmentary Nabataean inscription appeared in the second loculus to the left, when entering the tomb (Pl. L, 2). It reads : "mnku... nbt" which means : "Maliku (king) of the Nabataeans". It is clear from the cement on the back of the slab that it was fitted into a wall, maybe the one closing the loculus. The king here mentioned is probably Malichos II (40-70 A.D.), son of

Aretas IV. In another loculus was found fragmentary wall plaster inscribed with two letters (**resh** and **tet**) suggesting the name of Aretas, as supplementary evidence of a royal burial in the tomb. Such a conclusion is reasonable when one remembers that the name of Uneishu, a Nabataean minister was inscribed on a slab, in a nearby tomb of the same style (No. 808). A courtyard decorated with columns extended in front of tomb No. 813 and a triclinium is cut on the north western side of the portico.

II. In area A, situated at the beginning of the stairway leading up to the Urn Tomb, a cave was excavated. This turned out to be a small dwelling, provided with a forecourt cut out of the rock and a stairway, leading to the roof. The cave, which was plastered inside, contained many household wares and implements : a wine amphora, two jugs, two lamps, a mortar, a pestle, and a glass bottle. Fragmentary mill stones were recovered in the courtyard, with a jar lid and a broken marble idol (Pl. L, 3). The whole group belongs to the beginning of the 4th century A.D. and it is tempting to consider that the cave was abandoned after an earthquake.

III. Area B, about 50 meters northwest of area A, yielded a Nabataean house of the 1st c. A.D., overlooking the Wadi Musa. When this house was destroyed, a channel, running into a reservoir was built through its southern and northern walls. In the bedrock which was smoothed off and used as a floor, a shaft was cut. This led to a large chamber containing many burials. Only two of them

(1) Petra und das Königreich der Nabatäer, München, 1974.

could be excavated. Mixed with some disturbed bones lying over the slabs of a grave were a silver coin of Obodas II (30-9 B.C.) and two gold nose-rings. In the graves themselves, many pottery objects were discovered, including fragmentary fine decorated Nabataean plates of the early type. The earlier graves could be dated to the beginning of the 1st century B.C.

IV. In area C, situated east of area B, a shaft tomb was investigated. It consisted of a square shaft leading to a chamber containing four burials, dug down in the rock. Only an unguentarium of the spindle type was associated with a fragmentary skeleton.

Though very short (two weeks only), this campaign proved to be fruitful in revealing a sequence of occupation at Khubtha from the 1st century B.C. up to the beginning of Byzantine period (4th century B.D.). The inscription discovered in tomb No. 813 is not complete but suggests that the Royal tombs of the Nabataeans are to be located in the Khubtha area. It is hoped that the excavations could be continued in that area and a full report is to be published on the work already accomplished.

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