

NABATAEAN SCULPTURE FROM KHIRBET BRAK.

Situated a few kilometres south - west of the village of Wadi Musa, and commanding a fine view westwards over the Petra basin and the 'Arabah to the Negeb beyond, Khirbet Brak (خربة براك) is one of several small sites which must have been the garden suburbs of the Nabataean capital. The limestone slopes below the site, watered by a copious spring, are terraced today, and most probably were also in antiquity, and the crops they produced were no doubt readily sold in the Petra markets. The ruins of Brak have never been fully described, though there are quite substantial walls and foundations to be seen over a fairly wide area, with many Nabataean/Roman and Byzantine sherds lying on the surface. Musil first drew attention to the part played by 'Ain Brak in the water supply of Petra¹, while Nelson Glueck seems to have been the first to visit the site itself and realize its significance as a suburb of Petra². This latter author records and illustrates several architectural fragments which he discovered at Brak³, and also mentions the reputed existence of a statue, which, however, he was not able to locate⁴.

During the course of the 1959 season of excavations at Petra by the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem, reports similar to those heard by Glueck with regard to the existence of statuary at Khirbet Brak led to an excursion being made to the site⁵. Two pieces of sculpture, hitherto unrecorded, were at length discovered, built face downwards into field walls near a pool at the foot of the slopes below the main area of the ruins. After the photographs and notes on which this paper is based had been taken, the statues were replaced in their concealed and relatively protected positions, they being much too heavy to remove from the site. It is perhaps worth remarking that no one was more concerned over the preservation and safety of the sculptures than were the two members of the Bdul tribe of Petra who led the party to Khirbet Brak and produced the stones for inspection.

1. The first piece of sculpture is a large female head carved in high relief on a block of limestone .52 m. wide and .56 m. high (plate XV, 1). One corner of the block has been broken off, and the nose, eyes, and mouth of the face are damaged, but otherwise the carving is clear and well preserved. With its full face and long chin, its well marked eyes and thick lips, the relief is a typical example of the Orientalising style of Palestinian art of the first and second centuries A.D.⁶, though it is, perhaps, rather more competently executed than are many other specimens. Its closest parallels are to be found in three reliefs from the latest period of the Nabataean temple at Khirbet Tannur, dated by the excavator to the first part of

¹ A. Musil, *Arabia Petraea II: Edom* (1907), pp. 78, 98, 102, 108.

² N. Glueck, *A.A.S.O.R.* XV (1934-5), p. 79; *ibid.* XVIII-XIX (1937-9), pp. 44ff.

³ E. g. *A.A.S.O.R.* XVIII-XIX (1937-9), figs. 24, 25.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45.

⁵ I am indebted to Mrs. C. M. Bennett, who was first told of the statues, for persuading me to accompany her to the site, and to Mr. Ahmed Sheshtawi, of the Jordanian Department of Antiquities, for much assistance in obtaining information from the local inhabitants.

⁶ Cf. M. Avi-Yonah, *Oriental Elements in the Art of Palestine . . . Q.D.A.P.* X. (1944), pp. 112ff., especially pp. 116-8.

the 2nd. century A. D. ¹. Most strikingly, one of the Tannur reliefs has the same kind of leaf decoration on the face as has the present example, a decorative feature which otherwise seems to be unknown in the Near East ². The treatment of the hair, and especially the representation of a small ringlet against the cheek near the ear, is closer to that on the other two reliefs from Tannur ³, though the present statue is distinguished by the three tight braids of hair falling on each shoulder ⁴. Glueck most plausibly identifies the three sculptures from Tannur as representations of Atargatis, in her role as goddess of natural produce and cultivation, and it would seem very likely that the Brak figure is similarly to be explained. The worship of Atargatis at Khirbet Brak would not be surprising in view of the distinctly agricultural basis of the settlement there.

2. The second relief (plate XV, 2) is that of a volant winged figure; the head has been destroyed, but the figure is evidently female, judging from the dress. It is carved on a block of limestone .71 m. long and .47 m. high. One side of the block is dressed moderately straight, and from the position of the figure in relation to that edge it would appear that it originally formed part of a frieze or of the spandrel of an arch. Unfortunately, some detail of the carving has been obliterated, especially at the top, and it is not possible to see what attributes, if any, the figure had; perhaps there are traces of a cornucopia. The drapery is reminiscent of that of the reliefs of Tyche discovered at Petra in 1954, and elsewhere ⁵, and there can be little doubt that this figure from Brak belongs, with them, to the 2nd. century A. D.

Two other architectural fragments from Khirbet Brak may conveniently be mentioned here, though one of them has already been published by Glueck ⁶. This is part of a capital (plate XVI, 1), of a style obviously derived from, though much more ornate than, the classic Nabataean capital. What is unusual about the Brak capital is that it has carved animal heads at each corner, projecting from beneath the volutes. Glueck identified these heads as of dolphins. The heads are carved in a peculiar "rippled" technique, the surface of the stone being finished in a series of wavy grooves, in a manner that is both distinctive and pleasing. A capital exactly similar to this from Brak was found during the course of recent excavations at Petra, lying in débris on the Roman street; while many other fragments of similar carved heads, including some with horns, evidently of sheep or goats, were also discovered, all in the débris from the final destruction of the city. The date of the capital and the fragments from Petra is not yet securely determined, but it is in all probability not earlier than the beginning of the 2nd. century A. D., when Petra was architecturally embellished after the Roman annexation, and may be even a hundred years later. The capital from Brak is, then, of the same period, as, indeed, Glueck suggested, and must be contemporary with the two

¹ Glueck, *The Other Side of the Jordan* (1940), pp. 180ff. and figs. 114, 116, and 117. But note that Albright dates this structure almost a century later: cf. *Archaeology of Palestine* (1954) p. 165.

² Glueck, *ibid.*, mentions a similar feature on a statue of Zeus from Puteoli, near Naples, from where, it will be remembered, two Nabataean inscriptions are also known.

³ A photograph of one of the Tannur reliefs, showing this feature most clearly, is to be found in Aviyonah, *op. cit.*, pl. XXII, no. 4.

⁴ This manner of hair dressing has been noted on fragmentary reliefs from near the Monumental Gateway at Petra itself, as yet unpublished.

⁵ Parr, P.J., *P.E.Q.* 1957, plate IVA, and p. 8, with references.

⁶ *A.A.S.O.R.* XVIII - XIX (1937 - 9), fig. 25 and p. 45.

pieces of sculpture discussed above. In so far as it is reflected in architecture, therefore, Brak's prosperity seems also to date from the coming to Petra of the Romans, for whose needs it and the other agricultural suburbs no doubt most profitably catered.

Finally, we illustrate a stone which is an interesting curiosity more than anything else (plate XVI, 2). The stone, a building block some .25m. square, has been reused in a fairly modern wall, next to a block dressed in the typically Nabataean fashion, with regular diagonal tooling. The stone in question here, however, has its face dressed in a very distinctive manner, being decorated with a lozenge-shaped figure incised on the stone with a sort of herring-bone tooling. The beginnings of two similar designs, one on either side of the complete example, show that the original scheme was of a series of contiguous lozenges. The stone lacks the smooth margin of the Nabataean block next to it; nor is the tooling so carefully done; so it is unlikely that our stone is to be assigned to the same period. More probably, perhaps, it is of Byzantine date, surface sherds of this period proving that Brak was still occupied then. A few other blocks at Brak show the same decorative pattern on their faces; and it would be interesting to know whether it has been found elsewhere in Jordan.

PETER J. PARR