

AN IMPORTANT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE OPPOSITE THE AD-DAYR MONUMENT OF PETRA (JORDAN), DEPLORABLY NEGLECTED BY SCIENCE

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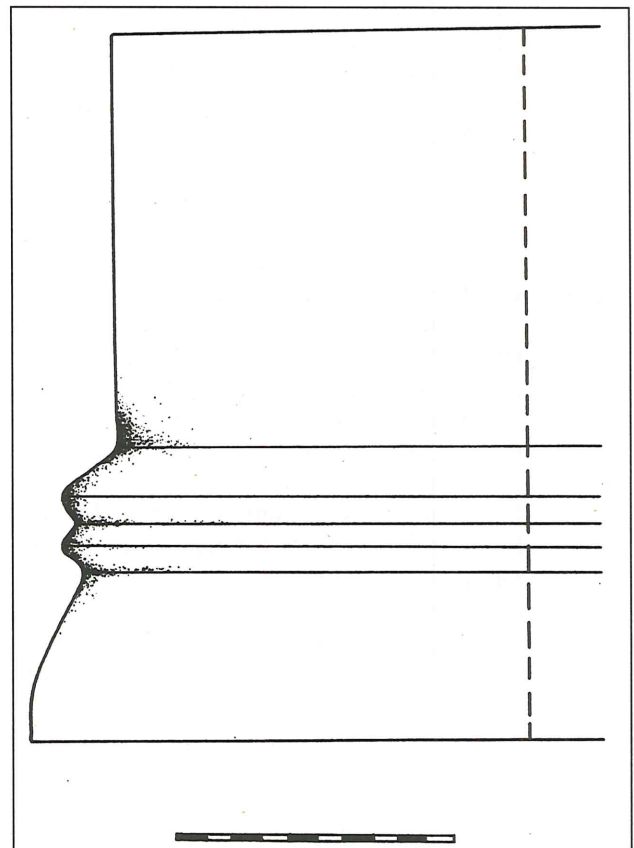
In late October 2000, together with a group of Naturhistorische Gesellschaft Nürnberg (NHG) (Germany), I climbed from our excavation site on Umm Saysabān (أم سيسبان) along the northwestern rock wall of the Jabal ad-Dayr (جبل الدير) massif to the ad-Dayr plateau. The visit had been planned long before. My conscience had been bothering me almost since I finished the extensive and intensive survey of the ad-Dayr plateau 17 years ago (Lindner *et al.* 1984: 163-182). Bedouins, police and — every day more — tourists used to visit the place, the latter even in always larger groups. In my report to the Department of Antiquities and ADAJ, the “Burgberg” (Dalman 1908: 273) opposite the monumental ad-Dayr with the cultic cave room and the peristyle in front of it was described and illustrated with photos, but the “Burgberg” top itself was only prospected and hesitantly pinpointed as a purposely constructed striking counterpart to the ad-Dayr rock monument.

There were two round structures, one of them the newly discovered foundation circle of a slender tholos or monopteros, on top of the “Burgberg”, beside walls of a putative sanctuary (Brünnow and Domaszewski 1904: 331-338; Musil 1907: 146; Dalman 1908: 278; Lindner *et al.* 1984). The most enticing open stratigraphy of several floors with hexagonal slabs, tesserae, tumbled drums and Nabataean painted pottery was left on site, without any sounding or excavation.

Among the special finds of the tholos foundation, a half column base was the only one preserved of the original nine. Due to the surveyors' reverential attitude toward the ancient structure, it was not taken out of its composite, and therefore drawn with a slight but important fault. Eventually, it did not seem to fit into J. McKenzie's thesaurus of Nabataean column profiles (1990: pl. 50 and pers. comm.). In October 2000, the small group of Ulrich Hübner, Elisabeth Schreyer, Mr. Jarrah, the representative of the Department of Antiquities, and myself approached the “Burgberg” top together with many tourists, who like us waded through

deep white sand, the result of their — other than natural erosion — constant scraping and scratching in the soft Ordovician sandstone.

The remnants of the tholos had partly disappeared, in fact almost half of the material found and drawn in 1982 had (been?) tumbled down the steep rock wall. Luckily the half column base was discerned on the very top of the “Burgberg”, where some joker or a responsible visitor had secured it. It was taken down and could now be effortlessly measured, drawn and put back in its right place (Figs. 1, 2). T. Weber had putatively dated the tholos with its “carefully worked half columns” in the “Herodian” rather than an earlier period (pers.



1. New drawing of the half column base, part of a tholos or monopteros opposite ad-Dayr.



2. Half column base set back into its right place in 2000.

comm.). Now the assertion of a Nabataean-Roman period structure which seemed uncertain according to the drawing of 1982 proved to be true. The previously noted walls and steps were unfortunately less visible than in 1982, and in 2000 no measurements were taken of the described development and the tumbled architecture.

By scanning very carefully the rock walls of the with the masses of tumbled ashlar, it "Burgberg" became clear why Dalman regarded the rock as fortified. As a matter of fact, the rock was originally lavishly dressed and faced to make it look like a splendid monumental building (Fig. 3). An elegant ascent over a flight of finely worked steps allowed pilgrims to proceed from the plateau up to the holy cave, farther up to the tholos and eventually to whatever was waiting there for them or for an adoring priest. In several places the carefully worked ashlar are still in place. This embellishment went hand in hand with an ingenious hydraulic system draining virtually every drop of rain into gutters and reservoirs.

It seems to me that ad-Dayr and the structures of the "Burgberg", including the results of previous examinations (Dalman 1908; 1912; Lindner 1984; Zayadine and Farajat 1991) should be reassessed as a highly important ensemble. The top of the "Burgberg" deserves thorough investigation, excavation and consolidation, not only for scientific purposes but also for furthering the tourist trade. The on-going destruction of the "Burgberg" top opposite the impressive facade of ad-Dayr should not be tolerated.



3. Lavishly dressed wall of the "Burgberg".

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