

A MENHIR DISCOVERED AT WĀDĪ ṢAQRA, ‘AMMĀN DISTRICT

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An upright stone structure was pointed out in the spring of 2005 to the Department of Antiquities by Gajus Scheltema, the X-Ambassador of the Netherlands, who had been informed earlier of its existence by Ms. Jane Taylor (**Fig. 1**; before cleaning, seen from the South). No previous records of surveys existed of this stone structure, which turned out to be one of the oldest architectural features of ‘Ammān. It was situated on the south bank of Wādī Ṣaqra, in the busy district of Jabal ‘Ammān, three kilometres away from downtown ‘Ammān. It stood on the slope of the Wadi, about 50m away from the main road, on an empty plot meant for construction. Its Pal. coordinates were E 234127; N 151706, elevation 905m asl. Its foundations formed part of an agricultural plain, consisting of a thick layer of Mediterranean red soil (Bender 1974).

The structure consisted of an upright stone (orthostat or monolith, commonly called menhir) which was raised on a rounded platform, formed by a double row/coarse of very large boulders.

The site was cleaned by the Chief Inspector of Antiquities of the Amman Governorate Area, Adeeb Abu Shmais. His team worked between

20/8/2005 to 28/8/2005 (**Fig. 2**, Menhir structure after cleaning, seen from the North). They started with a small survey of the area followed by the cleaning of the land directly around the structure, so as to expose it and understand its archaeological function, as well as having it documented. Further down the slope of the same Wadi (and on the same SE slope) a couple of upright stones suggest that there were more raised monoliths in the area, although they do not seem to have had round platforms (**Fig. 3**).

The structure itself consisted of an elevated earth platform on a slight slope, delineated on the outside by a double course of megalithic



2. Menhir structure after cleaning seen from the north.



1. The site before cleaning seen from the south west side.



3. A couple of upright stones raised in the area (Wādī Ṣaqra).

stones. Its diameter was roughly 390cm N-S and 380cm E-W. In the middle of this platform stood the raised stone, roughly conical in form, with a height of 155cm above the platform and a diameter of about 93cm N-S and 100cm E-W. The orthostat itself was found standing at a slight angle pointing north (Fig. 4).

Two trenches were opened to investigate the lower part of the platform and find out how it had been constructed:

Trench no. 1: In the SE of the platform contained a layer of accumulations from new building materials which came from the wadi slope above the menhir (about 50-70cm thick). Under this recent layer, a 30cm natural, hard and compact layer of dark red soil (terra rosa) was encountered, with a large amount of cobble stones, limestone deposits were found on both sides of the wadi. A massive stone delineating that side of the circular platform had as measurements: 140x116cm and 61cm thickness, the stone seemed to have been cut on the outer face (Fig. 5). A sort of piece of cloth and iron inserted between the megalithic stones refers to what these structures may have been to the local people about hundred years ago.

Trench no 2, SW of the structure: The platform stones were smaller than on the other side. Two larger stones seem to have served as base support for the platform stones. The soil has the same characteristics as in trench 1 (Fig. 6).

In summary: The structure had been built on a gravel deposit which geologically formed the wadi slopes, dating from the Cretaceous. The boulders were from Cisjordan limestone. Cobble stones were used to solidify the megalithic wall of the platform.

A very small number of Chalcolithic/Early Bronze IA pottery sherds were found in the trenches, one being right above the natural soil, with some possible lithic tools from the EBIA. Several pieces of rusty iron were found under one of the megalithic stones. They could have been part of an iron chain used to pull out stones from the structure while searching for gold, or to tie some animal. Two medium sized stones were used as a retaining base in the lower part of the platform.

Conclusion

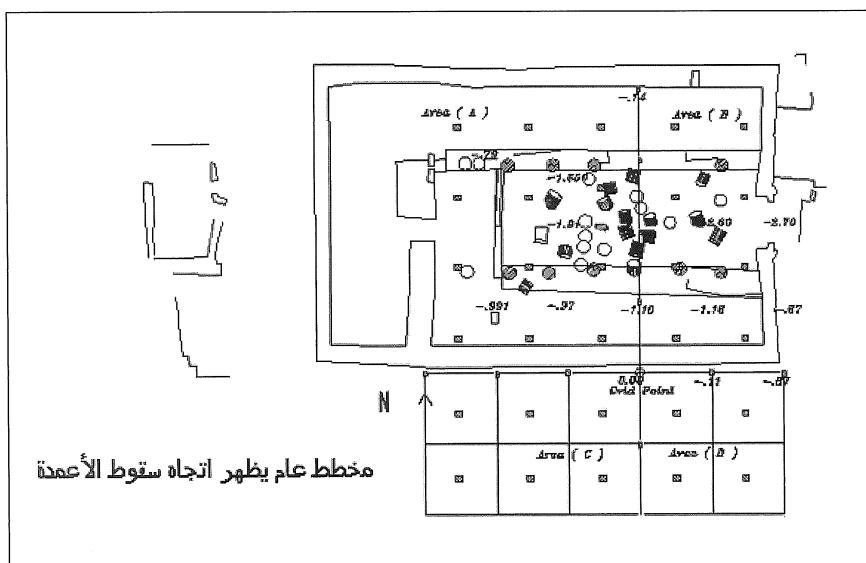
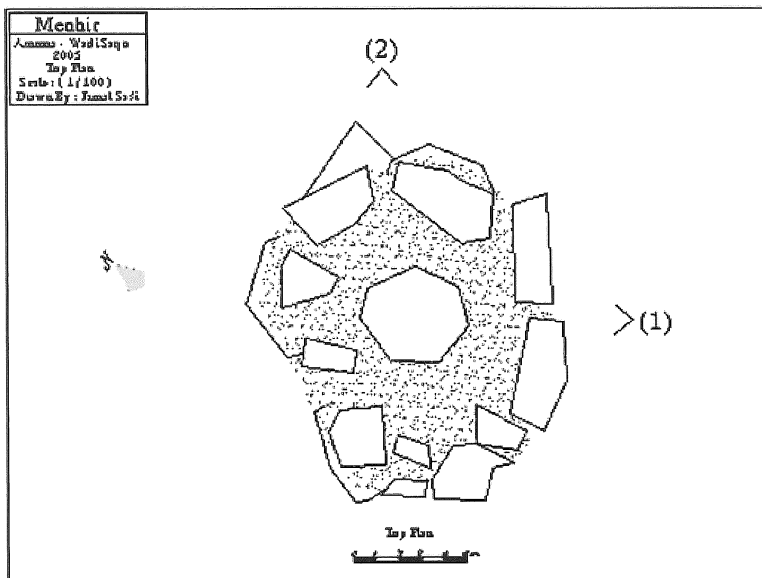
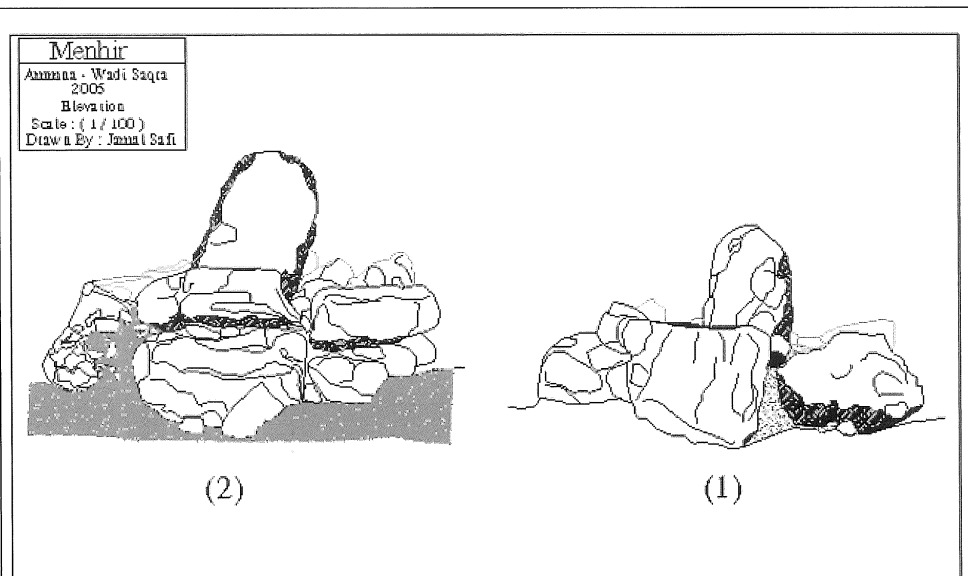
The menhir of Wādī Şaqra can be inscribed in the long list of standing stones in Jordan, of

which the most famous examples are the monoliths of Adir (the local name being Sarbūt, Kufayr Abū-Sarbūt/ al-Balqā' district), the (now vanished) standing stones of Khirbat Iskandar, the row at al-Lajjūn and the Ḥajar al-Manşūb, close to al-Murayghāt (near Mā'in), *al-Anşāb* mentioned in the Holy Qur'an in Al-MA'EDAH: 90 as erected stones used between the Arabic tribes before the Islamic as ritual places. Such monoliths can often be found associated with EBI-II settlements (e.g. Khirbat Iskandar) and/or with dolmen fields (such as al-Murayghāt; the dolmen fields east of ar-Rawḍa on the slopes of the Jordan Valley; the dolmen field of ar-Rusān).

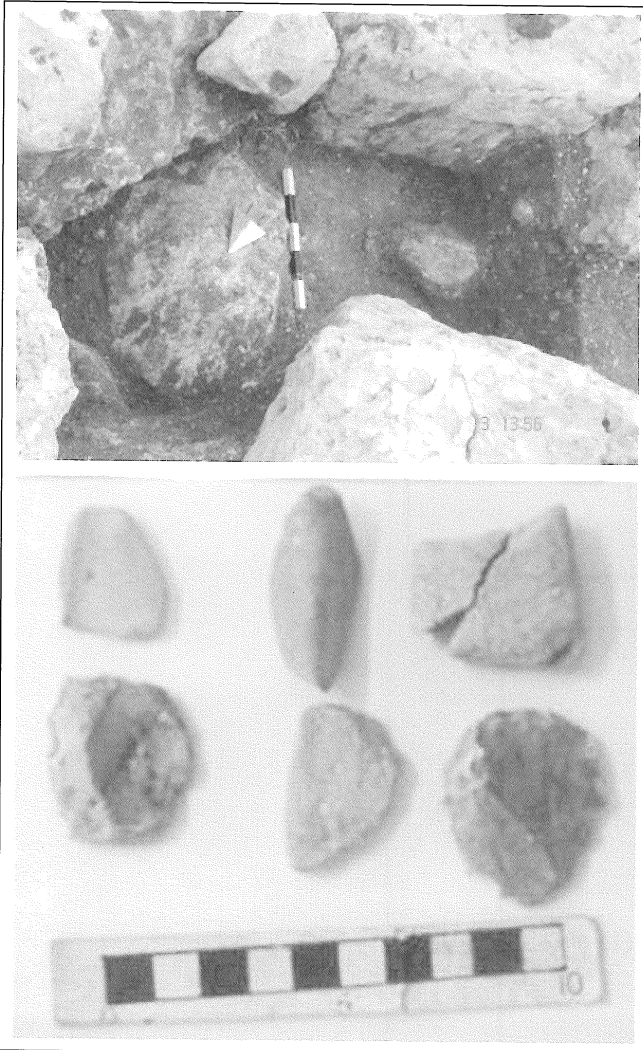
This particular monolith had however been raised on a conspicuous circular platform, which is exceptional, but which may have some parallels in the stone circles with orthostats North of Mount Nebo. Circular platforms are on the other hand quite common as a base for dolmens. Scholars tend to think of standing stones as shrines. There could even relatively recently have been a ritual ceremony related to burials, as objects were found inserted between the stones (pieces of cloths and burned objects, suggesting ritual practices). The stones delineating the circle were mostly unhewn, except for the one stone mentioned at trench 1. The orthostat itself seems to have been shaped to some extent. The discovery of items inside the trench between the stones could reflect tradition practices and people's requests from gods or spirits, or natural processes, moreover the surface of the monolith stone seems smooth or as though it had been touched many times.

The architecture, the sherds and the comparison with similar raised monoliths point to a late Chalcolithic/Early Bronze Age period.

Conder, in his Survey of Eastern Palestine (Conder 1889: 19ff), mentioned no less than six menhirs in the Rabbath Ammon area along with several dolmens, most relatively close to the citadel hill on today's Jabal al-Qusūr (Wādī al-Ḥaddāda)(1971 العادي). None of these stones have survived. Relatively close to the site of Wādī Şaqra a single standing stone of imposing height can be found in the area of ash-Shumaysānī, opposite to the entrance to Sports City (Fig. 7). There also seems to have been four damaged Menhirs on both sides of 'Abdūn valley, on the new street (Khirbat 'Abdūn area).



4. Top plan and side view,
drawn by Jamal Safi.

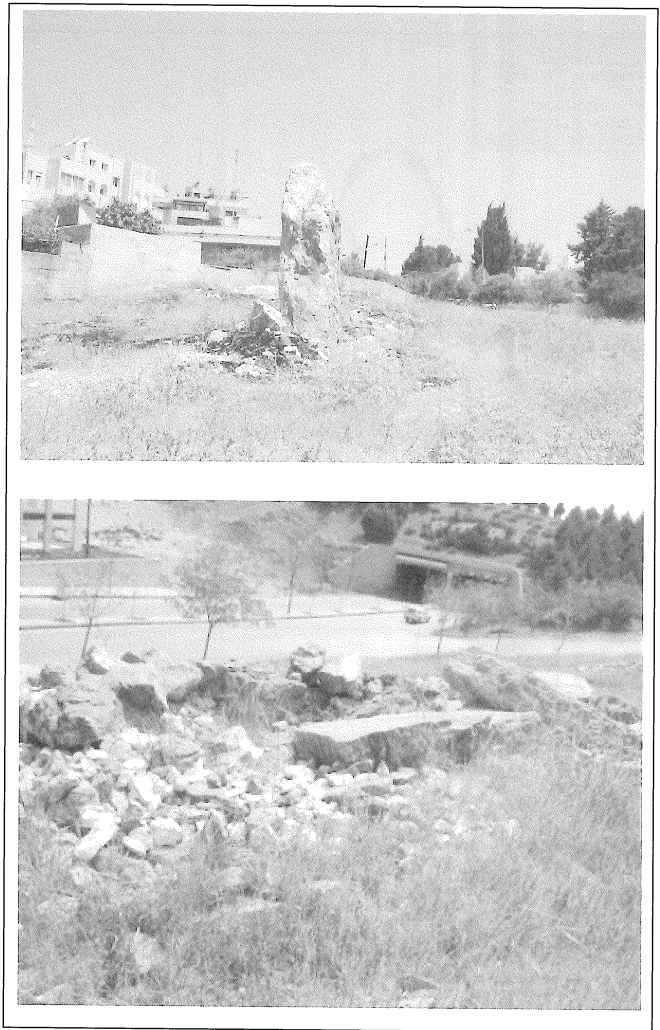


5. Trench No.1 inside the structure and the discoveries.



6. Trench No. 2 the platform outside the structure.

These suggest archaeological evidence of ancient main roads, rather than being situated in a specific cult place (acropolis or high place, etc.). There are several other places with large stones of a round shape suggesting menhirs (cromlechs

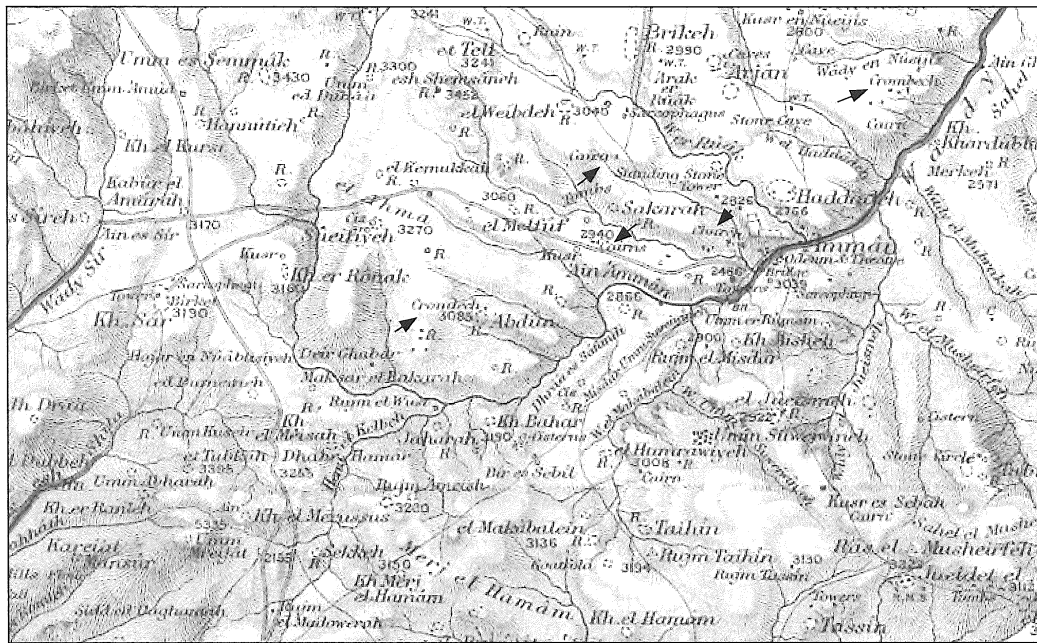


7. A single standing stone found in the area of ash-Shumaysānī.

Fig. 8) (Kafafi 2002) damaged or removed, such as in Wādī ‘Abdūn, which is geologically connected to Wādī Ṣaḡra. Such structures, which can be found scattered over the Arabian peninsula on open areas, seem to relate to trade routes. There is however also a second group of upright stones, often in a round or oval set-up, which were established as open sanctuaries (Durand 2005), such as the al-Murayghāt site, away from the main roads.

Alex Joffe claims that the export of olives to Egypt from the Mediterranean region (southern Levant) started in the Late Chalcolithic/Early Bronze Age IA. This provided a mechanism for regular contact between rural/pastoral societies close to sedentary ones and the Egyptians, starting around 3800BC (Lovell *et al.* 2005: 198-200).

Some standing stones could well have formed markers of these ancient trading routes, as well



8. Conder map showing the cromlech (stone circle).

as opportunities for local cult performances for the traveller.

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