

“A NABATAEAN ROCK-CUT SANCTUARY IN PETRA: PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THREE EXCAVATION SEASONS AT THE “OBODAS CHAPEL”, JABAL NUMAYR (2002-2004)

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Nabataean sanctuaries of Petra belong to various categories. The most famous are the easily recognizable temples, mainly although not exclusively located in downtown Petra, and the high-places that offer spectacular sights to their modern visitors. Another type of sanctuary, equally important, consists of rock-cut meeting places visited by various communities in Antiquity and distributed on several natural terraces in the mountains around the city. The “Obodas chapel” is one of them¹. This rock-cut sanctuary discovered in 1862 is located ca. 1km south of Petra’s main theatre, on a natural platform of the Jabal Numayr. This religious complex was accessible by a processional stairway starting in the southern bed of the Wādi Numayr. It consisted of various rock-cut, as well as, built structures situated around a major triclodium, which remains one of the largest of its type discovered in Petra.

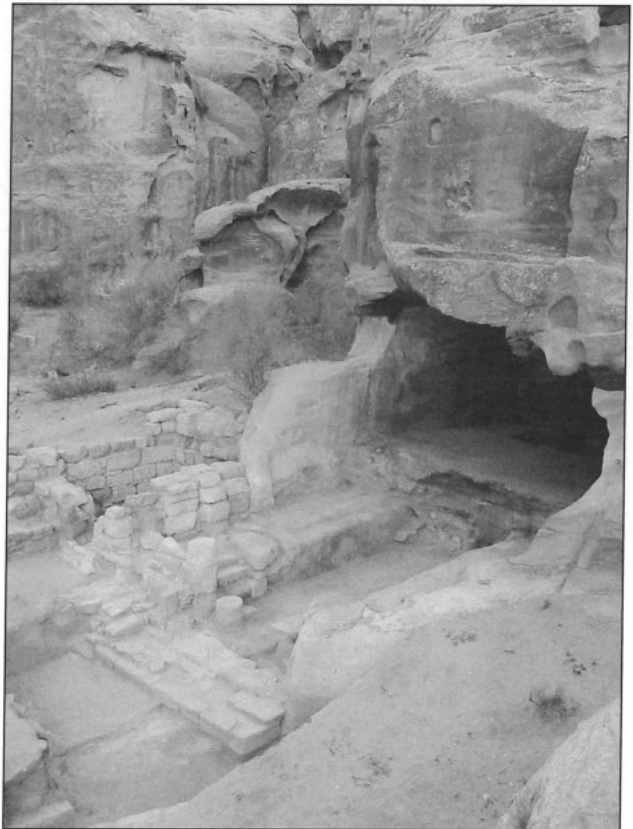
Three excavation seasons were carried out on the site since the 2001 campaign initiated by L. Nehmé². The main goal of the project was to study the development of a Nabataean sanctuary essentially known until then by its epigraphic material, i.e. a major 20AD dedication of a statue of “Obodas the god” (CIS II 354) and 133 worshippers’ signatures scattered in the vicinity. After a brief description of the newly excavated structures, part of the ceramic material studied by C. Durand will be discussed here, in order to provide a first account of the chronology and a general idea of the alleged function of the so far exposed components of the sanctuary.

THE STRUCTURES

1. The Triclodium of Obodas and its Esplanade

The discovery of substantial fragments of the

statue of Obodas the god dedicated in 20AD were found in a probe opened under the central niche on the back wall of the main triclodium in 2001. The following year, the efforts were concentrated on the front part of the monument (Fig. 1). It rapidly appeared that the entire façade of the otherwise rock-cut triclodium of Obodas was built. The monument presents an overall length of 12.60m (including the thickness of the northern façade), and its internal



1. Obodas Chapel. The triclodium, towards the south-east (2004).

1. For a general account on the sanctuaries in Petra: Nehmé 1997, 1023-1067; Tholbecq 1997, 1069-1095.
2. For a preliminary description of the 2001 season, see the substantial article of Laila Nehmé, Nehmé 2002b: 243-256. For the 2002 season, Tholbecq 2003: 469-470. This project, funded by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is part of

the French Archaeological Mission in Petra directed by Christian Augé (CNRS – Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, UMR 7041 - Nanterre). The work extended over ten weeks: March 15 – April 5 2002, November 9 – 20, 2003 and June 3 – 24, 2004.

width is 6 meters. Its inner height is 5.37m in the center of the room and 4.31m from the top of the western bench. The side benches make an overall length of 11.45m (width: 2.60m) and are limited to the north by three step staircases, one rock-cut (west), the other built (east), being respectively 0.55m and 0.80m wide. The eastern bench is limited by a wall with a preserved height of 1.74m (**Fig. 2**). The eastern limit of the triclinium is only partly rock-cut, and ends with a 2.92m long wall which rests, on the south, directly on the rock. Just 0.52m to the north of the rock-cut part of the monument, the masonry shows a 0.54m wide arch spring and four of its archstones. Approximately 0.75m south of this arch spring, on the same eastern wall of the triclinium but in its rock-cut portion, a 0,62m broad projection must be interpreted as a second arch spring. To these arch springs correspond two rock-cut projections on the western rock-cut limit of the triclinium (**Fig. 3**). It is consequently clear that the front part of the triclinium was covered by flagstones supported by two arches with a 4.90m to 5.00m span. These arches supported an upper story limited to the northern side



2. Obodas Chapel. The entrance, towards the south-east (2004).



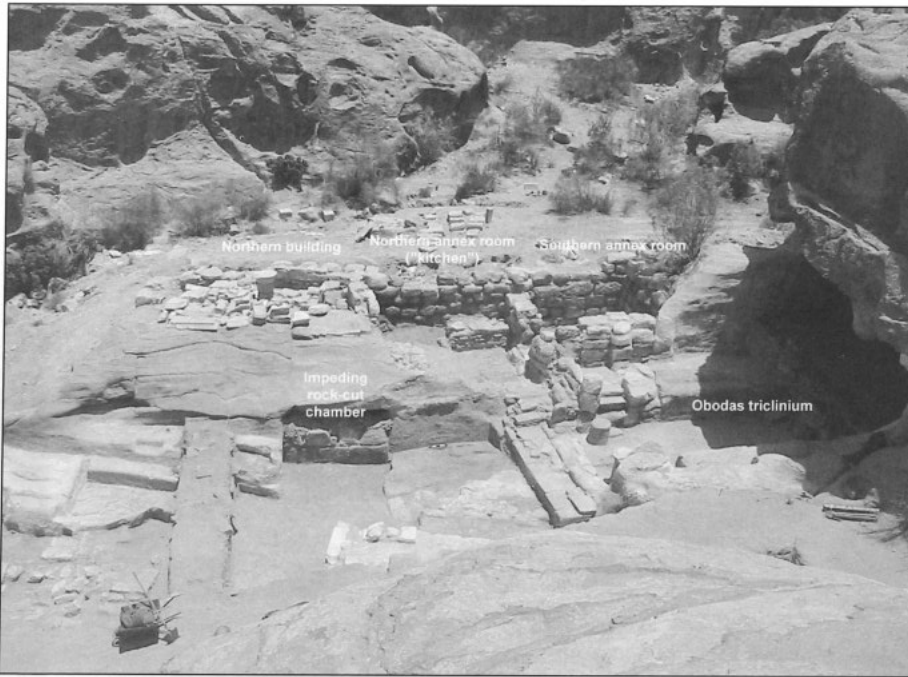
3. Obodas Chapel. The rock-cut western bench, towards the west (2004).

of the triclinium. Indeed, a 3.75m wide surface cut on the northern face of the rock, immediately above the triclinium's entrance, seems to have constituted its back wall. Its access remains unknown.

The façade of the monument extended approximately 7.60 meters. The excavation revealed a 0.60m broad flush wall situated in its front stage and closing the 1.40m wide space between the benches. It does not seem possible to interpret this wall as a stylobate and to place columns in this limited space. The destruction layers revealed many architectural fragments from the inner and the façade's ornaments. A wide step (width 3.90m, depth 0.80m, height 0.25m) was built in front of the entrance. Immediately to its east, a few small steps gave access to the eastern free-standing structures that will be described later. Among the remarkable features of the triclinium, we noted some column drums topped by reused fragments of Nabataean capitals and flanking both the inner small stairs reserved in the benches. These were intentionally placed there and therefore did not belong to the building's debris.

2. The Eastern Free-Standing Buildings

Two rectangular built structures were flanking the eastern side of an apparently opened area situated in front of the triclinium (**Fig. 4**). The partial excavation of their remaining eastern walls during the 2001 campaign did not allow the first excavator to understand their nature: the first hypothesis that these were retaining walls supposed to protect the sanctuary from a seasonal wadi appeared to be wrong after the completion of the work. Instead, it became rapidly obvious that these structures were actually the back walls of two small buildings limiting the eastern side of the esplanade opening in front of them main monument of the complex.



4. Obodas Chapel. General view with the eastern buildings, towards the east (2004).

The northern building was almost destroyed except for its eastern and northern lower courses. Its western and southern walls built without any foundations on an emerging portion of the bedrock were totally washed out. The southern complex, excavated in 2002 and 2003 is a building 8.50m long north-south by 4.30m wide and is divided into two contiguous square rooms. Some of its walls are preserved to ca. 2m high. This two-room building is structurally as well as functionally associated with the main triclinium of Obodas. One entered its northern room excavated in 2003 and 2004 by two narrow steps built against the eastern side of the main triclinium's entrance (Fig. 5). From this place, one could reach the southern room excavated in 2002 (Fig. 6). Both rooms were covered by a



6. The southern annex room, towards the south (2003).



5. The northern annex room, towards the east (2004).

flat roof supported by two east-west arches each. In the northern room, two rectangular structures were built against the northern (1.70 x 0.90 x 0.63m) and eastern walls (1.66 x 0.78 x 0.63m) (Fig. 7). They were interpreted as raised working surfaces used for food preparation or as a storage space for the cooking tools (see *infra*). According to the ash layers, the water containers and the evidence of the material from the floors, it seems reasonable to postulate that the room functioned as a kitchen. The southern room did not contain any supplementary structures.

3. The Court

During the 2003 season, a 35 meter square trench was opened in front of the triclinium ex-



7. The northern annex room, towards the north (2004).

tending to the north of the adjacent 2002 sounding. After the removal of the remaining debris of the façade, no pavement slabs were found in the front court but instead what looked like bedding floors. It was therefore suggested that the original flagstones were removed in a later phase. This opinion evolved the next year when it was realized that this supposed bedding floor was in fact the summit of a ca. 3m long wall abutting a well defined and vertically cut portion of the bedrock (Fig. 8). Further north, an extension of this square opened in 2004 revealed a previously unknown rock-cut chamber opening a few meters away from the triclinium's entrance (Fig. 9). Its volume had clearly been reduced during the construction of the triclinium of Obodas its original plan could be traced on the floor while its reduced inner space was blocked by a strongly built one meter high wall. This wall followed the orientation of the esplanade imposed by the construction of the new complex. It became therefore obvious that the Obodas triclinium succeeded an earlier complex, of which consisted of at least a rock-cut chamber later reduced and impeded by a wall. This discovery provided the first possible archaeological hints of the early sanctuary stages referred to in CIS II 354.



8. Retaining wall of the early complex, towards the east (2004).



9. Rock-cut chamber of the early complex, towards the east (2004).

The court's upper fill layers correspond to the destruction of the western walls of both the kitchen and its northern adjacent building. They contained numerous architectural fragments, such as a highly damaged upper part of a Nabataean capital and several other moulded fragments (at least two types of cornices, pilaster bases, and a few column drums). The surface cleaning of the area also revealed that the court was at some point limited on its northern side by a very massive and strongly built structure supporting columns, and approximately situated fifteen meters from the entrance of the Obodas triclinium. One of the pillars supporting a so far unfound column base was discovered in the court's destruction level together with other moulding fragments. Both its construction and destruction dates need to be defined by a future pottery study. However, several carved and built details, indicate that earlier structures can be expected under this major destruction level. So far, few first century BC ash layers were excavated in

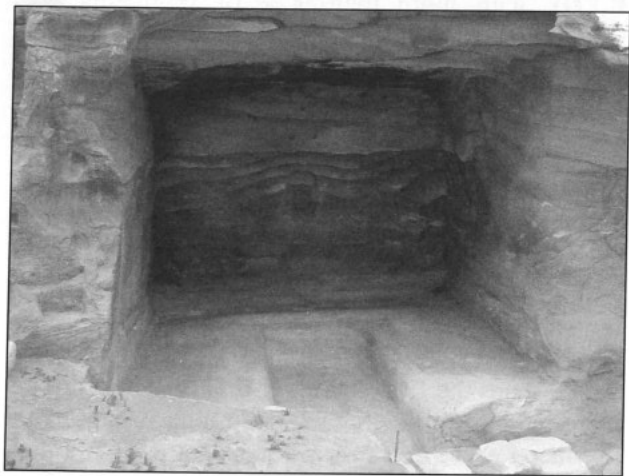
this northern probe giving a first indication of the date of the complex predating the construction of the Obodas triclinium.

4. The Triclinium Brünnow 291

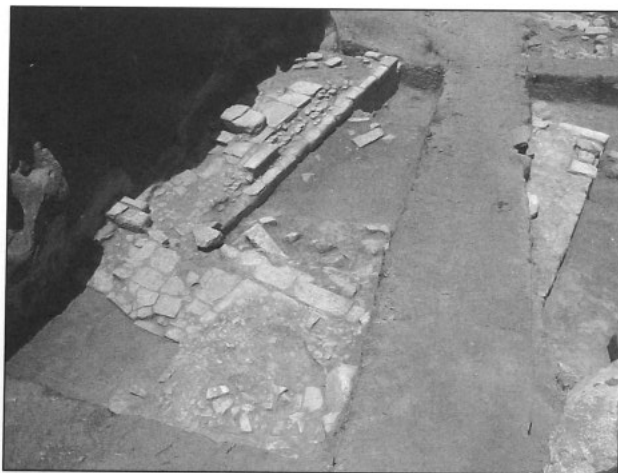
The excavation of the room Brünnow 291 gave evidence of another triclinium, which raises their number in the whole complex so far to at least two triclinia and one biclinium. Brünnow 291 is a 4.0m wide room opening on its eastern side (Fig. 10). Its northern wall is 4.50m long while the southern length is 5.20m. The entrance axis is not parallel to the rear wall. The ceiling rises to 3.40m from the top of the benches. The rear bench is 1.76m wide, while the lateral ones are only 1.60m wide. A small rectangular cavity is spared in the rear bench, right under a niche situated 1.64m higher. The circulation space between the benches is 1.32m wide. Unlike the main triclinium, this room was not closed by a built façade. Instead, a rather unusual structure appeared in front of it, abutting its entrance.

5. An Open-Air Triclinium

In 2003, a square was opened in front of the triclinium 291. It revealed part of a U-shaped structure that was entirely excavated in 2004 (Fig. 11). This north-south structure is ca. 8.8m long and ca. 6m wide, opening on its north side. It follows the general orientation of the façade of the triclinium 291 as well as the 3m long wall discovered under the entrance of the Obodas triclinium. Some of its covering slabs were found *in situ*, giving an orig-



10. Triclinium 291, towards the west (2003).



11. The U-shaped structure – triclinium, towards the north-west (2004).

inal height of 1m. It is tentatively interpreted as a triclinium itself.

6. The Cistern Dalman 297

Lastly, a rock-cut cistern situated on the north-western side of the complex was partly excavated in 2003. This 4.60 x 3.96 x ca 5m cistern was closed on its eastern side by a five course wall. A 2.40m by 2.20m square was opened in its north-eastern corner, under a canalisation adducting the water. Three main deposits have been found. The upper one containing several boulders and a small module column base seems to correspond to an abandonment of the structure. The inferior deposit was a light sandy accumulation corresponding to the slow filling of the cistern during its use. A large quantity of material was found, some of which was complete. At first sight, the ceramic analysis of the three major identified deposits indicates that the cistern was used between the first and the third century AD³.

THE FINDS

Beside the architectural fragments, the majority of the finds consist of ceramics. Metal is nearly absent, while glass artefacts are poorly represented. A single fragmentary inscription was found. According to L. Nehmé's reading, it mentions an association (MRZH) to a female goddess. The aim of the second part of this report is to give a first account on the study of the ceramic material found in

3. Its material is under study. A rapid reading of the ceramics from the upper layers of the cistern indicates that it was still in use after the destruction of the triclinium of Obodas and its connected rooms, at least during all of the 2nd century, until the 3rd century AD. As expected, a great quantity of jugs and jars were found (parallels : Gerber 2001a, fig. 1-22 ; Schmid 2000, fig. 330), but, more surprisingly, a relatively

large quantity of cooking pots was also discovered (parallels from the end of the 1st and beginning of the 2nd century AD : Gerber 1997, fig. 7 ; Gerber 2001a, fig. 1-12 ; Gerber 2001b, fig. 2-B. For the 2nd and 3rd centuries : Gerber 2001a, fig. 1-18 ; Gerber 2001b, fig. 2-E). Fine ware is almost missing from this context.

the eastern two-room building connected to the trichinium of Obodas. They shall hereafter be called "northern annex room" and "southern annex room".

The Two Eastern Annex Rooms: The Strata

The northern room strata reveals an important destruction phase (2003.1002, 2003.1005, 2003.1006 and 2003.1009) which corresponds to a brutal collapse of the building. The roof of the room consisted of flagstones supported by two arches whose archstones (2003.1004 and 2003.1007) were found in the destruction layers. During its excavation, the summit of two built structures appeared. One was built against the eastern wall (2003.1003), and the other against the northern wall (2003.1008) immediately on the rock, this one having been slightly cut for this purpose (2003.1015). A large storage jar was found *in situ* in the north-eastern corner of the room, right between the two aforementioned structures (2003.1013). Under the destruction, several small ashy layers were isolated (2003.1010, 2003.1011, 2003.1014, 2003.1017). They correspond to the last occupation phase of the room. A few similar layers were excavated in 2004 one located under the storage jar (2004.1012) and two other being the earlier floors found in the room (2004.1019 and 2004.1020). A few shards were also collected in the eastern wall foundation (2004.1021). The entrance door area was excavated separately and the same destruction phase was evidenced (2003.1016, 2003.1017). Similarly, an ashy layer (2003.1018) was isolated immediately on the top of the doorstep.

The strata of the southern annex room give a slightly different image. A destruction phase was identified on the top of the square, simultaneous with the destruction phase of the northern room (2002.2010 and 2002.2011). Under the destruction layers, which contained boulders and roof flagstones, a homogeneous layer was identified containing pinkish sediment and again flagstones apparently connected to the roof (2002.2012, 2002.2012bis, 2002.2012ter and 2002.2013). It seems that these destruction layers contained elements from the rock-cut eastern wall of the trichinium as well as parts of the small adjacent building itself. Under this level, a sandy layer containing very fragmentary pottery shards was interpreted as

a levelling phase (2002.2014), filling the interstices between parts of the bedrock (on which the western wall of the room is founded) and some large unused non-squared stones. Lastly, a compact layer (2002.2015) was identified, corresponding to the wall foundation levels. During the 2004 campaign, some supplementary shards were found in the southern and eastern wall foundations (2004.2016). If the interpretation of 2002.1014 is correct, no proper occupation phase was clearly identified in this room.

The Two Eastern Annex Rooms: The Pottery

The pottery from the annex rooms falls into three categories: Nabataean Painted Ware (NPW), Nabataean Fine Ware (NFW) and Nabataean Common Ware (NCW). It includes large quantities of cooking pots and a few lamps⁴.

Northern Annex Room

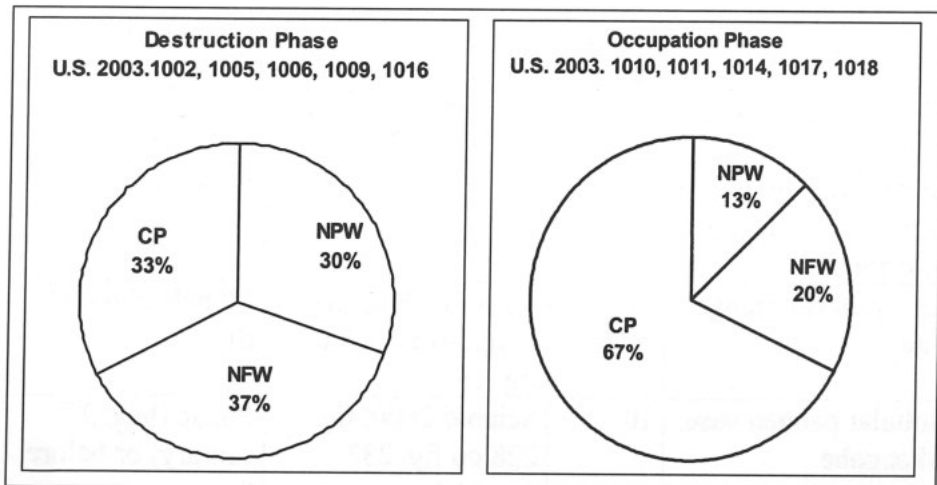
Destruction

In a rather unusual way for a destruction phase, a great quantity of ceramic material was found in the thick destruction layer of the northern annex room and its doorway (2003.1002, 2003.1005, 2003.1006, 2003.1009, 2003.1016). Why was this pottery there? The most immediate answer is to suppose that this pottery was stored on top of the destroyed building. The aforementioned three ceramic types are equally represented in the destruction levels (Fig. 12). In terms of chronology, NPW extends from the phases 2a to 3c (Fig. 13: A, B, D), with more than 90% of fragments corresponding to phases 3a-3b (Fig. 14). The phase 3a (Fig. 13: A) is particularly well represented (69%). Shards from the earlier phases (2a-2b) represent only 7% of the whole NPW from the destruction layers. The later phase 3c accounts for only 3% (Fig. 13: D).

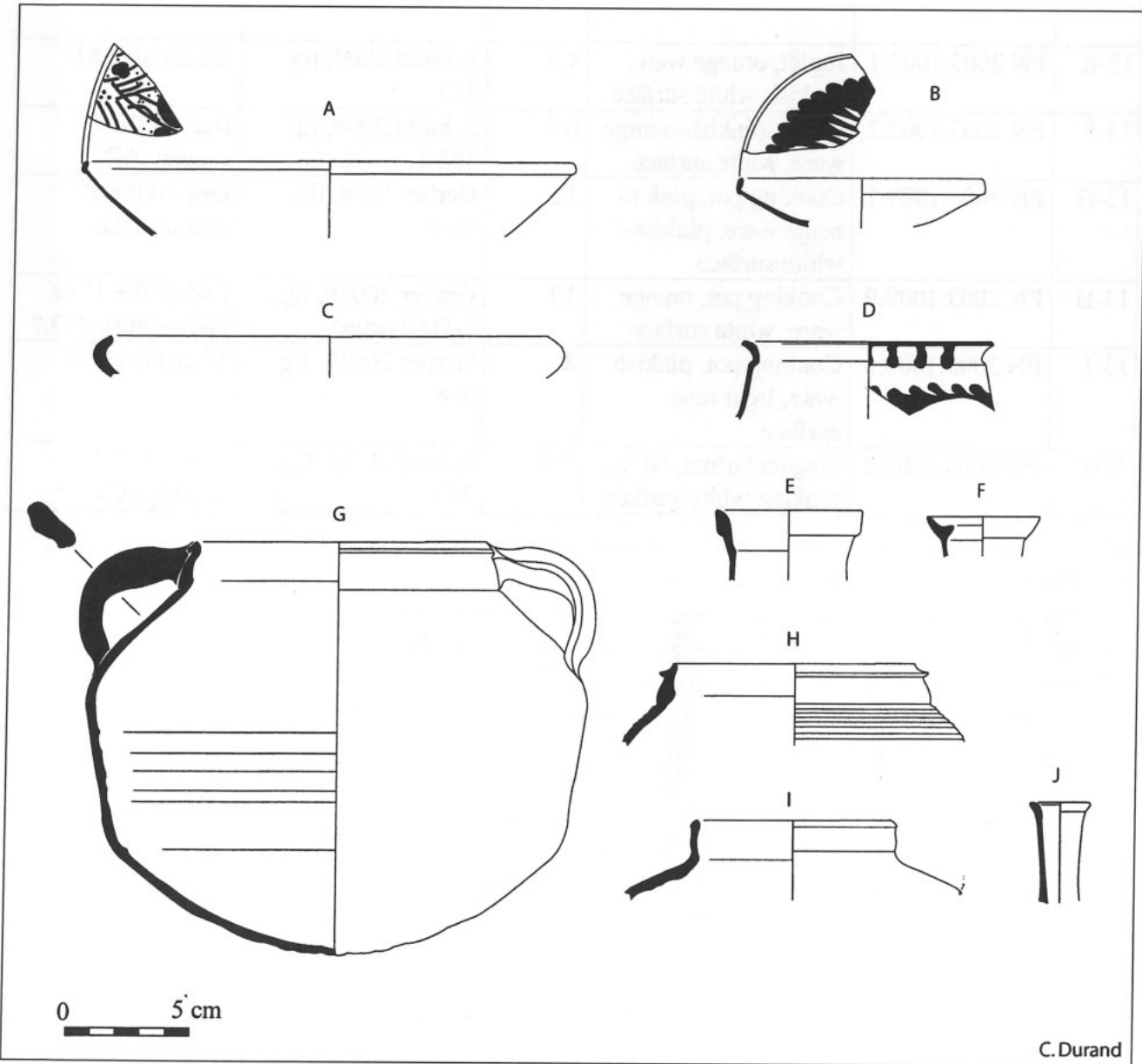
Unpainted NFW fragments were also found in the destruction layers. Those fragments mainly belong to closed containers (jugs or small pots) showing various profiles from the first century AD products (Fig. 13: E, F), but also to cups or plates dating from the first century BC (Fig. 13: C). This material shows the characteristic pink-orange ware produced in the Petra area, except for a NPW much smaller than the average plate (10cm diam.), which

4. So far, S. Schmid and Y. Gerber's pottery analysis from az-Zanṭūr gives the most reliable information in both terms of chronology and typology of Nabataean pottery. For the NPW and NFW, see Schmid 1996, 2000. For the NCW, see Gerber 1994, 1997, 2001a-b, 2003. They will consequently be our principal working parallel tool. S. Schmid's phasing is tentatively adopted here. Phase 1 =

end of 2nd century BC – 1st half of the 1st century BC, Phase 2a = third quarter of the 1st century BC, Phase 2b = last quarter of the 1st century BC, Phase 2c = 0-20 AD, Phase 3a = 20-70 AD, Phase 3b = 70-100 AD, Phase 3c = beginning of the 2nd century AD, Phase 4 = end of the 2nd – 3rd /4th century AD.

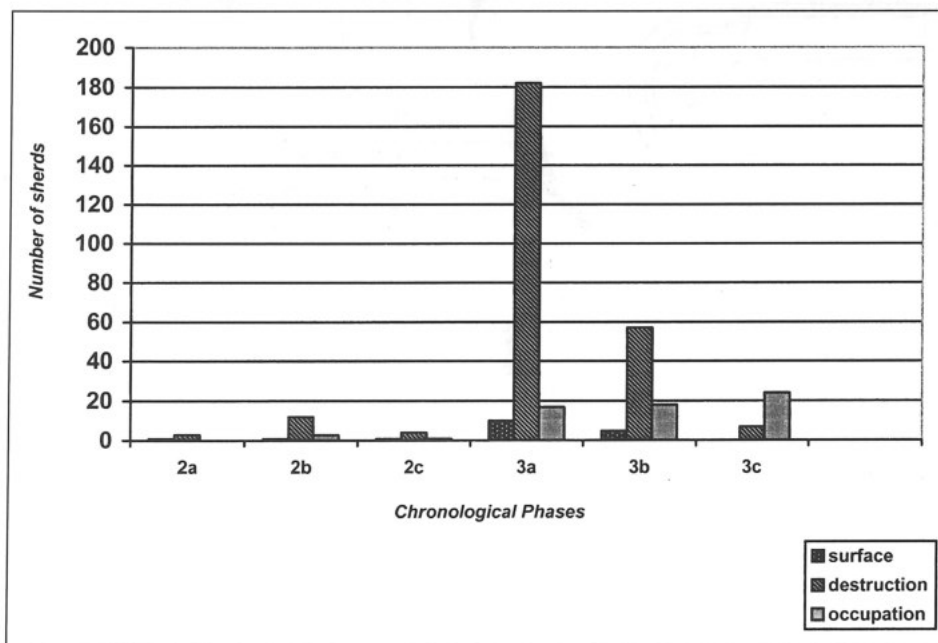


12. Northern annex room : ceramic repartition by type and context.



13. Northern annex room, ceramic material from the destruction phase.

Figure	Inventory N°	Description	Diam. (cm)	Parallels	Chronology
13-A	PN 2003.1005.6	Painted plate, orange ware	20	Schmid 2000, photo n° 5	Ph. 3a (20-70 AD)
13-B	PN 2003.1009.3	Painted plate, pinkish-brown ware, shining inclusions	10		1 st century AD
13-C	PN 2003.1009.8	Plate, pinkish-orange ware	18	Schmid 1996, Grp. 1, fig. 615 ; 2000, fig. 13	2 nd half of the 1 st BC
13-D	PN 2003.1016.1	Globular painted vase, red engobe	10	Schmid 2000, fig. 228 ou fig. 233 (profile)	Ph. 3c (beg. 2 nd century) or before ?
13-E	PN 2003.1002.1	Juglet, orange ware, pinkish-white surface	4.5	Schmid 2000, fig. 322	1st century AD
13-F	PN 2003.1002.2	Juglet, pinkish-orange ware, white surface	6 ?	Schmid 2000, fig. 303 ?	Beg. of the 1 st century AD
13-G	PN 2003.1009.1	Cooking pot, pink to beige ware, pinkish-white surface	12	Gerber 1994, fig. 16-F	Beg. of the 2 nd century AD
13-H	PN 2003.1009.9	Cooking pot, orange ware, white surface	10	Gerber 2001b, fig. 2-D (shorter)	End of the 1 st or 2nd century AD ?
13-I	PN 2003.1009.6	Cooking pot, pinkish ware, light rose surface	8	Gerber 2001b, fig. 2-A	1 st century AD
13-J	PN 2003.1005.2	Unguentarium, NFW, pinkish-white surface	2.5	Schmid 2000, fig. 317	Phase 3, 1 st century AD



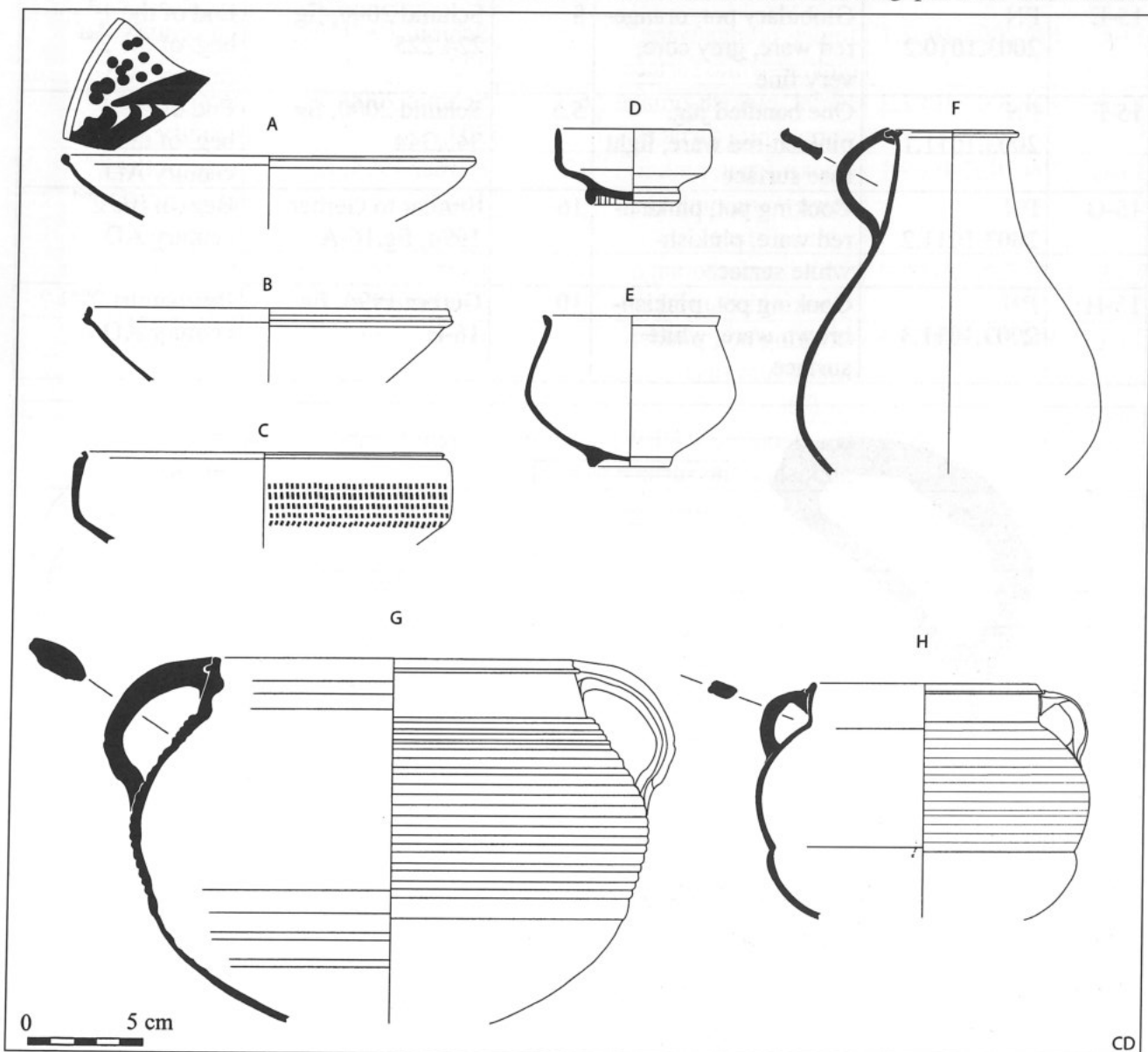
14. Northern annex room : NPW repartition by chronological phases and context.

has an iridescent aspect quite different from the others (**Fig. 13: B**). Cooking pots found in the northern annex room destruction shows characteristics usually associated to the end of the first or the beginning of the second century AD (**Fig. 13: G, H**), except for one piece, slightly older and clearly dated from the first century AD (**Fig. 13: I**). Therefore, the ceramic material from the destruction layers of the northern annex room mainly belong to the first century AD, with some later fragments dated to the beginning of the second century.

Occupation

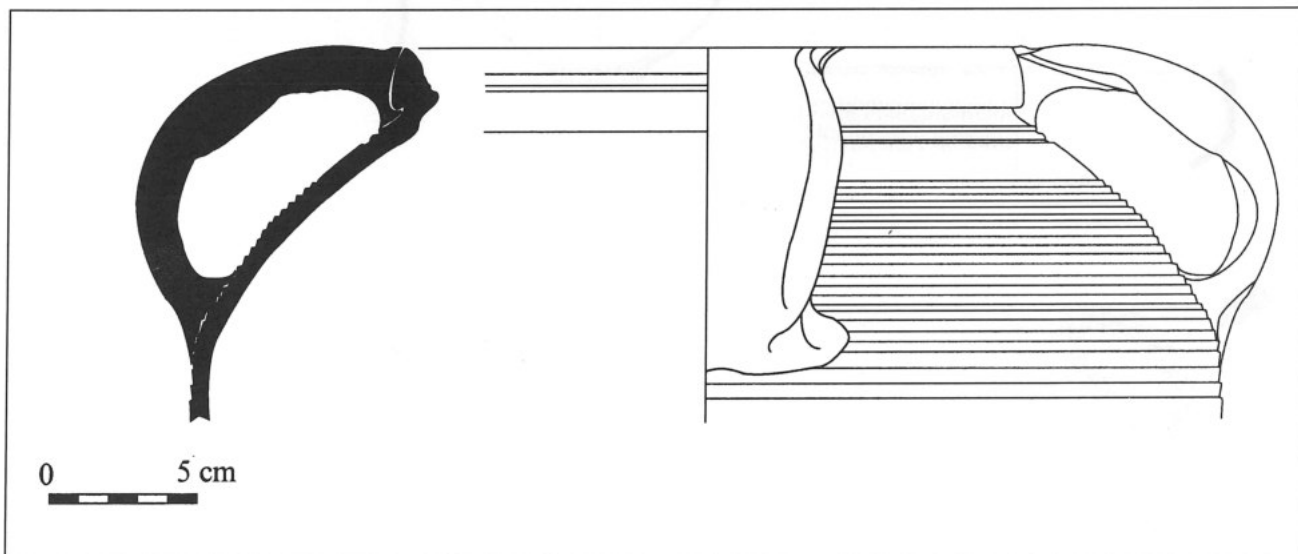
The ashy layers located under the destruction debris produced relatively fewer materials

(2003.1010, 2003.1011, 2003.1014, 2003.1017, 2003.1018, 2004.1022). NPW was found (**Fig. 15: A**) as well as a NFW assemblage possessing several almost complete containers (**Fig. 15: B-F**). The contents of the northern annex room include primarily cooking pots, service pottery as well as a large storage jar (**Fig. 16**). This confirms, along with the presence of the two working places, the interpretation of the room as a kitchen. More than 90% of NPW belong to phase 3, with an approximately 40 % peak in phase 3c (**Fig. 14**). Similarly, NFW seems to belong to the late phase 3, i.e. to the end of the first or the beginning of the second century AD. Here again, several almost complete cooking pots were found (**Fig. 15: G, H**). The characteristic cooking pot with the bevelled



15. Northern annex room, last occupation phase.

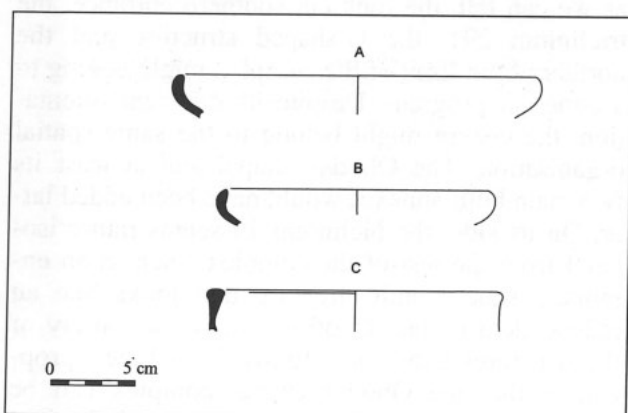
Figure	Inventory N°	Description	Diam. (cm)	Parallels	Chronology
15-A	PN 2003.1014.4	Painted plate, dark orange ware, gritty	18	Schmid 1996, fig. 702; 2000, fig. 92	Phase 3c, beg. of the 2 nd century AI
15-B	PN 2003.1011.5	Plate, pinkish-brown ware	16	Schmid 1996, Grp. 7, fig. 658 ; 2000, fig. 56	Phase 3
15-C	PN 2003.1010.5	Bowl, red-brown ware, red slip	16	Schmid 1996, Grp. 9, fig. 663-667 ; 2000, fig. 61-65	Phase 3
15-D	PN 2003.1014.1	Cup, red-brown ware, black-grey core, red drip in the bottom	7 foot : 4	Schmid 1996, Grp. 8, fig. 659/661 ; 2000, fig. 57/59	Phase 3
15-E	PN 2003.1010.2	Globular pot, orange-red ware, grey core, very fine	8	Schmid 2000, fig. 224/225	End of the 1 st - beg. of the 2 nd century AD
15-F	PN 2003.1011.1	One handled jug, pinkish-red ware, light rose surface	5.5	Schmid 2000, fig. 343/344	End of the 1 st - beg. of the 2 nd century AD
15-G	PN 2003.1011.2	Cooking pot, pinkish-red ware, pinkish-white surface	16	Similar to Gerber 1994, fig.16-A	Beg. of the 2 nd century AD
15-H	PN 2003.1011.3	Cooking pot, pinkish-brown ware, white surface	10	Gerber 1994, fig. 16-E	Beg. of the 2 nd century AD



16. Storage jar, Northern annex room, last occupation phase.

Figure	Inventory N°	Description	Diam. (cm)	Parallels	Chronology
16	PN 2003.1013.1	Storage jar, pinkish-brown ware, pinkish-white surface	22	Gerber 1997, fig. 6	End of the 1 st - beg. of the 2 nd century AD

rim was found with some slight variations in profile. In az-Zanṭūr, these cooking pots appeared in the second half of the first century AD and were mainly produced in the beginning of the second century⁵. The four handled storage jar found in the north-eastern corner of the room shows similarities to examples known from the az-Zanṭūr levels dating to the second half of the first century⁶. Nevertheless, our jar has a shorter collar and a strongly ribbed body. Speaking about the last occupation of the room, the material from the aforementioned ashy layers is homogenous and can be dated from the end of the first century going into the beginning of the second century AD. Two floors were excavated in 2004 under this last occupation phase (2004.1019 and 2004.1020). They contained fragmentary material including NPW primarily represented in phases 3a and 3b, several particularly fine fragments of small closed containers (jugs and goblets), and some cooking pots shards with bevelled rims. This material indicates



17. Northern & southern annex room, ceramic material from the foundation.

a continuous occupation of the room between the second quarter of the first century and the beginning of the second century AD. To complete the image, a fragment of a plate belonging to phase 1 was discovered with three other shards in the eastern wall of the room (Fig. 17: B). This gives a *terminus post quem* to the construction phase of the building.

Southern Annex Room

The material in the southern annex room is relatively similar to that of the northern annex room. In the destruction levels (2002.2012, 2002.2012 bis, 2002.2012 ter, 2002.2013), a majority of material from the last three quarters of the first century AD was found. NPW belongs mainly to phases 3a and 3b. No floor has been clearly identified in this room (*cf. supra*). The ceramic material from the entire strata between the destruction layer and the fill of the interstices of the bedrock (2002.2015) is homogenous. This latter level contained NFW and NPW going up to the first century BC, as well as a fragment of Hellenistic black glazed ware⁷. It seems that this layer, although strongly disturbed, contained material from the foundation of the room. A few shards were also found in the room walls (2004.2016) including three fragments of NPW belonging to phase 2b, as well as a plate rim and a cooking pot rim that could both be dated to the first century BC (Fig. 17: A, C). This gives a similar image, with material giving a *terminus post quem* of the end of the first century BC to the construction phase of the building.

In other words, the end of the first century BC *terminus post quem* indicates that the two small an-

Figure	Inventory N°	Description	Diam. (cm)	Parallels	Chronology
17-A	PN 2004.2016.1	Plate, orange fine ware	22	Schmid 1996, Grp. 1, fig. 609	1 st century BC
17-B	PN 2004.1021.1	Plate, pinkish-brown ware, grey surface	16	Schmid 1996, Grp. 1, fig. 610 ; 2000, fig. 8	1 st century BC
17-C	PN 2004.2016.2	Cooking pot, orange ware	16	Gerber 1994, fig. 15-D	1 st century BC

5. Gerber, 1997, 410, fig. 7.

6. *Id.*, fig. 6.

7. This type of ceramic was initially produced in the Athens area between the end of the fifth century BC and the middle of the second century BC and later in various workshops imitating the Greek productions. This Hellenistic production was found in small quantities in Petra. It is well ev-

idenced in some early levels of the az-Zanṭūr excavations (Schneider, 1996: 132, n° 14-18 and figs. 534-537), also found in Peter Parr's surveys carried out in Petra during the sixties (Parr, 1965: 528 and 530) as well as in the recently reopened Qaṣr al-Bint excavations, where it was associated with an early structure independent from the temple itself (Ch. Augé, personal communication).

nex rooms were not constructed before that date, and might have been constructed later. The study of the material from the northern annex room reveals a continuous occupation of the room between the second quarter of the first century AD and the beginning of the second century AD. That conclusion can also be applied to the southern annex room. This fits with the information given by the 20 AD dedication of the Obodas triclinium. Therefore, the two annex rooms appear to be contemporary to the dedication of the statue of Obodas the god. The inscription also refers to an earlier sanctuary. So far, an earlier use of the area is evidenced by residual material from the first century BC found in different layers.

Let us add two other comments. Firstly, the graph (Fig. 14) shows certain inconsistencies that require an explanation: in this graph, all the NPW fragments from the northern annex room were distributed according to their context (surface, destruction or occupation) and according to the typochronology established by S. Schmid. The presence of NPW in the destruction and occupation phases shows important variations. Indeed, in the occupation levels, the phases 3a, 3b and 3c are all represented but the majority of the shards belong to the 3c phase. On the contrary, in the destruction layer, phase 3a material is highly represented while the phase 3c material is almost non-existent. In other words, ceramics from the destruction levels are as a whole older than the ones present in the last occupation levels of the room. If we assume that the earlier service pottery was stored on the top of the roof, then this phenomenon would seem less illogical than the first image given by the material repartition.

Secondly, as we have seen, the ashy layers under the destruction level of the northern annex room are not sufficiently thick to be interpreted as trace evidence of a destruction caused by fire. They are more likely to be interpreted as fireplaces associated with a kitchen. Since no abandonment phase was identified between the last occupation and the destruction of the building, it seems that it collapsed in a rather sudden way sometimes after the beginning of the second century AD as many other violent destructions evidenced in the area⁸. It would therefore be tempting to connect it to the supposed earthquake that occurred around 113/114 AD⁹. According to the scarce presence of late roman shards found in the higher levels excavated in the court - among which a fragment of a typical

“pilgrim flask” - the site seems to have been abandoned at the end of the third or fourth century AD¹⁰. This later occupation might be explained by the continuous presence of water in the cistern. Similarly, one isolated Ayyubid-Mamluk hand-made jug fragment was also found in the upper part of the destruction of the triclinium's façade.

Conclusions

Several of the objectives defined at the end of the preliminary 2001 season have been reached and a better understanding of the nature of the complex emerges. The rock-cut chamber Brünnow 291 is a triclinium. No evidence can be used so far to determine its chronological relation with the Obodas chapel. On the contrary, the eastern impeding rock-cut room is obviously older than the Obodas chapel. On a topographical level, one can add that several rock-cut and built structures seem to follow a general north-east / south-west orientation that predates the construction of the Obodas Chapel. As far as we can tell, the rock-cut southern entrance, the triclinium 291, the U-shaped structure and the northern built limit of the complex might belong to a coherent program. Despite its different orientation, the cistern might belong to the same spatial organisation. The Obodas chapel and at least its two main built annexes would have been added later. On its side, the biclinium 19 seems rather isolated from the rest of the complex, such as an enigmatic square built structure that looks like an independent *môtab*. In other words, the variety of the structures allow us to follow L. Nehmé's proposition that the Obodas chapel complex can be compared to the al-Madras complex and fits into the same category of religious cult places.

At this stage of the work, no pavement or portico was found associated to the building or to the use of the Obodas chapel. The drum fragments found so far in the site seem to belong to an earlier complex. The ceramic evidence indicates that the occupation of the site goes back to at least the end of the first century B.C. and continues through the first century AD. The sanctuary seems to have been abandoned in the beginning of the second century, with the exception of the cistern which has scarcely been used later according to its material and a few isolated finds.

The 2005 season objectives are to study the southern access of the complex, to determine the nature of the rock-cut chamber 1296, and to understand the northern limits of the court and the first

8. Schmid 1997, 413-420.

9. Russel 1985, 37-59.

10. For a parallel to the pilgrim flask, see Fellman Brogli 1996, fig. 827-829.

century BC levels and structures reached at the end of the 2004 season, in order to understand the origin and the organisation of this familial sanctuary¹¹.

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11. Nehmé 2002b, 255.