

## NEW GREEK INSCRIPTIONS IN THE BYZANTINE HERMITAGE AT QAŞR AṬ-ṬŪBA ON THE LISĀN

by  
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Qaşr aṭ-Ṭŭba located in the northern part of al-Lisān peninsula, approximately 34.5° N-S and 65° E-W at around -380 m below sea level. The site was cut into a ridge on the soft laminated marls which dominate the Lisān landscape and built in places with sun-dried bricks (hence the name “ṭŭba”, meaning brick in Arabic, was adopted). It should not be confused, though, with the Medieval sugar factory site in the Ghawr aṣ-Şāfi with a similar name.

Although Musil had recorded the substantial ruins of al-Qeryeh (currently known as Dayr al-Byzanti) on the Lisān in 1898, Qaşr aṭ-Ṭŭba was not discovered until 1928 (Abel, 1929). He described it as a possible hermitage for ascetic monks coming from the Judean desert in the Byzantine period. In fact that interpretation would correlate with the nearby site of al-Qeryeh which is probably a monastery itself (surface finds of mosaic cubes and marble fragments attest to a church and other rooms to a monastic complex).

In the spring of 1994 Qaşr aṭ-Ṭŭba was re-discovered by geologists and engineers prospecting for oil on the Lisān. They consequently brought the site to my attention with the particular intention of translating some inscriptions they had noticed engraved on the side of a soft marl wall. It was obvious that illicit excavations were taking place so it was decided to rescue these inscriptions before they were completely destroyed.

On April 14, 1995 a small team was assembled which photographed, consolidated and then removed the inscription by cutting behind and around the marl wall (located

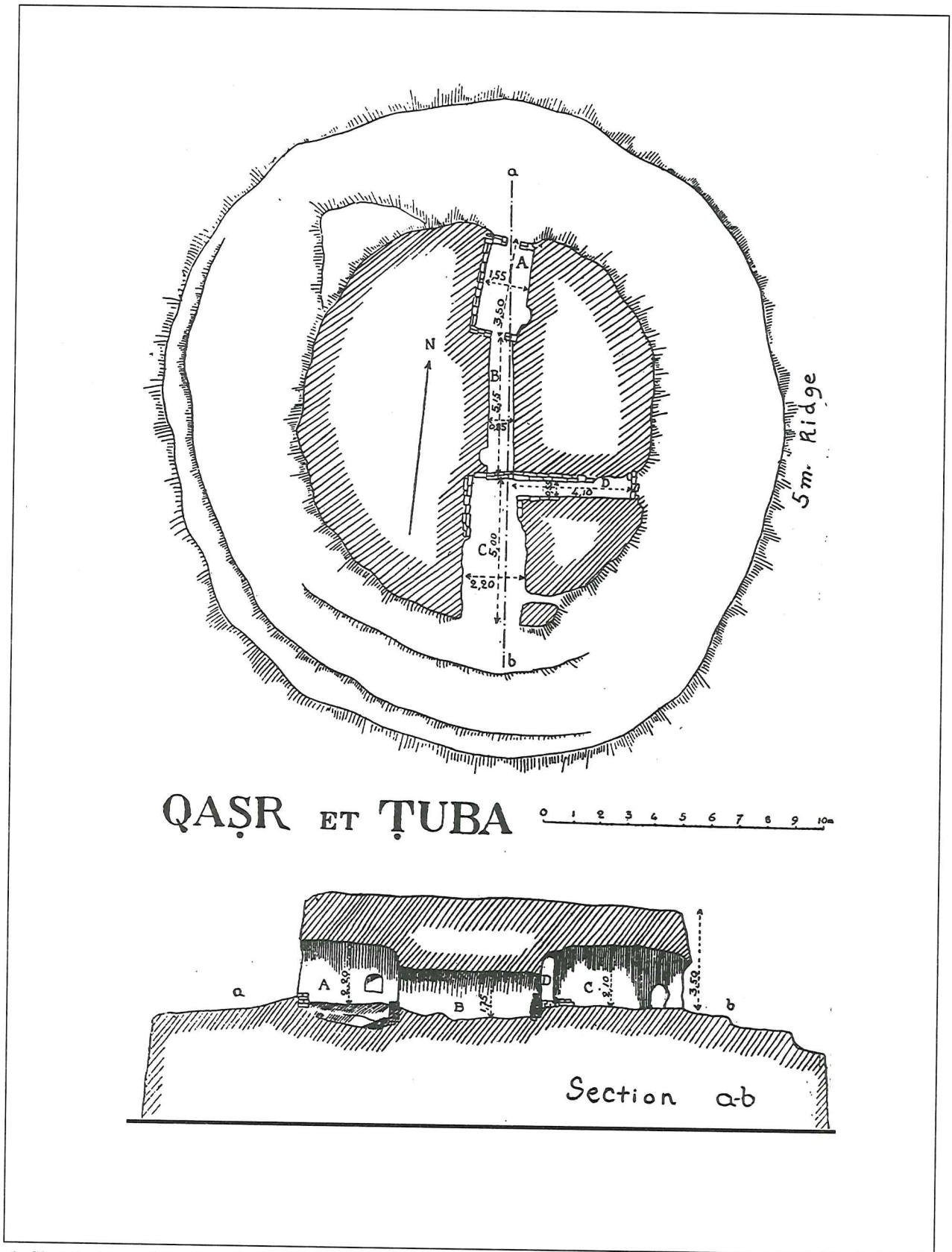
just west of D on Fig 1). A recently damaged inscription which was discovered that day was also removed (located on the inside corner between C and D on Fig 1). Emergency conservation was carried out at the Jordan Valley Authority Resthouse in Sekine where they were temporarily stored along with material from the Dayr ‘Ayn ‘Abātā excavations.

The first inscription is at least eight lines long and was written in capital Greek letters, though most are weathered and illegible (Fig. 2). It begins with a cross, then invokes “Our Lord, to have mercy upon Your servants, Agapios [.....] Konstantinos [.....] Makarios [.....] Ioannis .....” To the left of this inscription is a larger cross with some undecipherable Greek letters enclosed by a box (there are two more similar enclosed crosses on nearby walls which were left *in situ* on the site).

The second inscription has only five surviving lines again engraved in Greek capital letters but could not be read. Above the inscription is a small cross within a larger one. This entire area was very badly damaged by illicit excavators (Fig. 3).

Both of these inscriptions seemed to have been covered by bricks at the time of Abel’s visit to the site, otherwise he would have seen them. They probably name some of the hermits who dwelt there and may even be buried on that spot, though no human bones were seen at the hermitage.

I would like to thank Dr Ghazi Bisheh, Director-General of Antiquities, for understanding the urgency of this rescue mission and giving his full support to it. Mario Dradi should also be acknowledged for com-



1. Sketch plan and section after Abel, 1929.



2. First Greek inscription with cross engraved on marl wall (photo: K. D. Politis).



3. Second damaged Greek inscription with engraved cross on corner of marl wall ( photo: V. Munday)



4. Hermitage of Qaşr at-Ṭüba from the south (photo: T. Springett).

pletely funding this project, which was carried out by Professor Pietro Tranchina, Dr Sergio Bonfatti, Maestro Paolo Ballarin, Dradi and myself. Dr Yiannis Meimaris gave us the preliminary readings of the inscriptions.

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### **Bibliography**

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