

# PRELIMINARY REPORT OF THE NOTES ON THE HEAD OF THE GODDESS TYCHE FROM PETRA, JORDAN

by  
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## Introduction

In the summer of 1995, excavators from the Brown University expedition to the Great (Southern) Temple at Petra discovered a sculpted head of local al-Quwayra sandstone, subsequently identified as the goddess Tyche. The head was published in *ADAJ* 1997;<sup>1</sup> since that time, new information concerning the piece has been discovered, prompting this brief re-examination to be submitted to *ADAJ*.

## Initial Identification in Bachmann, *et al.*

The first important piece of new evidence to surface was the recognition, by Ms. Leigh-Ann Bedal of the University of Pennsylvania, that the Tyche head recovered in the Brown University excavations of 1995 was the same head mentioned by Bachmann (Bachmann *et al.* 1921: 44-45) (Bedal, pers. comm.).<sup>2</sup> It is also illustrated, as figure number 37, and the text states that Bachmann discovered the head, 39 centimeters high and of local sandstone, in the rubble of the area of the Lower Temenos. The description of the head, and the photograph listed as figure 37, seem to indicate that this is indeed the same head recovered by the Brown University team. While the 1997 article lists a Tyche head illustrated in Bachmann *et al.* as an example of the appearance of that goddess in the art of the Nabataeans at Petra, it does not state that the piece is in fact one and the same with the head discovered - or, more accurately, "rediscovered" - by the Brown

University team (Basile 1997: 257).

This realization has important ramifications for one of the hypotheses advanced in the 1997 article - namely, the idea that the rubble scarp in which the head was found consisted mainly of spolia from the various excavations of the famous Baths complex, north and west of the Lower Temenos of the Great Temple (Basile 1997: 255, n. 2). If the head was to be seen in the Lower Temenos as early as 1921 - prior to all of the significant excavation projects at the Baths - it seems less likely that it found its way to the area through archaeological research. While the author still stands by the argument that, on stylistic grounds, the fragment should most likely be assigned to the Temenos Gate (or an associated monument) with a date of between the third quarter of the first century BC and the first quarter of the second century AD (Basile 1997: 261-262), this new discovery calls into question the process by which the head was deposited in the Lower Temenos of the Great Temple.

## Identification of a Possible Source-Block

A second new development was the identification, by the author, of a possible source block for the Tyche head recovered in the Brown excavations of 1995. In the 1997 article, it was argued that the Tyche most closely resembled the winged "Hermes" head in the Petra Museum (Basile 1997: 261), which has been assigned to the sculptural decoration of the Temenos Gate (Parr 1957: 7-8, pl. 3; Glueck 1965: pl. 151;

1. See J.J. Basile, A Head of the Goddess Tyche from Petra, Jordan. *ADAJ* (1997) 41:255-266.

2. Mr Danny Herman, a graduate student at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, also recognized this

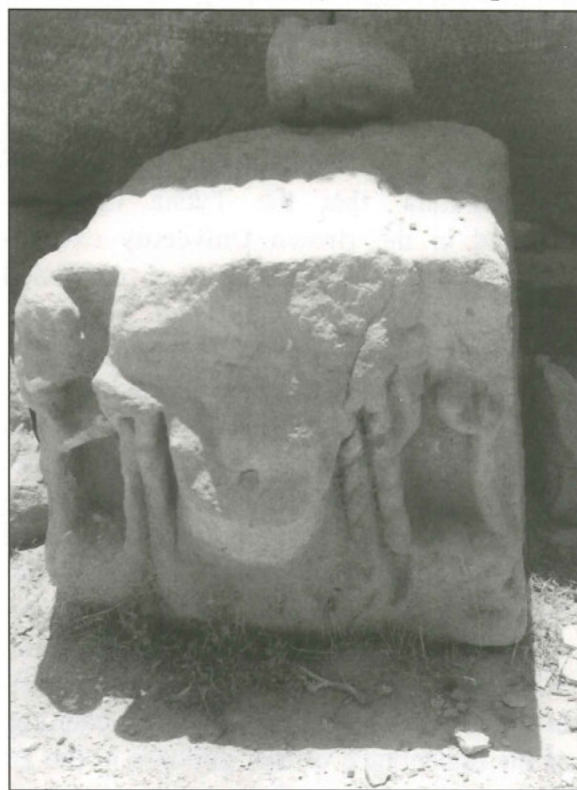
error (pers. comm.). Additionally, the piece is listed as no.54 in McKenzie's catalog of Petra sculptures in the *PEQ* 1988:94.

McKenzie 1988: 87, 88, 91, Fig. 12a; McKenzie 1990: 134, Pl. 58d-59a). This head was most likely part of a relief bust, projecting outward from a carved block like the famous limestone Serapis bust, also linked to the Gate (Parr 1957: 6-7, Pl. 1-2; Glueck 1965: Pl. 151; Maurer and Maurer 1978: Pl. 65; Berthud and Hatch 1985: Pl. 59; Lindner 1985: 47; Zayadine 1986: 215, Fig. 1; McKenzie 1988: 87-88, 91, Fig. 12b; McKenzie 1990: 134, Pl. 58b-c). The author, working on the hypothesis that the Tyche head belonged to a similar kind of bust, made a survey of the sculptural fragments of the central Petra valley in the summer of 1997, and identified a block just east of the Temenos Gate (on the south side of the Colonnaded Street, against the retaining wall and near the Propylaia Steps of the Great Temple), which might belong to such a sculpture. This block is of the same red sandstone as the Tyche head, is of the proper size and scale (44 cm wide, 39 cm high, and 68 cm long), exhibits a break pattern similar in shape to that on the back of the head, and although badly weathered clearly depicts the neck and shoulders of a female figure with curled tresses and perhaps the remains of a veil (Figs. 1-3).<sup>3</sup> Damaged and enigmatic carvings to either side of the figure may represent vegetal motifs, thyrsoi, cornucopiae, or other attributes.<sup>4</sup> The most prominent feature of the block is however the preserved neck - it is 18 cm wide at its greatest extent, the same width as the neck of the Tyche head. This block was first published by McKenzie as "female head coming out of acanthus leaves;" interestingly, she considered it to be contemporary with the carvings of the Temenos Gate, based on stylistic grounds (McKenzie 1988: 94, no. 51). An

attempt was made by the author, with the assistance of Mr. Brian Brown, to fit the Tyche head to the block, but both the back of the head and the front face of the block were too badly weathered to allow articulation. Nevertheless, the similarities in material, size and scale, break pattern, carving technique, style, and location suggest to the author the strong possibility that the Tyche head was originally attached to this block, which in turn belonged to the sculptural program of the Temenos gate or of a similar and contemporary monument nearby.

### Conclusions

It is hoped that these notes clarify certain issues concerning the Tyche head recovered in the Brown University Great Temple ex-

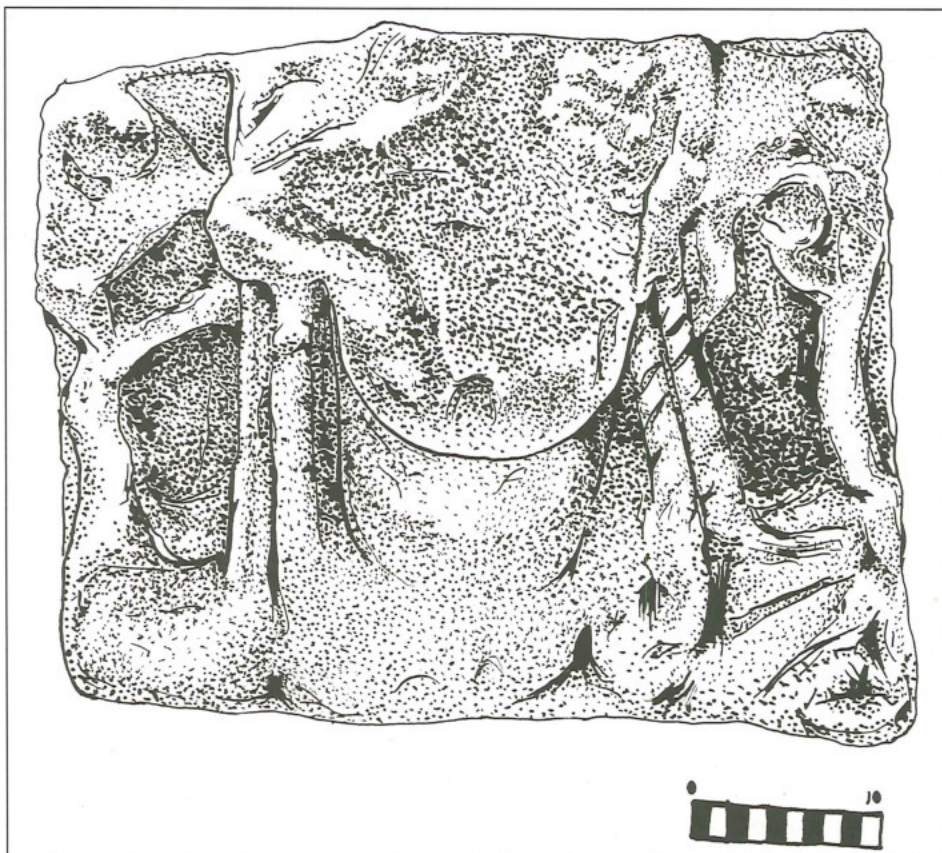


1. Possible source block for the Tyche head, photograph *in situ* (J. Basile).

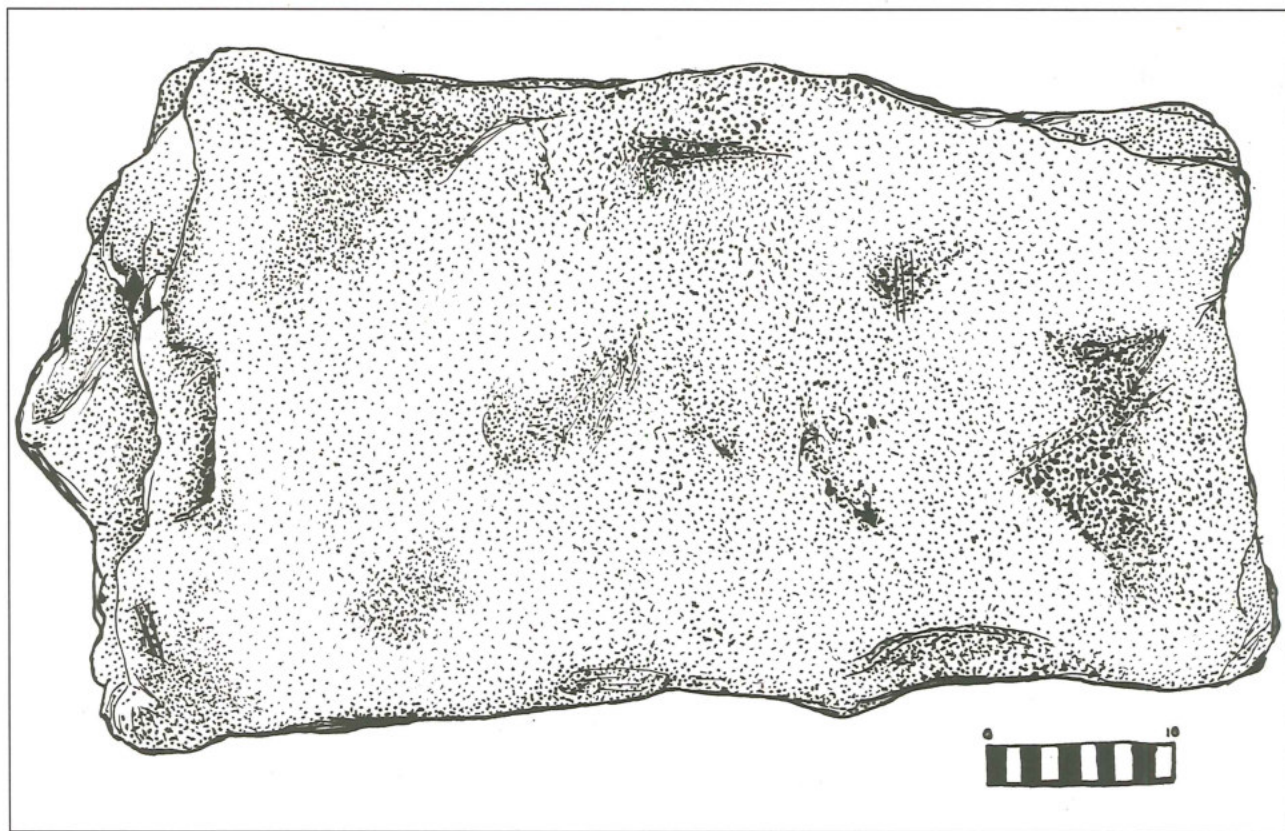
3. The resulting hairstyle-wavy hair parted down the middle, pulled into corkscrew curls falling in front of the shoulders-would resemble Classical and Hellenistic models such as the famed Caryatids of the Erechtheion, the Eirene of Kephisodotus, the Demeter of Knidos, and important Tyche figures

like the Prusias-ad-Hypum type.

4. The block also bears the number "582" on the back (south) face, and an iron screw has been driven into the top left corner of the east (side) face.



2. Possible source block for the Tyche head, illustration of front side (J. Ragosta).



3. Possible source block for the Tyche head, illustration of west side (J. Ragosta).

cavations in 1995, and shed further light on a possible place of origin for the fragment. It is also hoped that they demonstrate a continuing need for systematic study of the sculptural remains of the central Petra valley, and not only of their more famous cousins which decorate the carved tombs of the necropolis.

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