

AL-KHAZNA, THE TREASURY RE-VISITED A FORGOTTEN DOCUMENT OF LEON DE LABORDE

Fawzi Zayadine

Preliminary

There is no doubt that the recent excavation at Al-Khazna courtyard by the Department of Antiquities, under the supervision of Suleiman al-Farajat and Sami al-Nawafleh in 2003, revealed crucial evidence for both interpretation and dating of this masterpiece of rock-cut architecture in Petra. There were conflicting opinions regarding the different issues concerning this monument. The 28 various assessments expressed by the authors have been summarized in one table by Judith Mckenzie (1990: 7, Table 2). However, the analysis of two famous explorers, Léon de Laborde and Linant de Bellefonds was not considered by this author. They arrived at Wādī Mūsā in March 28th, 1828, coming from 'Araba and Wādī Ṣabrā, at a time when plague had desolated the country. The details of this expedition were recently published in an instructive volume by C. Augé and P. Linant de Bellefonds, a relative to the explorer by marriage (Augé and Linant 1994). The two authors enhanced the publication by a good preface and excellent notes, in addition to the most significant lithographs of the two French explorers. The purpose of the present paper is to present a so far forgotten document of Laborde which belongs to Carlos Muños de Laborde, Comte de La Vinaza and Marquis de Laborde. The permission to publish this document was granted to me by the Marquis, through his son Mr. Juan Luis de Laborde, whom I met by chance in the General Consulate of Spain in Frankfurt/Main in Germany. He was designated later in 1991 as the permanent representative of Spain at UNESCO in Paris. When I asked him if he was a relative to the famous explorer, he mentioned to me that his father is a descendent of Laborde and inherited the honorific title of "Marquis". In surprise, I asked if his family still keeps any archives of his ancestor. He approached his father who was generous enough to send me an off-set copy of the above mentioned document entitled: "The Nabataeans". In order to better understand and appreciate it, it is essential to intro-

duce it by a short account of the career of the two explorers and on their expedition to Petra.

Léon de Laborde

He was born in Paris in 1807 in a renowned family: his father, Alexandre Louis Joseph de Laborde, was a diplomat and state advisor under Napoleon I and published remarkable works on the art and monuments of Spain. He then was elected to the Academy of Inscriptions and Belles Lettres in 1813. In order to give a solid education to his son Léon, he sent him to the University of Göttingen, in the kingdom of Hanover, Germany. This was a famous University, one hundred years old, where the young Laborde was educated in the Old Testaments in ancient Greek and Latin, in the Medieval and modern history, in addition to modern languages of German, Italian and English. As he was in possession of a firm education, Alexandre de Laborde took his son on an expedition to the East in 1826-27 from Turkey, they passed to North Syria, followed the sea coast to explore the Lebanon, visited Damascus, the Ḥawrān and Palestine. From Jerusalem, they traversed the Jordan Valley to Jarash and 'Ammān, which was in ruin, they reported. Because of tribal tensions, the party could not reach Petra. But Léon de Laborde did not abandon his dream to explore the famous Nabataean city. A new expedition was organized in the company of engineer Louis Maurice Linant de Bellefonds. His father took him in 1817 for cruise in Greece, Syria, Palestine and Egypt. He was fascinated by the antiquities of this country and decided not to return to France but rather explore the heritage of the Pharaonic civilization. He was the first European to visit the oasis of Siwa, in the Libyan Desert in 1820 where the famous temple of the Ammon oracle was located. In 1823 he crossed with the Italian traveler Ricci, the western coast of the Sinai. Their intention was to reach Wādī 'Araba and Petra, (but the insecurity forced them to return from Ras Mohammad to Cairo). There he met with Laborde in 1827 and both of them organized the ex-

pedition to Petra. Linant de Bellfonds had good relations of with the local population, as he was one of the engineers of the Canal of Suez which was initiated by Ferdinand de Lesseps (1859). They hesitated on the way to undertake this adventure: were they going to imitated J.L. Burkhardt who was dressed like a poor bedouin an mounted on horse back to follow the caravans to Makka? In this case it was not possible to establish contacts with tribal leaders and to produce any drawing or plan. The two explorers decided to travel in the formal way: In 'Aqaba they were introduced to the Turkish governor, Ḥassan Aghā and waited until the two tribe leaders of the 'Alāwīn arrived to accompany them. The document is short (Fig. 1) but will be summarized hereafter, since it is not easy to offer a faithful translation of it, but we can look forward to a full publication of the French text, probably in *Syria*. Apparently, it was written in 1864, because he indicated at the end of the document: "When I came back to France, I published my drawings; they were received with suspicions which were hardly dissipated by the reports of the travelers who followed me. The duc de Luynes ordered a photograph to be made this year (1864) of the Khazné of Petra and this reproduction which is certainly exact confirms, if not my artistic talent, at least my accuracy". Photographs were a technique, still uncommon at that time. It is not easy to guess the occasion, which warranted the diffusion of this text. It can be surmised that when he was designated in 1863 as the director of the "Collection of Inventories and Documents" (Augé and Linant 1994: 13), he might have prepared this document to be included in the collection, as one could deduce from his introduction: "The Nabataeans claim they were the oldest population on earth". He then proceeds to the description of the Khazna: "A huge monolithic tomb, carved in rose sandstone, on a surface of 1.200 square meters". This figure, no doubt, is overestimated, because the exact measures of al-Khazna, according to the photogrammetric plotting by the National Geographic Institute in Paris are 25m wide by 38.40m high, which equal 810m square meters. On the other hand, it is not known where he found the statement about the origin of the Nabataeans. He probably followed the Biblical account of Genesis 25: 13, where Nebayôt is the first son of Isamaël. However, this Arabian Tribe is not identified with the Nabatu but was associated with the Qedarites (Starcky 1966: col.903). At any rate, the document is written in the romantic style of the 19th century, but with a precise scientific description and accurate dating, it goes on:

".... on March 27th, 1828 I came to sit down at

a place chosen the day before. My guides, two leaders of the powerful tribes of the desert were unable to obtain for me but a week of stay from the inhabitants of Petra which I intended to employ in executing some twenty drawings and plot the plan of this huge city. Thus my time was limited and I had to employ it in the best way". The two tribe leaders were Ṭawālib and Ḥusayn, from the 'Alāwīn, a sub-tribe of the Ḥuwayṭāt (الحويطات).

This limited time he was allowed to stay was imposed by the plague epidemic (Reinaud 1835: 20). To avoid this catastrophic disease, the population abandoned the ruins of Petra and settled in the surrounding hills. Laborde apparently observed the Khazna at sunrise.

He goes on: "suddenly, before twilight could be dissipated, the daylight burst with violence and its light invaded the valley". Then the author is captivated by the beauty of the monument and its architectural style; he compares it to the decoration of the Opera (in Paris), the largest in the world at that time, built by architect Garnier in 1862 and adorned with rich statues and reliefs. He is fascinated by the spectacle of al-Khazna at sunrise and specifies that the Arabs called "Khazné", treasury, the most beautiful of all the monuments carved on the rocks that enclose Petra. "They believe that it conceals the treasures of the Pharaos ... for us, isn't it a treasure, since this is a masterpiece, so far the most elegant?" But the most surprising feature in the document is the chronological appreciation of the author; the first element of his arguments is that the Romans were "lacking the sense of originality, refinement and exact proportions. They brought in their colonies the art they received from Greece. They employed mercenaries but were unable to bring with them architects, sculptors and masons; "they employed the artists of the conquered countries", and those local artists created "outstanding monuments in Baalbek, Palmyra, Bosra, Gerasa and Philadelphia, in the Ḥawrān and at Petra, in the heart of the deserts".

The opinion that the Romans were incapable of genuine art was common among the scholars of the 19th century. What is new in the argumentation of Laborde is that the East was bored with the old art and was in search of a new one. The Oriental Imagination, he states, was no more satisfied with a monotonous plan of one order... it challenged the one plan and superimposed several stories. The oriental architects developed vaults and domes and erected "long porticoes with a double elevation of colonnades; they created a new architecture". For the chronological appreciation, Laborde expressed the most unexpected opinion for his time: "We

Les Nabathéens

habitaient le plus ancien temple de l'époque. A une époque très reculée, ils établirent leur capitale dans un entonnoir de rochers qui formaient une enceinte fortifiée naturelle. Cette ville s'appelle Pétra, elle donna son nom à l'Arabie Pétrée.



Pétra

Grand tombeau monolithique sculpté dans un rocher de grès rose qui, sur une surface de 1200 mètres, ne présente ni une strie, ni une fissure, ni une altération dans sa teinte harmonieuse. Ce monument, quoique d'une seule pierre, a les dimensions de l'arc de triomphe de l'étoile.

Le 24 mars 1828, j'étais venu m'asseoir devant ce monument, à une place choisie l'après-midi. Mes guides, deux chefs de puissantes tribus du désert, n'avaient pu obtenir des habitants de Pétra, qu'un séjour d'une semaine, que je me proposais de consacrer à faire une vingtaine de dessins et à lever le plan de cette immense ville. Mon temps était donc compté, j'avais à cœur de le bien employer.

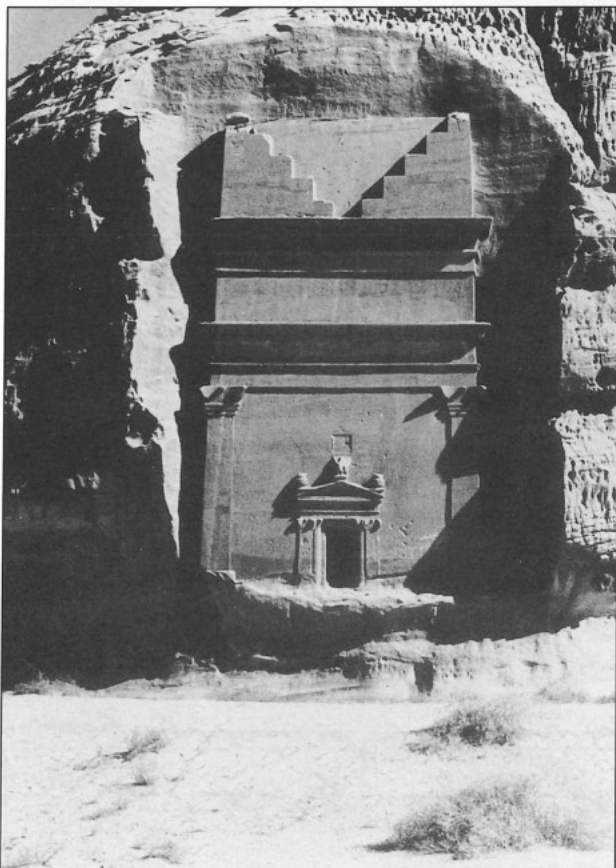
Il faisait nuit; à peine si la transparence de l'air laissait distinguer, au milieu des rochers, les principales lignes de l'architecture. Tout d'un coup, sans que le crépuscule ait

should relate this masterpiece of architecture to the first years of the Christian era, and far from considering it as the decline of the Greek art, which was corrupted by the Romans, we must regard it as "a genuine creation, the signal and the first landmark of a new Oriental architecture which is, in fact, our modern architecture". Let us now turn our attention to the recent excavation and examine the elements they offer to the interpretation of the archaeological results and the sculptured iconography.

Four chamber-tombs have been so far exposed under the Treasury. Their function as tombs was confirmed by the bones collected in the courtyard, with a human skull that was 2m away from the burial. The Danish team who undertook some conservation on the skull identified it as belonging to a man "of around 50 years of age and had noble features" (Farajat and Nawafleh 2005: fig. 9). Animal bones were also identified, especially a skeleton of a ram which was found on the floor of the chamber, in the southeast corner, next to the main tomb entrance. This was most probably the remain of a funeral banquet or maybe of a sacrifice. But of special concern is the fact the chamber-tombs were in

use at the time of the carving of al-Khazna: the top of Tomb 62E was cut together with the larger part of the pediment over the doorway (see fig. 18 in Farajat and Nawafleh 2005). On the other hand, the entrance to Tomb 62D, exactly in front of the stairway leading to the vestibule of al-Khazna was blocked by the ramp of the stairway leading to the vestibule and a doorway was opened in the partition wall between the windows Tomb 62D and the staircase Tomb 62E. The Nabataean pottery, which was examined by S.G. Schmidt, can be dated between 25BC and the first century AD. And the architectural decoration corroborates this chronological estimation. The horned capital (fig. 11 in Farajat and Nawafleh) has good parallels at Hegra-Madā'in Šālīh: SJ B1 and E 18 are dated to 31AD (Healy H5 and H36 respectively) (Figs. 2A, 2B). The outer frame of the doorway of 62E consists of a pilaster with an attached quarter column, a design which is comparable to the frame of both B1 and E18 of Hegra (Figs. 2A, 2B).

The role of al-Khazna as a monument dedicated to the funeral cult can be assumed with more probability after the recent excavations. If the lower tombs are to be dated around 31AD, under the



2A. Tomb B1, Healy H5 of Hegra-Madā'in Šālīh, dated 31AD.

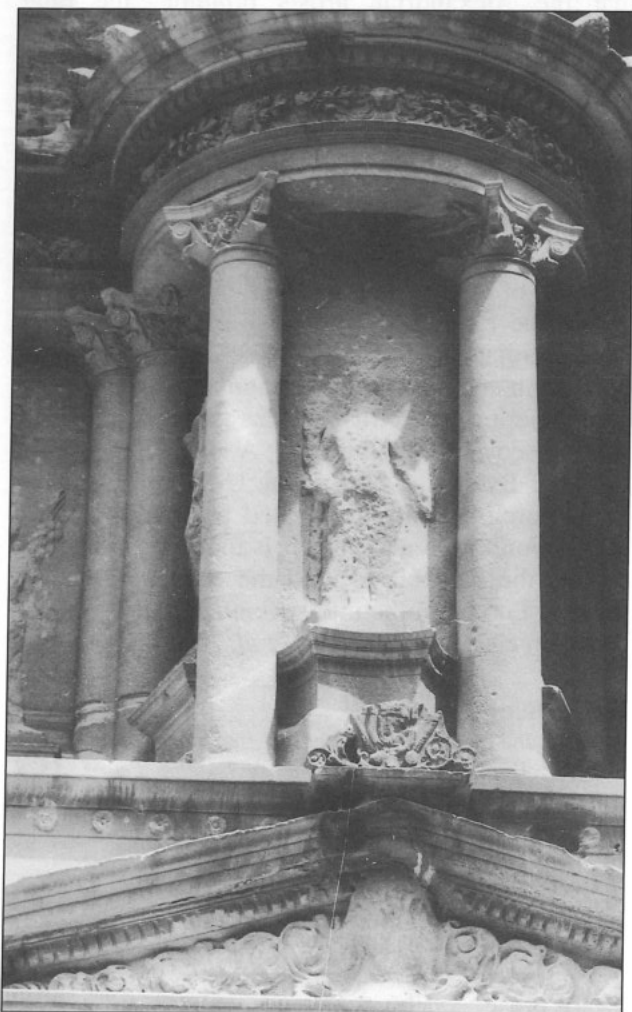


2B. Tomb E18, Healy 36 of Hegra-Madā'in Šālīh, dated 31AD.

reign of Aretas IV (9BC-40AD), al-Khazna itself should be dated to this period. This conclusion of Léon de Laborde was also reached by Bowersock (1983: 62): "furthermore, with an early date secured for the Qaṣr al-Bint and theater, it becomes highly probable that the stunning façade of the so-called khazneh ("treasury") belongs to the same age". It is possible to assume in this case that this monument was the mausoleum of Aretas IV and his family. When the upper order with the tholos (round kiosk) is considered, the relief of standing Isis with head turned to the right and holding in one hand a phiale (cup) and in the other a cornucopia (Fig. 3), this representation was adopted by the Ptolemaic queens who identified themselves with Isis, on the faience vases (=oinochoe) (see Lyttelton 1990: 21 and Pls IV-V). Figure 4 depicts Berenike II, wife of Ptolemy III (246-221BC). The Isis Tyche on the tholos of al-Khazna (Fig. 3) would represent a Nabataean queen. Parlasca (1998: 64-70) has drawn the attention to the coins of Aretas

IV and his first wife Ḥuldu 5BC-14AD. On the reverse of this coin is represented the Nabataean queen (Fig. 5), face turned left, wearing the crown with the stylized Isis attributes (Meshorer 1975: Nos. 53-54, Pl. 4; Parlasca, 1998: 69, figs. 1-2). The schematic attributes of Isis over the head of Ḥuldu are well carved on the lower level of al-Khazna and consist of the sun-disc, flanked by two horns and ears of corn (Fig. 6).

To sum up, if the Khazna was the mausoleum of Aretas IV and his family, the Isis relief on the upper kiosk would represent a Nabataean queen,



3. The relief of Isis on the Khazna, note the attributes of the goddess on the lower acroterion.



4. Queen Berenike II on oinochai, after Lyttelton (1990: 28-29, Pls IV-V, 1).



5. Coin of Aretas IV, reverse, head of queen Ḥuldu, wearing the Isis crown, after Parlasca (1998: 70, fig. 2).



6. Mourning Isis, figurine from Petra (Parlasca 1998: 70, fig. 1).

possibly Huldu, the first wife of Aretas IV. This conclusion is but a working hypothesis, which needs to be substantiated by more evidence from the completion of the excavations under the Treasury.

Iconoclasm, Nabataean Style?

In two well documented approaches (Patrich 1990: 132-37, 153-57) and in a article, 1990: 185-196; Negev 1994: 419-448 argued that iconoclasm was practiced by the Nabataeans and touched several monuments at Petra. The two authors quote Strabo (Geog. 16, 4.26) who notes: "Most of the country is well supplied with fruits except olive; they use sesame-oil instead... embossed (relief) works, paintings, and moulded works are not produced in their country". The *geography* of Strabo dates back to the reign of Augustus at the turn of the first century BC-AD. This statement is contra-

dicted by recent discoveries: Olive and olive oil were produced in the first century BC-AD at Petra ('Amr *et al.* 2000: 239, 2001: 265-66) as well as frescoes ('Amr *et al.* 2001: 266, fig. 19). It appears that the report of Strabo who did not visit Petra on the funeral traditions of the Nabataeans: They "bury even their kings beside dung-heaps" (Geog.16,4.26) is a literary topos under the influence of Greek poets. The Khazna, which was a royal mausoleum is the best evidence of the inaccuracy of Strabo. If we return to the problem of iconoclasm, Patrich relates the movement to groups and classes in the Nabataeans society (1990: 37). But Negev speculated "that behind the conservative circles that initiated and pushed the iconoclastic reform (or reaction) were members of the ancient priestly families" (1994: 422). He goes further and assumes that iconoclasm was ordered by the Nabataean kings themselves. He dated the Khazna and Qaşr al-Bint to the reign of Obodas III (30-90BC), and involves into wild imagination when he reports that the Alexandrian artists brought "the blue prints" of the treasury with all of the reliefs, and presented them to the king, in the second half of the first century BC. Then the king ordered "to avoid the sculpting of any offensive details, such as facial features, hands feet and so on" (Negev 1994: 428). That there was traces of hammering on the animate figures is inaccurate. The excavation team of the recent project found in front of the Khazna the head of the lion that was in the southeastern angle of the monument and fragments of the horse head (Farajat and Nawafleh 2005: fig. 20). Strangely, Patrich and Negev seem to ignore the long Byzantine period at Petra and that several churches were discovered in the city. A cathedral with a baulk of Byzantine papyri, the Urn Tomb and the blue church, recently excavated by Patricia Bikai, in addition to the ad-Dayr. It is more logical to associate the iconoclasm with the Byzantine movement of Leo III in the mid-seventh century AD (for the main church, see Frösen *et al.* 2002).

References

- Augé, C. and Linant de Bellefonds, P. (hereafter Linant)
 1994 *Pétra retrouvée, Voyage de l'Arabie Pétrée, 1828, Léon de Laborde et Linant*. Paris, Pygmalion, Gérard Watelet.
 Bowersock, G.W.
 1983 *Roman Arabia*. London: Harvard Mass.
 De Luyne, D.
 1874 *Voyage d'exploration à la mer Morte, à Pétra et sur la rive gauche du Jordain*. Paris.
 Farajat, S. and Nawafleh, S.
 2005 Report on the al-Khazna Courtyard Excavation at Petra 2003. *ADAJ* 49.

- Fiema, Z.T. *et al.*
 2001 *The Petra Church*. Amman. ACOR.
- Healy, J.F.
 1993 The Nabataean Tomb Inscriptions of Mada' in Salih. *Journal of Semitic Studies*, Supp. 1.
- Jaussen and Savignac
 1909 *Mission archéologique en Arabie I*. Paris: Ernest Leroux.
 1914 *Mission archéologique en Arabie II*. Paris.
- Laborde, L., Linant de Bellefonds, L.M.
 1930-33 *Voyage de l'Arabie Pétrée*. Paris.
 1836 *Journey Through Arabia Petraea*. London.
- Lindner, M. (ed.)
 1997 *Petra und das Königreich der Nabatäer*. Munich.
- Lyttleton, M.
 1974 *Baroque Architecture in Classical Antiquity*. London.
 1990 Aspects of the Iconography of the Sculptural Decoration of the Khazneh at Petra. Pp. 19-29 in F. Zayadine (ed.), *Petra and Caravan Cities*. Amman.
- McKenzie, J.
 1990 *The Architecture of Petra*. Oxford Univ. Press.
- Meshorer, Y.
 1975 *Nabataean Coins*. Qedem 3. Jerusalem: Hebrew University.
- Negev, A.
 1994 Khaznet Fir'un at Petra – Iconoclasm Nabataean Style. *ARAM* 6: 419-448.
- Reinaud, M.
 1835 Rapport sur le voyage dans l'Arabie Pétrée de MM. Léon de Laborde et Linant. *Extrait du Nouveau Journal Asiatique*: 1-34.
- Parlasca, K.
 1998 Bemerkungen zum Isiskult in Petra. Pp. 64-70 in U. Hübner, E. A. Knauf and R. Wenning (eds.), *Nach Petra und ins Königreich der Nabatäer*. Bonn: Bonner Biblische Beiträge, Philo.
- Patrich, J.
 1990 *The Formation of Nabataean Art*. Jerusalem. Pp. 153-157.
 1990 Prohibition of a graven image among the Nabateans: The Evidence and its Significance. *ARAM* 2 1&2: 185-196.
- Schmidt-Colinet,
 1983 Dorisierende Nabatäische Kapitelle. *Dam.M.* 1: 107-112, Pl. 66,d.
- Schmitt-Korte.,
Nabataean Coinage, Part II, New Coin Type and Variants, Num. Chron., 117f, Nos. 53-57, Pl. 13.
- Strabo
 1966 *Geography*. Trans. H.L. Jones, London: Loeb Class Library.
- Wenning, R.
 1993 Eine neuerstellte Liste der Nabatäischen Dynastie. *BOREAS* 16: 25ff.
- Zayadine, F. (ed.)
 1990 *Petra and the Caravan Cities*. Amman: Department of Antiquities.
 1991 L'iconographie d'Isis à Pétra, in Religion, Mythologies. *Mel. Ecole Fr. De Rome* 103: 283-306.