

***Khirbet et-Tannur Nabataean Temple Project,  
Jordan***

Khirbet et-Tannur is a hilltop sanctuary on the King's Highway, near Khirbet edh-Dharrah which was the third caravan stop 70 km north of the Nabataean capital Petra. In use from the 2nd century B.C. to the 4/6th century A.D., this temple complex is exceptional because of the information it provides about religious practice due to the astonishing preservation of carbonized cult offerings and vessels. Specialist examination of these revealed continuity of Iron Age religious customs after the Roman conquest of Arabia (in A.D. 106) in a sanctuary of local design, but with architectural decoration and gods in classical form in a fascinating iconographic programme. The site reveals the process of the cessation of religious practice, without conversion, and also provides new information about iconoclasm at Nabataean sites.

These results come from the previously unstudied archaeological remains and records of the 1937 excavations by Nelson Glueck (for the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem and the Department of Antiquities of Transjordan), which are preserved in the ASOR Nelson Glueck Archive at the Semitic Museum, Harvard University. Although he was ahead of his time in the types of archaeological samples he collected, this evidence had remained unstudied. Despite the lack of modern stratigraphic methods, these finds provide meaningful results because of the site's single (religious) function, and its lack of contamination from nearby structures or re-occupation. Such information has not survived in other Nabataean temples in Jordan and southern Syria, largely due to later re-use.

Over ten years were spent by an international multidisciplinary team, directed by Judith McKenzie, analysing the finds and records from Glueck's 1937 excavation and preparing them for publication in two extensively illustrated volumes, which appeared in 2013 (see publications below). The exceptional preservation of the evidence and its significance as a pilgrimage sanctuary make Khirbet et-Tannur of interest to those studying the deities, religious practice, architecture, sculpture, and iconography of the Hellenistic and Roman East.

The focus of the project has now moved to the presentation of the site in educational materials, and the online archiving McKenzie's drawings and photographs. Marlena Whiting (now at the University of Amsterdam) was awarded a Knowledge Exchange Fellowship (by TORCH, The Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities), held at Manar al-Athar in the Faculty of Classics, October 2014 – April 2015, followed by a CBRL (the Council for British Research in the Levant) Visiting Fellowship. She liaised with the UNESCO office in Amman, the French project at Khirbet edh-Dharrah, and the Semitic Museum at Harvard University over plans for tourist development of the site in an attempt to ensure that its presentation and preservation have an academically-informed basis. Whiting has prepared the first version of a video for use in the museums with material from the site. She and Hannah Wellman (University of Oregon) worked on a 48 page booklet presenting the site and its finds to the general public and students, assisted by Andres Reyes (Groton School, MA, and Wolfson College, Oxford), and Judith McKenzie. It was type-set by Groton student Hanna Kim and translated into Arabic by a former Groton student, originally from Aleppo, Diana Sayegh (University of Massachusetts Lowell). The booklet ('*A Gem of a Small Nabataean Temple*': *Excavations at Khirbet et-Tannur*) provides an accessible summary of the results published in more detail in J. S. McKenzie *et al.*, *The Nabataean Temple at Khirbet et-Tannur, Vol. 1 Architecture and Religion; Vol. 2 Cultic Offerings, Vessels, and Other Specialist Reports* (2013). The English language version of the booklet was published in October 2016. Besides print copies, pdfs of both

versions will be made available online. The results are also being used to inform the preparation of the new displays of the sculptures from the site in the Cincinnati Art Museum.

SUMMARY OF J. S. McKenzie, *et al.*, *The Nabataean Temple at Khirbet et-Tannur, Jordan, Vol. 1. Architecture and Religion* (2013).

The intellectual and historical milieu in which Glueck was working (in the pre-war years, during the Arab uprising) provided the background to his methodology. New reconstructions of the temple complex, improving on inconsistencies in those published by Glueck in *Deities and Dolphins* (1965) establish the spatial settings of the finds and cultic activities. The studies of the lamps, pottery, and glass provide more precise chronological information that has made it possible to date newly identified sub-phases, and so to track the growth and decline of worship at the temple. More evidence was detected for continuity from the Edomites (the Nabataeans' Iron Age predecessors). In addition, 4th-century use of the site by worshippers, rather than by 'squatters' (as previously assumed), was identified, clarifying the process leading to the cessation of worship and the A.D. 363 earthquake, when evidence was trapped.

The results were placed in a broader context of Nabataean religious practice and iconography. The design of the temple complex, which is unlike other Nabataean sanctuaries, was found to be most closely related to an Edomite forerunner, Horvat Qitmit, where similar types of offerings also survived. That the main god and goddess at Khirbet et-Tannur were worshipped through cult statues in figured form refutes the commonly held assumption that the Nabataeans, like their Jewish neighbours, had a prohibition against the representation of figures. Furthermore, the Nabataeans' nuanced understanding of figured sculpture is revealed by their sophisticated combinations of attributes of a variety of deities, and of personifications, including those of the Grain and Fish Goddesses now known to represent signs of the zodiac (Virgo and the personification of Pisces, rather than aspects of the goddess Atargatis), as discovered in the related temple at Khirbet edh-Dharih. These busts complement the well-known zodiac ring from the temple, whose two halves are in the Cincinnati Art Museum and the Jordan Museum, Amman.

Glueck assumed that the numerous busts decorating the Khirbet et-Tannur temple represented an eclectic mixture of eastern and western deities. However, this new study has determined the original location of its extensive architectural sculptures, revealing that these formed a cohesive decorative programme, reflecting the sanctuary's local religious role. It was focussed around a main god and goddess, and the heavenly bodies, which controlled seasonal rains and thus agricultural abundance. Aspects of the Egyptian god Serapis were detected in the cult statue of the god, in addition to Hadad and Zeus, previously identified. The goddess, whose attributes were found to include those of the Egyptian Isis, was apparently the supreme Nabataean goddess Allat (consort of the Nabataean god Dushara), rather than Syrian Atargatis. Reflecting her roles, the goddess was also represented as a unique version of Tyche (the goddess of Good Fortune) and as the goddess of the local spring in the famous Vegetation Goddess panel (featured in the new Jordan Museum in Amman).

The iconoclastic damage to the sculptures of Khirbet et-Tannur was examined for the first time. The re-evaluation of the phases made it possible to distinguish those sculptures which were buried in the AD 363 earthquake and those left exposed. Unlike the latter, those buried were not defaced, indicating that such damage was not done by the Nabataeans, but rather after AD 363. Analysis of the similar damage to sculptures at Petra, in the light of excavated evidence, revealed

that, contrary to what some scholars had suggested, iconoclastic damage there also was not done under Nabataean rule, but later, in about the 8th century, as in Khirbet Dharih.

SUMMARY OF J. S. McKenzie, *et al.*, *The Nabataean Temple at Khirbet et-Tannur, Jordan*, Vol. 2. *Cultic Offerings, Vessels, and Other Specialist Reports* (2013).

Edited versions of Glueck's excavation records, including his annotated excavation diary, were prepared for volume 2 of the report, in which they are followed by the specialist reports on the non-architectural finds. S. Witcher Kansa demonstrated that the animal bones include burnt offerings, such as cattle presented on the main altar, as well as sheep and goat. W. Wetterstrom (Harvard) identified not only species of carbonised grains in proportions indicative of their role as offerings, but also, surprisingly, discovered remains of burnt offering cakes. Examination of the corpus of pottery vessels by S. Schmid (Berlin) revealed that the types present were selected for ritual use and associated banqueting. These meals were accompanied by much drinking, as also evident from the glass beakers identified by M. O'Hea (Adelaide). Analysis of the lamps by D. Barrett (Harvard) suggested that the two most common Nabataean types (which are absent) were only used in domestic contexts. Others were made specifically for night-time rituals, which were also suggested the zodiac and other iconography. Chemical analysis of the glassware by N. Schibille (Oxford) and P. Degryse (Leuven) revealed that it was manufactured locally, largely with re-cycled glass, unlike in the metropolis of Petra. Re-examination of the inscriptions by J. Healey (Manchester) indicated a local focus, along with worship of the Edomite god Qos. On the other hand, A. T. Reyes found that the incense altars suggest pilgrims also came from further afield. Microstructural analysis of the iron door hinge by Brian Gilmour (Oxford) revealed that it is an exceptionally early example of ultra-high carbon steel (like that later used for Damascene swords), reflecting the use of expensive resources, when necessary, at what was clearly an important regional sanctuary.

## PUBLICATIONS

- J. McKenzie, "The Development of Nabataean Sculpture at Petra and Khirbet Tannur", *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, 1988, 81-107. [includes list of sculpture found at Petra until 1988, but the observations on the chronology and phases of Khirbet et-Tannur are out of date.]
- J. McKenzie, "Keys from Egypt and the East: Observations on Nabataean Culture in the Light of Recent Discoveries", *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, 324, 2001, 97-112.
- J. McKenzie, S. Gibson and A. T. Reyes, "Reconstruction of the Nabataean Temple Complex at Khirbet et-Tannur, Jordan", *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, 134, 2002, 44-83.
- J. McKenzie, A. T. Reyes and S. Gibson, "Khirbat at-Tannur in the ASOR Nelson Glueck Archive and the Reconstruction of the Temple", *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan*, 46, 2002, 451-476.
- J. McKenzie, "Carvings in the Desert: the Sculpture of Petra and Khirbet et-Tannur", in *Petra Rediscovered, Lost City of the Nabataeans*, ed. G. Markoe, 169-195 (New York 2003). [useful article on the development of Nabataean sculpture]
- J. McKenzie, A. T. Reyes and S. Gibson, "Khirbet et-Tannur Temple Complex", *CBRL 2003 Newsletter of the Council for British Research in the Levant*, 12-13.

- J. McKenzie, “Das Heiligtum von Khirbet et-Tannur und seine Skulpturen”, *Begleitbuch zur Ausstellung “Petra – Wunder in der Wüste. Auf den Spuren von J. L. Burckhardt alias Scheich Ibrahim”*, eds. E. van der Meijden and S. G. Schmid, 176-181 (Basel 2012) [brief summary].
- J. McKenzie, “Iconoclasm at Petra and other Nabataean Sites”, in *Studies on Nabataean Culture*, Volume 1, eds. N. Khairy and T. Weber, 1-25 (Amman 2013). [in Arabic; based on ch. 5 of *The Nabataean Temple at Khirbet et-Tannur, Jordan, Vol. 1. Architecture and Religion*, but with more photographs of examples at Petra].
- J. McKenzie, A. T. Reyes, and J. A. Greene, “The Context of the Khirbet et-Tannur Zodiac, Jordan”, *ARAM* 24, 2012 [2014] 379-420. [useful summary of the results in the full 2-volume report].
- J. S. McKenzie, J. A. Greene, A. T. Reyes, C. S. Alexander, D. G. Barrett, B. Gilmour, J. F. Healey, M. O’Hea, N. Schibille, S. G. Schmid, W. Wetterstrom, and S. Witcher Kansa; with contributions by K. da Costa, P. Degryse, K. Eremin, S. Gibson, O. Gingerich, and E. Khamis, ***The Nabataean Temple at Khirbet et-Tannur, Jordan, Vol. 1. Architecture and Religion, Final Report on Nelson Glueck’s 1937 Excavation***, *Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 67 (2013) (Manar al-Athar Monograph 1). (368 pages, 455 illustrations).
- J. S. McKenzie, J. A. Greene, A. T. Reyes, C. S. Alexander, D. G. Barrett, B. Gilmour, J. F. Healey, M. O’Hea, N. Schibille, S. G. Schmid, W. Wetterstrom, and S. Witcher Kansa; with contributions by K. da Costa, P. Degryse, K. Eremin, S. Gibson, O. Gingerich, and E. Khamis, ***The Nabataean Temple at Khirbet et-Tannur, Jordan, Vol. 2. Cultic Offerings, Vessels, and Other Specialist Reports. Final Report on Nelson Glueck’s 1937 Excavation***, *Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 68 (2013) (Manar al-Athar Monograph 2). (349 pages, 152 figures).  
[Reviews of both volumes: e.g., L. Nehmé, *Bryn Mawr Classical Review*, 24 June 2015; L. Tholbecq, *Topoi* 2014, 801-811; D.W. Roller, *American Journal of Archaeology* July 2016]
- M. Whiting and H. Wellman, ***‘A Gem of a Small Nabataean Temple’: Excavations at Khirbet et-Tannur in Jordan*** (Oxford 2016). [accessible summary of results].

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