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AT RISK CULTURAL HERITAGE: RESULTS OF A RESCUE EXCAVATION AT "WALI YOSHA" NORTH OF SHAWBAK IN SOUTHERN JORDAN

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to present the results of the rescue excavations conducted at the site of "Wali Yosha" north-east the Shawbak castle. It first presents a brief about the history and definition of Islamic shrines followed by a short introduction to the history of human settlements in the Shawbak area. The second part of the paper includes an introduction about the site and a discussion of the results of the rescue excavations and the archaeological finds. The pottery shards found at the site indicate that the principle period of occupation at Wali Yosha is the later Islamic period, mainly the Ayyubid-Mamluk (12th – 16th c. AD).

KEYWORDS: Yosha, Shawbak, Jordan, Shrine, Maqam, lamps, Ayyubid-Mamulk.

1. MUSLIM SHRINES: DEFINITION AND HISTORY

The idea of building a shrine is not strictly Islamic as shrines were known among and built by the followers of polytheistic and monotheistic faiths. The definition of a shrine is however variable and does not express the same meaning worldwide. While, for instance, the word shrine is applicable to portable and non-portable religious objects and features in many faiths, a shrine is a feature rather than an object in the Islamic world. Petersen (2018: 5) defines the shrine as "a material focus of religious activities". Nevertheless, he and other scholars (cited by Petersen, 2018) believe that this definition does not accurately reflect the true meaning of a shrine in the Islamic world. According to the fundamental teachings of Islam, three mosques can only be visited and travelled to for religious purposes: the grand mosque in Mecca, the prophet mosque in Medina and al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem. The prohibition is enormously embedded if the place, a shrine or a mosque, is associated with a grave. The prophet mosque is an exception in this regard as the place was his house and became afterwards a mosque. The fact that the prophet mosque includes his grave did not affect the faith of Muslims and the grand mosque in Mecca remained the most important religious place for all Muslims (Petersen, 2018: 5-7). For almost five centuries, shrines, in their current context and use, were not common in the Islamic state. Shrines were prohibited, particularly if associated with graves, but the "vast majority of Muslim shrines are associated with graves or presumed burial places of people considered to be exceptional in terms of piety, relationship to the prophet or other religiously important figures" (Petersen, 2018: 7). The shrine under discussion in this paper is of the common type which is usually built on a grave or the supposed burial place of a religiously important person. No attempt was made to build a shrine on a tomb for religious purpose before the tenth century AD, and the early examples were linked to the Shi'ism doctrine whose followers wanted to commemorate the great figures of the prophet's family (Petersen, 2018: 8). These shrines, particularly in Iraq, currently attract Shi'i Muslim visitors from all over the world. The appearance and spread of tomb-shrines or *maqamat* in the Islamic world is due to the political changes according to Petersen (2018: 9). The main change was the political break-up of the caliphate which became a real matter from the tenth century onwards. This situation led to the creation of new political units with regional or local cultural entities, and consequently enhanced their understanding of Islam on the account of the traditional central interpretation adopted by the cen-

tral political authority. Building shrines became increasingly widely accepted throughout the Islamic world from the twelfth century AD onward. The build-up of shrines on burial places, real or presumed, widely spread during the Mamluk period and continued during the ottoman period. The construction of shrines was not only restricted on the tombs or supposed burial places of Muslim religious figures but extended to include the assumed burial places of even biblical figures, namely the prophets and messengers of all religions. In Jordan, two shrines could be found for the same prophet but in two different places of the country. There are also the shrines or *maqamat* of the prophet's companions who died in Jordan during the early Islamic conquests in Kerak and in the Jordan valley. They do not necessarily have the real body of the deceased person and are associated with prayer space or a mosque.

2. THE HISTORY OF HUMAN SETTLEMENT IN SHAWBAK REGION

The name Shawbak originates from *šubk*; a Canaanite term Hebrew-derived for macchia or wilderness (Knauf-Belleri, 1995). The region of Shawbak was exploited from prehistoric times throughout the Late Antiquity (Shqiarat, 2018; Nucciotti, 2007; Rolffeson, 1981; 1985, Glueck, 1935, Bedour *et al.*, 2012). The plains of al-Fjaij revealed flint tools from the Paleolithic age indicating the existence of human community (Rolffeson, 1981; 1985).

This fact was confirmed by the discovery of new prehistoric sites near Badda on the lower slopes west of al-Fjaij plains and ridge (Milwright, 2007, Fuji, 2007, Shqiarat *et al.*, 2018). Human activities continued in and around Shawbak in the last period of the stone ages as indicated by the discovery of the Chalcolithic / Bronze Age burials better known as Dolmens (Dubis *et al.*, 2004; Shiyab *et al.* 2018). In the Iron Age (1200 - 539 B.C), Shawbak was almost in the heart of Edom. The surveys and excavations of Neil Smith around Shawbak uncovered several sites of this age, most of which agricultural settlement sites (Smith, 2005a 2005b, 2007; MacDonald, 1992). The continuity of human activities and flourish in the Hellenistic and Nabataean periods is unquestionable. Dozens of Nabataean-Roman sites were recorded in the hinterland of Shawbak (MacDonald, 1992, 2011, Findlater, 1998). The crusader castle at Shawbak is believed to have been built on the ruins of a Nabataean / Roman military structure due to its strategic location (Schmid, 2007).

The sites which flourished during the Nabataean period seem to have remained in use even after the annexation of Petra in AD 106 by Rome (Negev, 1977, Parker, 1986). Considerable portions of the

Roman highway via nova Traiana can be traced in different parts of Shawbak (Abudanah et al., 2017, 2015), and Najel is located as one of its stations according to the Tabula Peutingeriana (Levvi, 1967).

The most well preserved stretch of this road overlooks the site under discussion in this paper since it runs over the plains of al-Fjaij east of it (Fig.1).



Figure 1. The location of the site from the east.

In the byzantine and early Islamic period, Shawbak is not among the major sites but further investigations may prove otherwise. Nevertheless, the sites in the hinterland of Shawbak do have ceramic evidence from the Byzantine period. During the Crusader, Ayyubid and Mamluk periods. (c.a 1100 - 1517), subsequent of the sack of Jerusalem in 1099, the Franks marched south along the Wadi Araba. Having penetrated the Jabal al-Shara and al-Jabal, they secured their territories by erecting a network of fortifications including Shawbak castle around 1115 (Deschamps, 1939; Brown, 2010; Brown and Rielly, 2008-2009).

Following the decisive defeat of the crusaders by Salah ad-Din in AD 1187, the castles of al-Karak and Shawbak were capitulated in 1188 and most of Jordan became under the administration of one of Salah ad-Din's sons, who governed from Cairo (Walmsley, 2002: 520). In the Ayyubid-Mamluk period (late 12th - beginning of the 16th century), expansion of sedentary settlements seems to have taken place, and Shawbak had a significant cultural, political and commercial status. The architecture and plan of the crusader castle went through drastic changes and modifications during this period due to its continuous use, militarily and administratively.

The agricultural importance of Shawbak to the central power in the medieval period is beyond doubt. According to Abul Fida, the gardens around Shawbak produced apricots which were exported to Egypt (Abul Fida, 1840).

"It is a small town with many gardens. Most of its inhabitants are Christians.... waters run through the town and irrigate the gardens, which are in a valley to the west (sic) of the town. The fruits grown here are the apricot and others, which are most excellent in flavor, and are exported even to Egypt".

Agricultural production was based on the staple triad of wheat, olives and grapes, which yielded commodities of flour, oil, and dried fruit, as well as wine (William of

Tyre, 1976 .1.506-507). Under the patronage of al-Mu'azzam Isa trees were brought from other districts resembling Shawbak to the gardens of Damascus (Ibn Shadad, 1963). The region of intensive cultivations may be identified at Abu Makhtoub and al-Bustan, east and northeast of the castle where the "Wali Yosha" is located (Milwright, 2007).

In 1341 Aqsunqur, the na'ib of Gaza, ordered sacks of barley and 4,000 head of sheep to be sent from Shawbak to Gaza (Maqrizi, 1934-72). As in the medieval period the local population traded their wool, hides, and butter with Gaza as well in the 19th century (Burckhardt, 1822:405). After the Mamluks were defeated in AD 1516, the rule of Transjordan passed to the Ottoman sultans for almost 400 years. Southern Jordan was part of the province of Syria. In practice, however, the hold of the Ottoman central authority of southern Jordan was weak after the 16th century until the administrative reforms of the mid-19th century (Van der Steen, 2004: 451). Although the Early Ottoman period is yet poorly known archaeo-

logically, many villages in the ash-Sharah region appear to have continuously existed at the more or less same location from the Ayyubid-Mamluk period to the 19 century ('Amr *et al.*, 1998; 'Amr & al-Momani, 2000; 'Amr *et al.*, 2001). This fact supports the argument that our site was used for at least a short period during the Ottoman period. A large number of thick handmade pottery shards with coarse fabric and organic temper have been found on the ledges of the northeast summit of Jabal Harûn and at the foot of the cliffs (Frosen and Miettunen, 2008). The sherds are sometimes painted with black or red geometric decoration or have a reddish slip. The painted shards can be identified as Ayyubid-Mamluk pottery, or early hand-made painted pottery, which dates to the 11 - 13 centuries (Hendrix *et al.*, 1997: 289-306; Khadija, 1992: 345-356). French team from IFPO surveyed the area around Shawbak in 2003-2006 over three campaigns and discovered traces of the burgus below the castle hill and the remains of several watch-

towers and structures connecting Shawbak with the Petra and Wadi Musa area (Devais *et al.*, 2012). Recently, a team from the University of Florence has also engaged study of the structures in Shawbak Castle (Nucciotti, 2007).

By the end of the nineteenth century, an Ottoman garrison of twenty-five men was reestablished at Shawbak castle, where a large village population also resided (Hill, 1897). Recent study by (Abu al-Sha'ar, 2012) gives an idea about all the residents of Shawbak who were farmers, and that in 1913 there were 236 households with 1083 population, both men and woman.

3. THE NEW SITE AT SHAWBAK

The site situated in Abu Makhtub village about two kilometers to the north of Shawbak castle, and about the same distance west of al-Fujaij plains (Fig. 2).



Figure 2. Ariel view showing the site location. The modern roads run to the north villages; al-Muqarieh and al-Mansurah (source: Google Earth).

As a part of Jabal al-Shara mountains, the area is characterized by a moderately semiarid Mediterranean climate (Kürschner, 1986:49). The site is 1133 meters above sea level and its UTM coordinate is 36 R 0747616 UTM 3381120. It also lies near the controversial site of Abu Sulaiman Al-Dyrany; another *Wali*.

The name of the site is controversial and it is still unclear if it is related to Joshua site at Salt in the north of Jordan. The local people of the village provide another name which contradicts the first suggestion (*Wali Yoshua*) (Fig.3). It is highly unlikely that this site is related to Joshua because there are many

Maqam sites in the Western Bank with the same name which indicate that the site name may have changed through ages and ended with some similarities to Joshua. Another evidence which deny any connection with Joshua is that the site and its surrounding region did not reveal any datable materials from the Iron Ages. It is likely that the site is named after Joshua the prophet as a way to get the glad tidings from God. This in fact explains the multiplicity of shrines of one prophet or *Wali* in different places. In other words, the local community or more accurately the builders of the shrine seeks the blessings and honour of the name.



Figure 3. Part of the shrine in 1984. Medieval Arabic inscriptions and decorations appear in the foreground of the photo. The local people of the village used to visit the site and usually they put green clothes (photo by courtesy of Ammar Khammash).

The site covers an area of less than 500 square meters on a hillside overlooking the village from the north. The exact area of the buildings is not clear because of the possible removal of part of the western structures by the construction of the modern road (see Fig.1- 2).

The site consists of two levels, the upper level (level A) and the lower level (level B). Level A con-

sists of the Islamic structures with L-shape and consists of three rooms in the western part adjacent to the modern road whereas the southern part consists of one room with an arched roof. The upper part of the site is destroyed and only the arched room can be seen clearly, and the western part near the road is destroyed as well (Fig. 4-5).



Figure 4. Arch structure at the site before collapsing.

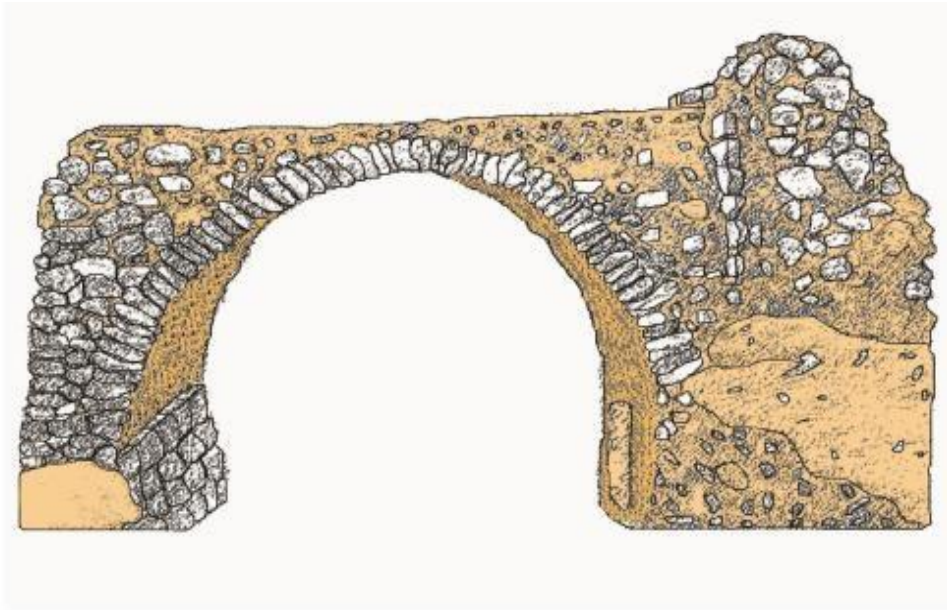


Figure 5. Drawing of the arch, looking south.

It is most likely that the upper part can be dated to the late Islamic period / Ayyubid- Mamluk period. This date is supported by the type of material uncovered during the excavation from the stratified layers such as pottery and Islamic inscriptions. This

part of the site was renovated and reused during the Ottoman period as indicated by the use of juniper trees for the roofing and other material culture such as beads and jewelry (Fig.6).



Figure 6. Ottoman bead and jewelry.

The lower level (B) of the site lies below the upper level and connected with it by a stairway carved in the bed rock and consists of 12 steps. This part is mainly consisting of a cave lies below the upper level and covers about 12 cubic/square meters and another small room measuring two by two meters which

was built outside the cave door (Fig.7). This small room has another door in its eastern wall leads to a narrow corridor of one meter width and orienting east to meet the stairway (Fig. 8). The type of structures in the lower part indicates that this part of the site is dated to the crusaders period.



Figure 7. Medieval gateways at the lower part of the site.



Figure 8. Medieval gateway between two structures.

3.1 EXCAVATIONS

This is the first archeological work at this site and no previous work has been done to record or preserve its structures. The site was divided into two areas. The first area consisted of the upper part (part A) where four trenches of four by four meters were excavated (Fig.9).

The first trench was filled with the collapsed walls and roof of the structure (Fig.10). For this reason, this trench did not reveal any stratified layers which can be used to understand the chronology of occupation precisely. However, this trench revealed some pottery and glass sherds which indicate a late Islamic occupation at this part of the site.

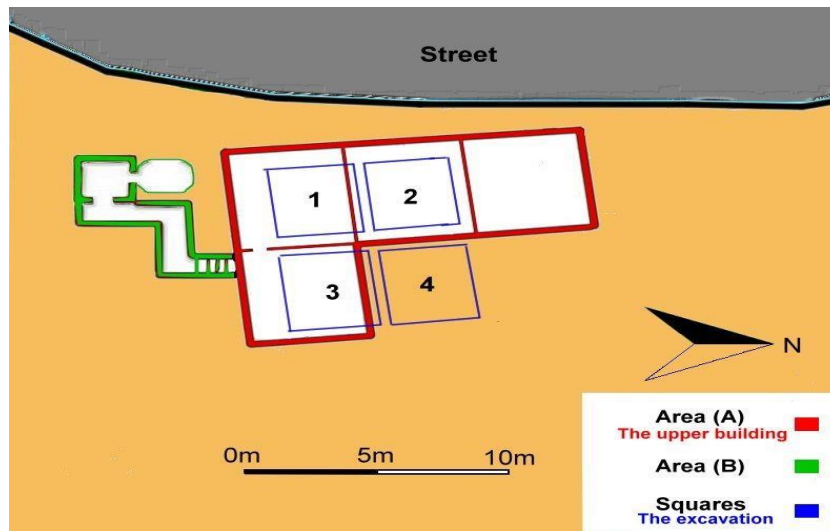


Figure 9. Top plan of the site and the excavated areas.

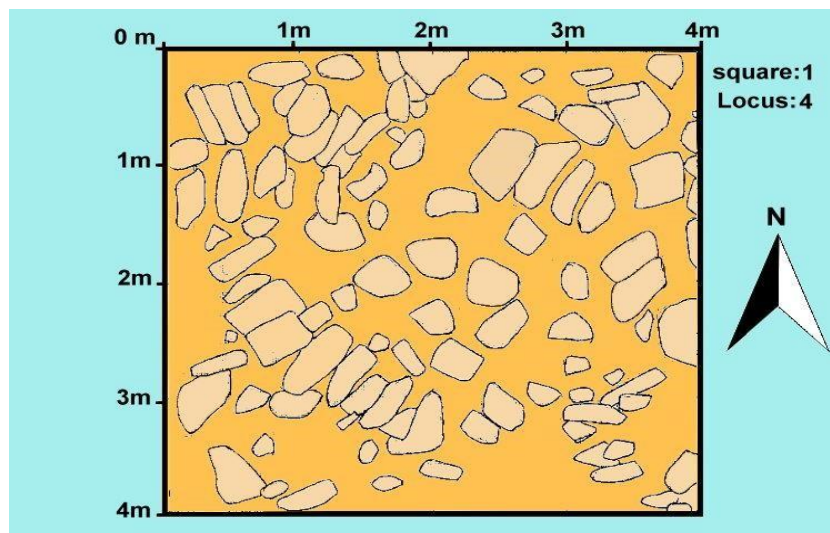


Figure 10. Collapsed stones in square number 1.

The lower courses of the structure walls were also uncovered. The second trench is similar to the first one and revealed similar materials. The third trench is located below the main arch at the site which is preserved in a better case than the area of the first two trenches. Five occupational layers were excavated at this trench. The first three of them revealed modern top soil and rubbles while the fourth and fifth layers uncovered materials of different Islamic phases of the late Islamic periods including the Ayyubid-Mamluk and the Ottoman. These finds include pottery and glass sherds and Islamic inscriptions. A modern burial was also excavated at this trench dated to the early twentieth century and was covered with stones and juniper beams. It is believed that this burial was for someone significant from the village such as a tribal leader who was buried under the shade of the arch on this high ground.

At Shawbak, Brown obtained pottery wares specific to the 12th and early 13th century, covering the historically documented Crusader and Early Ayyubid periods (Brown, 1987:287; 1988:232; Foucher de Chartres, 1969: 146- 147). In addition to a locally produced, hand-made and undecorated ware, decorations of simple linear, followed by Chris-cross and eventually geometrical patterns were developed. Of the geometrically decorated ware of the later Mamluk style only a few were recorded at Shawbak and al-Wu'eira (Brown, 1987:284; 1989: 229). Vannini and Desideri confirmed Brown's results concerning the pottery finds at al-Wu'ayra where a sequence of a plain to painted coarse ware of the 12th and early 13th century has been uncovered, all of which was produced by barely specialized craftsmen in the neighborhood of al-Wu'eira (Vannini and Desideri, 1995: 535-538; Vannini and Tonghini, 1997).

The fourth trench at the upper part of the site revealed ten stratified layers; the upper three are modern top soil starting from the early twentieth century (Fig.11). The fourth and fifth layers were dated to the

Ottoman period according to the pottery sherds which were found there.

Three modern burials were also found at the fourth and fifth layers dated to the early twentieth century (Fig.12).

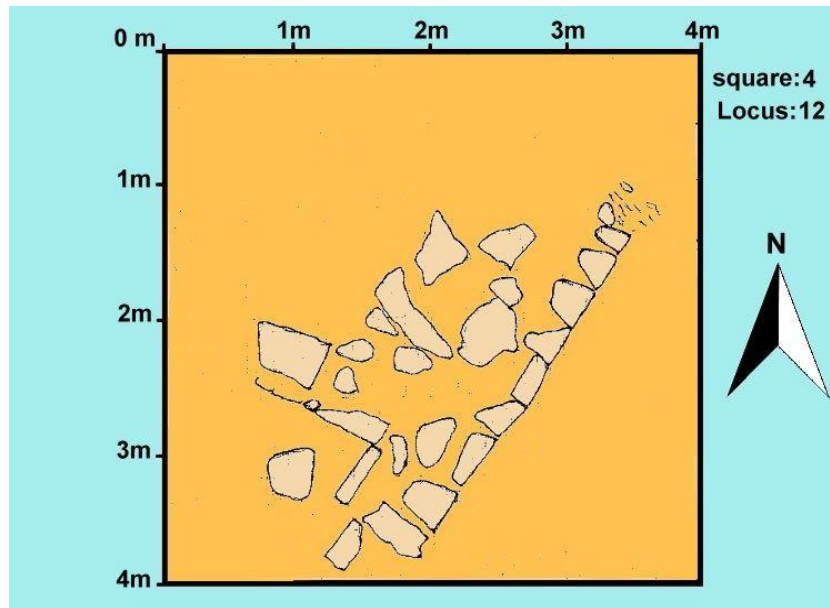


Figure 11. Possible wall foundations in square number 4.



Figure 12. Burial without any preparation. The date cannot be accurately specified.

The first one is covered with slap stones and timber, which seem to have been taken from the rail line (Fig. 13), while the burial sides stands up to 15 centimeters high. The other two burials accommodated

a female (Fig.14) and a child while the first burial reveals a male skeleton which indicate that these burials are for a family.



Figure 13. Burial covered with slab stones and juniper timber. The date cannot be accurately specified but the orientation of the grave is Islamic.



Figure 14. A burial of a woman with disarticulated bones inside. The date cannot be accurately specified but the orientation of the grave is Islamic.

An Islamic inscriptions dated to the late Islamic period were found in this level with the burials which may indicate that they were intentionally carried by the local people and left with the burial without any knowledge of the writing subject. The Islamic epigraphy from the castle of Shawbak were

previously studied (see Brünnow and Domaszewski, 1904; 1944; Millwright, 2008; Gawanmah, 1979; Momani, 1988; Kennedy, 2008) but it is the first time to find Arabic inscriptions outside the castle, some of these inscriptions written on marble (Fig.15a,b,c).

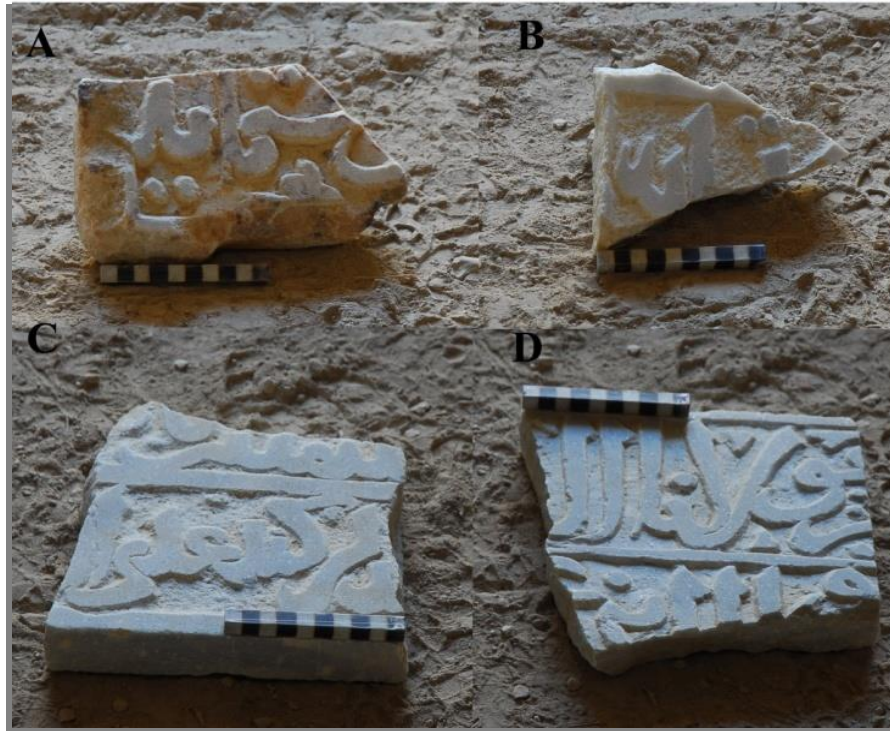


Figure 15a. fragments of medieval Arabic inscriptions on marble plates.

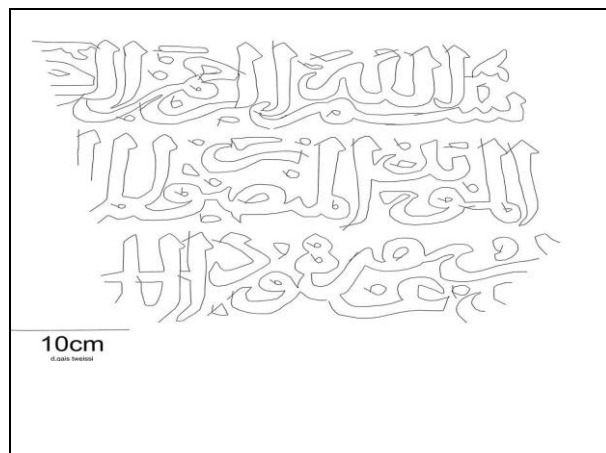


Figure 15b. Medieval Arabic inscription.

First line: "In the name of Allah, the most gracious, the most merciful

Second line: "the supported, the advocator, the king...".

Third line: "... his glory...".

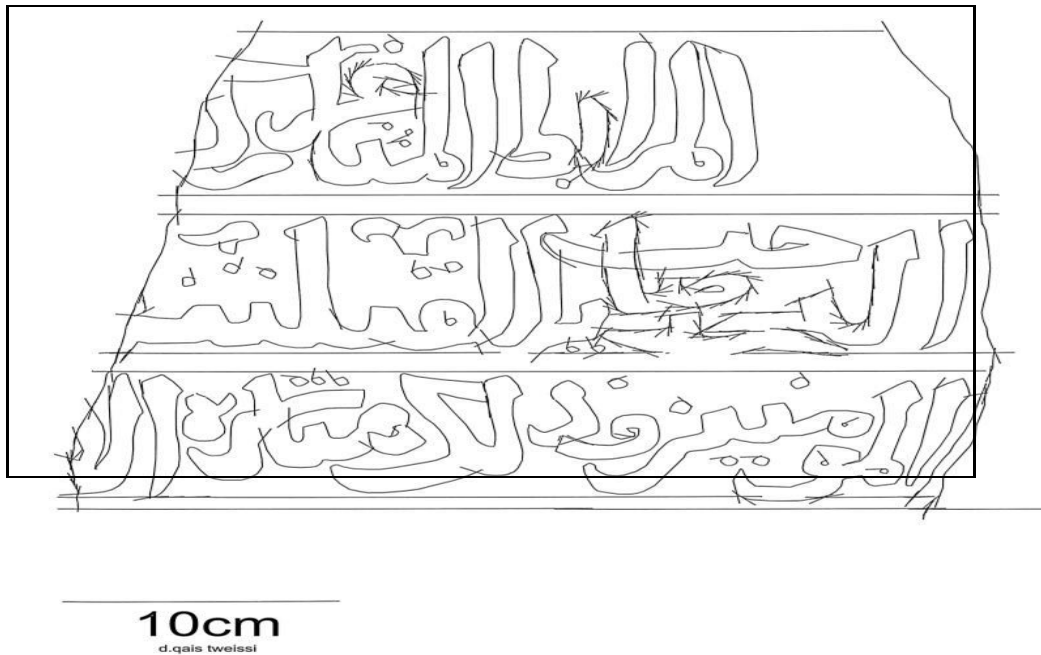


Figure 15c. Medieval Arabic inscription.

First line: "the warrior (who carefully watches the enemy). The blessed..

Second line: "the two seas. The owner of the two Kiblahs (Jerusalem and Mecca)...

Third line: "the believers and this the start of..."

Layers nine and ten uncovered possible Roman/Byzantine wall bases with Roman/Byzantine pottery shards and a Greek inscription found against. Only three letters can be seen, and only one of them with absolute certainty can be identified, the alpha in the middle. The first letter seems to be an epsilon and the last a gamma or an iota.

The autopsy could confirm that the first is not a chi and the last not a pi nor a mu. The letters are quite large (6,5 cm high). The fragment seems to belong to a building inscription of a church or a chapel. This could be a small part of its name

TOY AI[IOY 'of the Saint' + name. According to the style of the letters, it could be dated to the fifth-sixth century AD, but not with certainty (Fig. 16).

This possible Byzantine structure lies below the Islamic structures towards the south and south west and to the east and built of well dressed stones. The existence of a religious structure from the Byzantine period at the same spot is not unexpected at this site. At Petra, for instance, the shrine of Aaron built above the remnants of a Byzantine church. The travelers who visited the site in the 19th century found a cross carved on a stone and a Greek inscription, and they consequently concluded that the *maqam* was built on the remains of a Byzantine shrine, all relevant to Byzantine martyrdom culture (Wilson, 1900: 73; MacDonald, 2000: 70; Merantzas 2015).



Figure 16. Fragment of a Greek inscription.

The second level (Level B) at the site was not divided into excavation trenches but the stairway (Fig.17), room and the cave were cleaned and late Islamic finds such as pottery shards including lamps (Fig. 18), and glass were found.

No indications of any external buildings in the vicinity of the shrine were noticed. There is no evidence of any damming of the Wadi adjacent to the shrine. A series of *thamail* or holes were dug in the Wadi sands or pebbles to find fresh water. This sys-

tem appears to have been in use since at least since the early Islamic period. It is clearly described by Al-Maqdissi in his journey which he finished in the year 985 A.D. He reported this method of obtaining water after his description of 'Aqaba (Ailah) but before he mentioned Bayir and its wells (Al-Maqddasi, 1967: 253, 250, Tarawneh et al., 2012). There is no reason to suspect that such *thamail* were not in use when the shrine was constructed and first occupied.

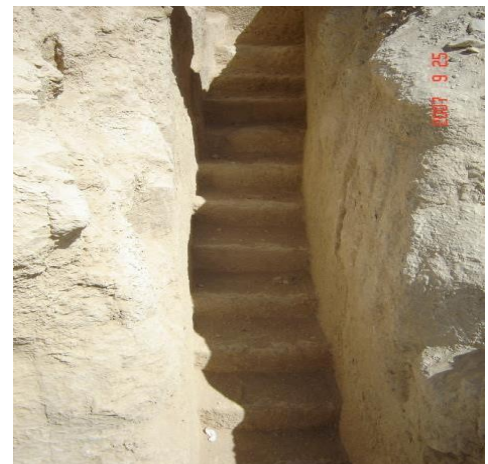


Figure 17. Stairway leading to the lower part of the shrine.



Figure 18. Late Islamic hand-made pottery including lamps, plate, and bowls.

4. CONCLUSION

The excavated site was occupied during several periods and it is likely that the latest phase of occupation at the site probably associated with the Ayyubid-Mamluk pottery. Excavations have revealed various type of evidence including pottery, numismatics, and epigraphic, which date more closely the foundation of the shrine to the Ayyubid-Mamluk period. The excavations have extended our understanding of the architecture of the site which is comparable to some periods in southern Jordan. Surface collection of pottery suggests that the main occupation of the building occurred in the late Islamic period (Ayyubid-Mamluk) period. The study of the surrounding areas of the shrine has not revealed a water source for the site with the exception of modern *thamail* in the adjacent Wadi of Abu Makhtub to the east. A cistern for collecting rain water has been uncovered within the vicinity of the site, and this answers the vital question of how the site was provided with water. However, near the basin of Abu Makhtub there are a number of springs and seeps which support agriculture. Since these water sources are more than 150m below the sites elevation, and approximately 2.5 km away down slope, the inhab-

itants of the site had most probably used the *thamail* to sustain their water needs.

The late Islamic occupation at the shrine was due to the reuse of the former buildings and take advantage of the cave. The location of the site and its structures may indicate that they were most likely used for the same function which is more likely cultic purpose in the late Islamic and in the previous occupation periods at the site. The first occupation at the site seems to have taken advantage of the cave which saved time and working power for them as well as profiting from its hidden location which is wanted sometimes in the cultic places. The site location on the flank of a rocky mountain was also possible to profit from the close location of the raw material used in building. In addition, the close distance between the site and castle may also shed some light on the type of life during the crusader and Islamic periods which indicate that the areas around the castle were occupied during the peaceful times particularly for agricultural activities and possibly cultic practices.

It is well known until these days that some buildings were used as *Wali* shrines or sites where a small building similar to a shrine was built for the memory of a prophet or someone important, such as leaders

or warriors. This type of sites is known throughout Jordan such as Jabal Haroun (Mount Aron) near Petra (Al-Salameen and Falahat, 2007; 2009, al-Nasarat, 2013) and Al-Harith Bin 'Omair near Tafila in southern Jordan.

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