Originalveröffentlichung in: Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan 10, 2009, S. 577-584

Robert Wenning
Institut für Altorientalische Philologie und
Vorderasiatische Altertumskunde
University of Muenster
robwenn@uni-muenster.de

Robert Wenning

The Message of the Khirbat at-Tannūr Reliefs

The Nabataean sanctuary of Khirbat at-Tannūr at the northern limit of Edom high above the Wādī al-Ḥasā was excavated by Nelson Glueck in 1937 and became more famous by his book "Deities and Dolphins", published in 1965. People were fascinated by the richness and the style of the sculptural decoration of the sanctuary. Glueck's book had a great impact on the research on the Nabataeans. A few years ago Judith McKenzie, Sheila Gibson and Andres T. Reyes published several important articles on Khirbat at-Tannūr (McKenzie, Reyes and Schmidt-Colinet 1998; McKenzie 2001; McKenzie, Gibson and Reyes 2002; McKenzie, Reyes and Gibson 2002; McKenzie 2003). Their re-examination of the evidence has led to a new reconstruction of the sanctuary and a revised chronology, as well as new interpretations of the sculpture. I largely agree with them and take their results as the starting point for further considerations. My own study of astral belief among the Nabataeans likewise focuses on the Khirbat at-Tannūr sculptures and has resulted in some new ideas presented first in a lecture during a conference of the Deutscher Palaestina-Verein 2006 and at the Washington ICHAJ 10.

Khirbat at-Tannūr and the nearby Khirbat adh-Dharīḥ were founded by the Nabataeans, but the monumental extension of the sanctuaries at both sites took place in the first half of the second century AD (McKenzie, Gibson and Reyes 2002: 50, 72-73; Villeneuve and Muheisen 2000: 1535; cf. the *lupa Romana* Villeneuve 2002), that is the early phase of the new Provincia Arabia. The subject of the frieze of the Qaṣr adh-Dharīḥ, excavated by François Villeneuve and Zeidun al-Muheisen, was recognized in 1999 by the bust of Libra with a balance as busts of the zodiac figures in alternation with standing Nike figures (Villeneuve and Muheisen 2000, 2003). Preserved are the busts of Taurus, the Gemini, Cancer, Libra and a fragment of Sagittarius and some Nike figures. The identification of the busts is facilitated by their crowning attributes, such as the horns on the bust of Taurus.

The Zodiac

Basing on such attributes Judith McKenzie elaborated on the zodiac approach and gave a new interpretation of the so-called Dolphin Goddess from Khirbat at-Tannūr (Glueck 1965: 315-319 pls. 1-2; McKenzie 2003: fig. 192). Nelson Glueck understood this bust as a representation of the Syrian goddess Atargatis. This relief was the corner-stone of his interpretation of the entire decorative programme of Khirbat at-Tannūr. McKenzie correctly demonstrated that the marine creatures in the hair of the bust are clearly fish, and no dolphins, identical to the fishes in the zodiac (McKenzie 2001: 109; McKenzie, Gibson and Reyes 2002: 76-77). The counterpart of the bust with the fish is a female bust with ears of grain in the hair (Glueck 1965: 315-318 pls. 25-26, so-called Grain Goddess; McKenzie 2003: fig. 191). McKenzie identified the two busts as zodiac signs, Virgo and Pisces, already suggested by Starcky 1968: 132. The busts decorated the outer pilasters of platform III (McKenzie 2003: fig. 188), which is about a century later than the main phase of the sanctuary. There are five other panels with busts above the zodiac busts, but they follow a more simple formula (Glueck 1965: pls. 27-28). Clearly, the two zodiac panels are emphasized. This seems to be a citation of a composition found among the sculptures of the older phase of the sanctuary.

The famous zodiac (Glueck 1952, 1965: 395ff. pls. 46-48; McKenzie 2001: 108-109; Rosenthal-Heginbottom 2001; McKenzie 2003: 186-191) is said to be contemporary with the older main phase

of the sanctuary or a little bit later for stylistic reasons, but whose original place in the sanctuary is unknown. The zodiac roundel with a bust of a female deity in its middle is carried by a Nike (FIG. 1). In comparison with other zodiacs (cf. Gundel 1992) the arrangement of the signs at the at-Tannūr zodiac differs from the usual sequence. It starts at the top with the bust of Aries, runs down to Virgo in the left half, then turns back to the top to Libra and runs down to Pisces in the right half (FIG. 2). To explain this peculiarity the two halves have been interpreted as the civil year beginning with the month Nisan on the left and the normal year beginning with Tishri on the right (Glueck 1965: 413-415). This presumed blending and integration of two calendars and two different New Year festivals side by side is questioned only by Starcky 1968: 232 (cf. Gundel 1992: 106, 222). McKenzie 2001: 108-109 supposed Egyptian influence. There are Egyptian parallels for a divided zodiac, but, significantly, none for a divided zodiac ring nor for a change of sequence of zodiacs.

1. Completed relief of Nike with Zodiac. ʻAmmān, Jordan Archaeological Museum and Cincinnati Art Museum. Markoe 2003: fig. 199, Courtesy the Cincinnati Art Museum.

Indeed, another interpretation seems to be possible as the new photographs in Markoe 2003: figs. 197-199 allow a better interpretation. Not only is the sequence of the signs unusual, but also the iconography of various signs as busts (for a list of Nabataean busts at Petra cf. Wenning 2004). The zodiac is organized in pairs, the most prominent ones being the two on top. Aries and Libra indicate the spring and the autumn equinox, and East and West. In Babylonian mythology the ram is connected with the moon, the scales with the sun (cf. Papke 1993: 62, 200, 234), and their moon and sun are male deities. That might explain why Aries is here pictured as a male bust, wrongly interpreted by Glueck 1965: 415-416 as bust of Athena (opposed by Starcky 1968: 231-232).

At first glance it may seem far-fetched to bring in Babylonian models as an explanation, but one must consider that Hellenistic-Roman world was thoroughly acquainted with Babylonian astronomy. That's true for the Nabataeans too, as at least a few pieces of evidence demonstrate. Convincingly, the two masks in the frieze of the Tomb with the Armour (Br. 649) at Petra and the masks of some tombs at Hegra are interpreted as a representation of the beheaded Sumerian-Babylonian demon Humbaba (McKenzie, Reyes and Schmidt-Colinet 1998). I know of another head of Humbaba in a figural capital found at Petra, still unpublished.

It must have been the intention to bring Aries and Libra together at the top of the zodiac, otherwise Pisces would have been next to Aries. This intervention into the sequence of the signs resulted in the unusual two halves of the zodiac. There is a second emphasis in the composition. The new arrangement of the signs of the zodiac brings Virgo and Pisces to the bottom of the ring as counterpart to the pair at top. While Aries and Libra as moon and sun indicate cosmic features, the sphere above the earth, Virgo and Pisces are related directly to the earth itself and its fertility. Virgo holds ears of grain (cf. the Semitic name for Virgo "ear", Arabic

2. Zodiac with bust of the local female deity as Tyche. Cincinnati Art Museum. Markoe 2003: fig. 198, Courtesy the Cincinnati Art Museum.

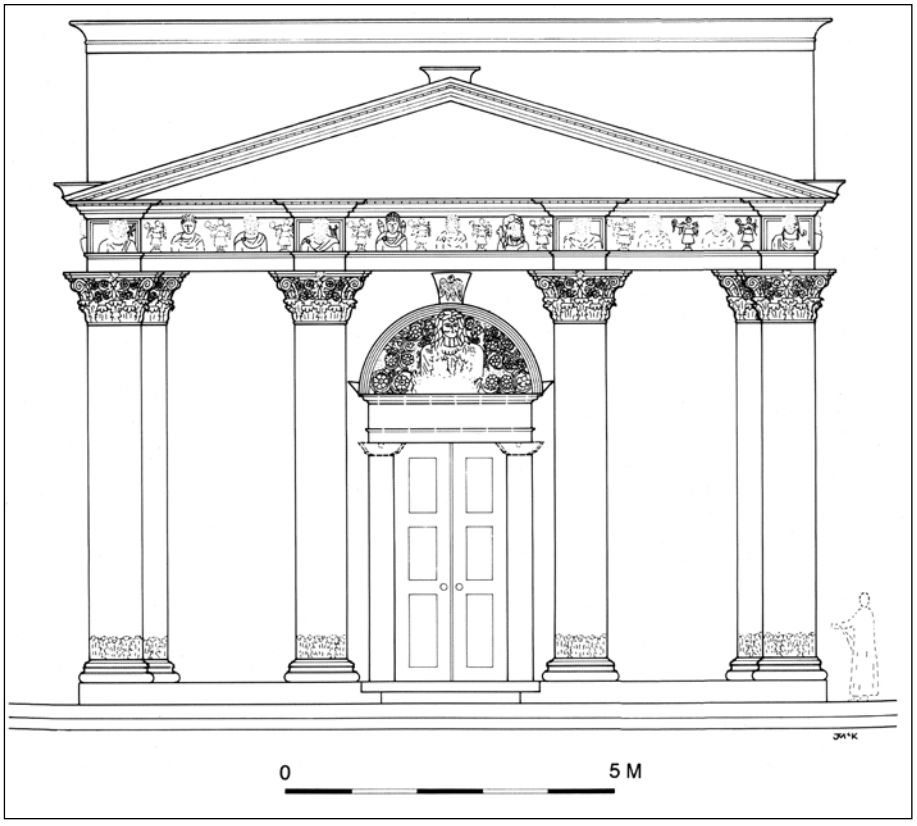
"sunbul"; kind information by F. Villeneuve) and the fishes symbolize the living water.

Therefore, I believe that the composition does not follow two calendars, but expounds local aspects of agricultural fertility of the land as a gift by the local deities within a larger cosmological conception. Some further arguments can confirm this interpretation. In the middle of the zodiac ring there is the bust of a female deity, *capite velato* and with mural crown, a Tyche as tutelary deity. Behind her left shoulder projects a double sceptre crowned with the cone of pine and the crescent moon. It is not a *semeion* as it is often called. Another crescent moon is added in the field opposite above her right shoulder. The identity of the deity is explained below, as it is revealed thanks to the frieze of the temple — what matters now is that the double crescent moon indicates the celestial reign of the deity. Embedded into the zodiac with its stars and the pronounced position of Aries and Libra, the monument reflects a cosmological programme.

The Frieze

The frieze of the temple of Khirbat at-Tannūr represents a programme that closely corresponds to this. Glueck 1945: 184 suggested a frieze of the seven planetary deities, but was not able to reconstruct such a frieze. A solution came only with the frieze of the Qaṣr adh-Dharīḥ with the alternation of zodiac busts and standing Nike figures and gave the idea for such a reconstruction of this frieze as well, suggested first by Laurent Tholbecq. The reconstruction of the façade of the temple by McKenzie (McKenzie, Gibson and Reyes 2002: 56-65 fig. 13) is convincing (FIG. 3), although the position of the deities in the frieze is debatable. Three busts of planetary deities are placed in the middle intercolumnium of the frieze, two busts at the outer intercolumnia. Each bust is framed by Nike figures, adding up to ten Nike figures. These unframed blocks belonging to the frieze are discussed by McKenzie (McKenzie, Gibson and Reyes 2002: 59-63; McKenzie, Reyes and Gibson 2002: 460-461) and do not require more detail here. The best-preserved blocks are those of Sol, Jupiter and Saturn.

Beside the busts of the planetary deities and the Nike figures there are four busts in framed panels directly above the half-columns. These four panels allow further consideration of the composition. The two middle panels were identified by Glueck as Mercury (Glueck 1965: 228, 467-468 pls. 146a-b), but one is representing Apollo with a small kithara behind his left shoulder (Starcky 1968: 233; McKenzie, Gibson and Reyes 2002: 60), the other the



3. Elevation of façade of inner temple enclosure, Period II (reconstruction J. McKenzie). Markoe 2003: fig. 180, Courtesy the Cincinnati Art Museum.

moon god (FIG. 4), as the rest of the crescent moon above the shoulders proves (cf. Roche 1990: figs. 4-5). This panel seems to be unfinished. Unlike to the moon goddess (Luna) among the planetary deities, this is a male moon god as in the composition of the zodiac. Apollo is a god of light representing the sun, a well-known feature for this god. He is the counterpart of the moon god. That means, sun and moon are again emphasized.

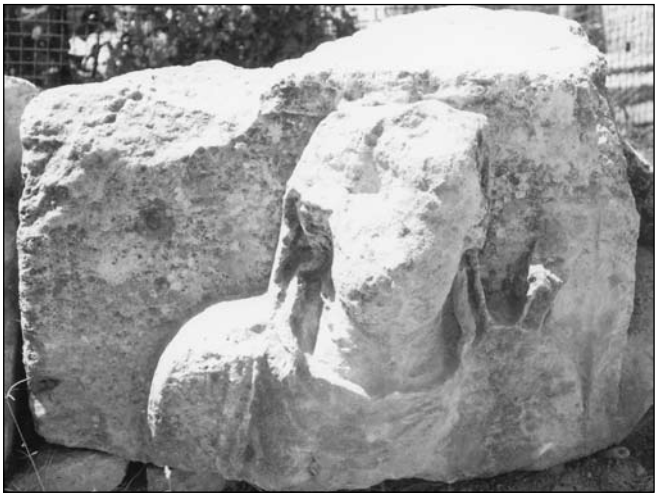
The two outer panels depict the deities of the temple itself (Glueck 1965: 411 pls. 56, Zeus-Hadad-Jupiter; 396, 411 pl. 53a, Tyche with lyre; McKenzie, Gibson and Reyes 2002: 59-60). Again, a clarification of the shown deities is necessary. On the left a bust of Zeus is shown with a thunderbolt behind his left shoulder (FIG. 5). He is to be compared with the male deity of the relief of the cult figures where this deity is depicted as a mixture of the Syrian Hadad and the Greek Zeus (Glueck

4. Panel from the frieze. Bust of the moon god. ʻAmmān, Jordan Archaeological Museum. Photo by R. Wenning, Courtesy Department of Antiquties, Amman, Jordan.

5. Panel from the frieze, Bust of the local male deity in a Zeus type. ʻAmmān, Jordan Archaeological Museum. Photo by R. Wenning, Courtesy Department of Antiquties, ʻAmmān, Jordan.

1965: pls. 41-42; McKenzie, Gibson and Reyes 2002: 74; Markoe 2003: fig. 40). The cult figure accompanied by two bulls follows rather Syrian models, while the bust in the frieze is closer to Greek models. But there are connections between the two. For instance, both wear unusual torques around their necks. The local deity behind these Zeus types is probably Qos, to whom a dedication was discovered on site (Savignac 1937: 408-409 no. 2; McKenzie 2003: fig. 196). Although this is the only clear indication of a venerated deity at Khirbat at-Tannūr beside the sculpture at all, and although it could be, that this dedication has nothing to do with the deities of the temple at all, it makes sense that the sanctuary at Khirbat at-Tannūr could have been devoted to the Edomite Qaus whose cult continued among the Nabataeans and Idumaeans as Qos through the Hellenistic-Roman period. Hadad, Qos, Zeus and even Dushara all more or less share the same iconographic type of weather and fertility deities.

The counterpart of Zeus in the frieze on the outer right depicts a female deity *capite velato* and holding a double sceptre (FIG. 6). She can be recognized as Hera, the wife of Zeus. Like Zeus she bears a torques. Hera is much less common in the Levante, but when she is pictured she sometimes holds ears of grain and points to the fertility of the country as the female deity of this temple. The female *paredros* of the Zeus type deity is depicted in a smaller relief which could reflect the cult figure again as a Syrian-Greek composite (Glueck 1965: pls. 44, 161b; McKenzie, Gibson and Reyes 2002: 74; McKenzie 2003: figs. 195, 193) and has been identified by Glueck as Atargatis, based on the Syrian type of the cult figure seated on a throne accompanied by lions. But since the Syrian "Hadad" is probably not Hadad, the Syrian "Atargatis" could easily represent a local deity other than Atargatis. Nevertheless, Atargatis as an eastern appearance of Hera remains a possibility. Lucian, De Dea Syria 32 describes the Dea Syria as a very complex syncretistic construct (cf. Hörig 1979). If one prefers to call the female deity of Khirbat at-Tannūr Atargatis, one has at least to modify the common interpretation. She is not the Fish- or Dolphin Goddess, and not necessary an Aphrodite type, but a matron, a tutelary deity, and a goddess of fate and fertility. But for now one should refrain from labelling her at all. Instead of speculation about names the identification of the female deity as a Hera type is of great importance and must define the direction of interpretation for the moment.



6. Panel from the frieze, Bust of the local female deity in a Hera type. ʻAmmān, Jordan Archaeological Museum. Photo by R. Wenning, Courtesy Department of Antiquties, ʻAmmān, Jordan.

The same couple of Zeus and Hera type deities is depicted once again in two smaller panels of the entrance either to the temple or to the Temenos (Glueck 1965: 467 pl. 153b, Hermes-Mercury, and 207 pl. 45a, Tyche) and underlines the given interpretation. The Zeus this time is identical with the Jupiter of the planetary deity from the frieze (the same type is found in Petra in Markoe 2003: fig. 3; Roche 2001: 355 no. 18), while the Hera is identical with the Hera of the framed corner panel. Once again, the same local goddess in the Hera type is to be identified in the middle of the zodiac discussed above.

The panels of the corner pilasters of the frieze are decorated with a bust at the outer long sides as well, which is unusual. Here a Tyche figure with the horn of plenty (FIG. 7) is depicted (Glueck pls. 55, 53b, Dionysus; McKenzie, Gibson and Reyes 2002: 59-60). Such reliefs with Tyche figures are common in Nabataean art, often as reliefs above the framing half-columns. Here the number of planetary deities, Nikes, Zeus and Hera, and Apollo and the moon god left no space to show them up in their usual position. These figures do not represent the Tyche in the sense of a city goddess as they lack the particular attributes needed for such an identification and they are not temple deities, but rather symbolise the blessing, wealth, fertility, and protection guaranteed by the venerated temple deities. For convenience, I call them Tyche figures. It is important to note that they are placed next to the

7. Panel from the frieze, but at lateral side, Bust of a Tyche figure. ʻAmmān, Jordan Archaeological Museum. Photo by R. Wenning, Courtesy Department of Antiquties, ʻAmmān, Jordan.

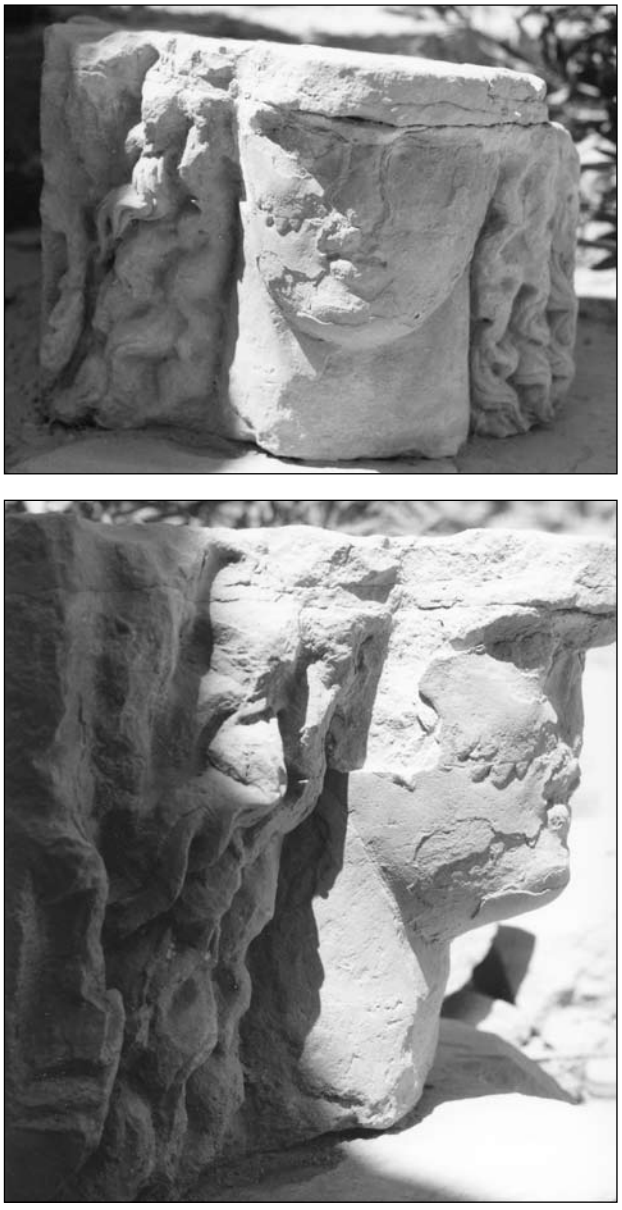
panels with Zeus and Hera, the temple deities.

Clearly, the arrangement of the blocks wit the temple deities send a message. The temple deities frame the frieze of the planetary deities and participate in this way in the cosmic ideas. The local deities are related to the fertility of the herds and of the land, while the planetary deities promise its perpetuation. The same programme is expressed in the zodiac: the busts of Aries and Libra together with the zodiac form the astral sphere, Virgo and Pisces symbolise the fertility of the country, joined by Hera-Tyche as the local tutelary deity with astral elements.

The Tympanum

Beside the frieze one also needs to mention the so-called Atargatis panel, a semicircular panel above the entrance of the temple (Glueck 1965: 143-144 pls. 31-33; McKenzie, Gibson and Reyes 2002: 63-64; Markoe 2003: fig. 41), which depicts the bust of a female figure surrounded by floral motifs (FIG. 8). Following Glueck the figure usually is identified as the temple deity, which depicts Atargatis as a vegetation goddess, but I would like to suggest another interpretation. The body of the figure is covered with floral branches, which are directed towards the bottom indicating that the figure originates from the earth or even below. Even the neck and the face are covered with leaves. Such features do not fit Atargatis, but are characteristic of marine creatures in Greek art. There are two other Nabataean busts of the same type known, one from Khirbat Brāq (Parr 1960: 134-135 pl. 15,1), the other one from Petra (Lyttleton and Blagg 1990: 277 pl. 9). If one conceder that Khirbat Brāq is important mainly for its spring, the ʻAyn Brāq, which provides water for Petra, this bust should represent the personification of that spring. The Petra bust (FIG. 9a-b) could represent the ʻAyn Mūsā or the Wādī Mūsā, but having no context for the bust this remains still hypothetical. At Khirbat at-Tannūr one

8. Relief from the tympanon panel with the bust of the personification of the ʻAyn Laʻbān (?). ʻAmmān, Jordan Archaeological Museum. Markoe 2003: fig. 41, Courtesy the Cincinnati Art Museum.



9a-b. Petra. Architectural panel with the bust of the personification of a spring (?). Photo by R. Wenning, Courtesy Department of Antiquties, ‘Ammān, Jordan.

would rather prefer to point to ‘Ayn La‘bān than to the Wādī al-Ḥasā. I would like to identify the bust‘ as the personification of the ‘Ayn La‘bān. There is a Nabataean inscription from the site, dated to 8/7BC, which mentions a votive by Netir’el, the master of the spring of La‘bān (Savignac 1937: 405-408 no. 1). This obviously important spring is situated at the foot of Khirbat adh-Dharīḥ, and the Wādī La‘bān continues towards Khirbat at-Tannūr. Between the isolated sanctuary on Jabal at-Tannūr and the settlement at Khirbat adh-Dharīḥ 7km to the south there must have been strong relations, and probably processions took place between the two sites. Khirbat at-Tannūr could have been a place of pilgrimage. The figure in the tympanum is not the temple deity and not a deity in the sense of the Zeus and Hera type deities, but rather comparable with the Tyche figures or the “*Rankenfrau*” in the tympanum of the al-Khazna and the Florentinus Tomb.

The crowning element of the pediment, an eagle (Glueck 1965: pl. 34a), is taken from the Greek world as a symbol of Zeus, and in the Semitic world as a symbol of the god of heaven under the local name of Dushara, Ba‘al-Shamin or Qos. In the combination with the personification of the spring this feature connects the fertility of the earth with the local deity and the divine sphere. At least four times we find the same idea formulated among the Khirbat at-Tannūr reliefs.

The emphasis of astral and cosmic connotations at the sanctuaries of Khirbat at-Tannūr and Khirbat adh-Dharīḥ is remarkable. One wonders if the programme reflects the new political situation of the Nabataeans after AD106. Although planetary deities do appear in earlier Nabataean art, even in connection with Nikes, there seem to be no earlier Nabataean representations of the zodiac. On the other hand, signs of zodiac are pictured on seals of the Roman administration in Moab at this time, found at Mampsis in the Negev.

The end of the Nabataean kingdom by the Roman occupation and transformation into the Provincia Arabia in AD106 must have shocked the Nabataeans. But rather than a break, one can observe increased building activity now sponsored by various local authorities. This is to be understood as a revival of the particularistic structures of the Nabataean tribal society, which Rabbel II had tried to overcome in his re-novatio. At the two sites in northern Edom discussed here the Nabataean tradition remained very strong, especially in the architecture, while the extremely rich sculptural decoration was a rather new feature. The people running the sanctuaries still worshipped their traditional deities. While these gods formerly protected the royal dynasty, now they had risen to a transcendental astral and cosmological sphere. In such turbulent times, the builders, artists and worshippers apparently chose to pin their hopes on astral deities rather than seeking the favour and protection of the gods of their new Roman overlords, who started to gain popularity elsewhere, especially in the cities.

Acknowledgments

Gratefully I acknowledge permissions and support by the Department of Antiquities of Jordan and its director general, Prof. Dr. Fawwaz al-Khraysheh, and Dr. Glenn Markoe, The Cincinnati Art Museum, and helpful comments by J. McKenzie, F. Villeneuve, M.-J. Roche, M. B. Reeves, J. P. Oleson, A. E. Knauf, and A. Lichtenberger. A. Kropp kindly checked the English, remaining mistakes are mine.

Bibliography

Glueck, N. 1945. *The Other Side of the Jordan*. New Haven: ASOR.

—— 1952. The Zodiac of Khirbet et-Tannur. *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 126: 5-10.

—— 1965. *Deities and Dolphins. The story of the Nabataeans*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Gundel, H.G. 1992. *Zodiakos. Tierkreisbilder im Altertum*. Kulturgeschichte der antiken Welt 54. Mainz: von Zabern.

Hörig, M. 1979. *Dea Syria. Studien zur religiösen Tradition der Fruchtbarkeitsgöttin in Vorderasien*. Alter Orient und Altes Testament 208. Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker and Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener.

Lyttleton, M.B. and Blagg, T.F.C. 1990. Sculpture from the Temenos of Qasr el-Bint at Petra. *Aram* 2: 267-286.

Markoe, G. 2003. *Petra Rediscovered. Lost City of the Nabataeans*. New York: Abrams.

McKenzie, J.S. 2001. 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: 97-112.

—— 2003. Carvings in the Desert: The Sculpture of Petra and Khirbet et-Tannur. Pp. 165-191 in G. Markoe (ed.), *Petra Rediscovered. Lost City of the Nabataeans*. New York: Abrams.

McKenzie, J.S., Gibson, S. and Reyes, A.T. 2002. Reconstruction of the Nabataean temple complex at Khirbet et-Tannur. *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 134: 44-83.

McKenzie, J.S., Reyes, A.T. and Gibson, S. 2002. Khirbat at-Tannur in the ASOR Nelson Glueck Archive and the Reconstruction of the Temple. *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 46: 451-476.

McKenzie, J.S., Reyes, A.T. and Schmidt-Colinet, A. 1998. Faces in the rock at Petra and Medain Saleh. *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 130: 35-50.

Papke, W. 1993. *Die geheime Botschaft des Gilgamesch*. Bergisch Gladbach: Lübbe.

Parr, P.J. 1960. Nabataean Sculpture from Khirbet Brak. *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 4-5: 134-136.

Roche, M.-J. 1990. Bustes fragmentaires trouvés à Pétra. *Syria* 67: 377-395.

—— 2001. Figurines, Sculpture, and Reliefs. Pp. 350-358 in Z. T. Fiema *et al*. (eds.), *The Petra Church*. American Center of Oriental Research Publications 3. Amman: ACOR.

Rosenthal-Heginbottom, R. 2001. A Nabatean Zodiac. Pp. 51-54 in O. Rimon and R. Shchori (eds.), *Measuring and Weighing in Ancient Times*. Haifa: Hecht Museum.

Savignac, R. 1937. Le dieu nabatéen de La'aban et son temple. *Revue Biblique* 46: 401-416.

Starcky, J. 1968: Le temple nabatéen de Khirbet Tannur. *Revue Biblique* 75: 206-235.

Villeneuve, F. 2002. Une louve romaine à sabots chez les Nabatéens?, Pp. 93-94 in *L'archéologie à l'École normale supérieure. Ouvrage dédie à Christian Peyre*. UMR 8546 CNRS-ENS. Archéologies d'Orient et d'Occident. Paris.

Villeneuve, F. and Al-Muheisen, Z. 2000. Nouvelles recherches à Khirbet edh-Dharih (Jordanie du sud, 1996-1999). *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des inscriptions*: 1525-1563.

—— 2003. Dharih and Tannur, Sanctuaries of Central Nabataea. Pp. 83-100 in G. Markoe (ed.), *Petra Rediscovered. Lost City of the Nabataeans*. New York: Abrams.

Wenning, R. 2004. Nabatäische Büstenreliefs aus Petra – zwei Neufunde. *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 120: 157-181.