

## Al-Mujib Jordanian Nature Reserve: Historical traditions and Archaeological Evidence

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**Abstract.** Throughout the last 70 years, extensive surveys and a number of excavations have been carried out in Jordan. But this is the first time to uncover archaeological sites in the region of al-Mujib Nature Reserve, which occupies the geographical gap between the Jordan Valley, the Karak plateau, Dhiban plateau, and the eastern shore of the Dead Sea. This region has never been the object of archaeological campaigns because it had been considered before the construction of the coastal road along the eastern side of the Dead Sea which lies in the most rugged highland of the country where the bare rocks and ravines are typical features of the region. The first season of an intensive survey of the region, resulted in the discovery of three Nabataean and Two Byzantine sites. These sites lack any pattern of settlement installations. But it is apparent that the region was very important from the strategic and religious perspective during these periods, and thus it deserves further investigation and study in the future. The focus of this study concerns the related question of the function of this region during those periods.

### Introduction:

The Mujib reserve is one of the lowest nature's reserves in the world, its spectacular array of scenery near the east coast of the Dead Sea. The reserve is located within the deep Wadi Mujib gorge (Biblical Arnon), which enters the Dead Sea at 410 meters below sea level. The reserve extends to Karak in the south and to Madaba Plains in the north, reaching about 900 meters above the sea level in some places. This 1300 meters variation in elevation means that the reserve enjoys a magnificent biodiversity that is still being explored and documented today by the Royal Society for Conservation of Nature (RSCN). Some of the ragged and remote mountains and valley areas are difficult to reach, and thus offer safe havens for rare species of Cats, Goats and other wild mountainous animals. This region, however an unfertile dis-

trict, is today largely uncultivated and completely uninhabited.

The trip from Amman to the reserve takes approximately an hour and a half drive, and is an hour drive from Salt, Madaba and Karak. The route takes visitors along the scenic Dead Sea-Aqaba highway all the way to the Mujib Bridge where the reserve office is located.

As a result of the rapid rate of development in Jordan, a large number of salvage and systematic excavations or surveys are each year carried out in the country by the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, foreign expeditions as well as by Jordanian Universities (For the early rate of archaeological activities in Jordan, see the Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan).

Since February 2002, Al-Mujib Nature Reserve has not been a field of scientific explora-

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\* Editors of Adumatu, while preparing this material for print, notes with great sorrow the untimely passing away of Dr. Taysir M. Atiat on September 6, 2004. He is one of the distinguished scholars in his field, and has cooperated with the journal since its inception. On this sad occasion we would like to extend our condolences to his family, friends, colleagues, and students. We pray that he rest in peace.

tions. Now the Royal Society for Conservation of Nature has been planning a campaign of exploration in cooperation with Mu'tah University, the chief object being to make al-Mujib reserve more attractive and interesting for visitors. Under the supervision of the author, a preliminary survey season of some two weeks was undertaken in 2002 by a joint team from Mu'tah University and the Royal Society for Conservation of Nature (RSCN) in cooperation with the Department of Antiquities of Jordan. The archaeological survey of the region owes its importance to the fact that the territories of the reserve extend from the Wadi Zarqa- Ma'in in the north to Wadi Shqeiq in the south (fig.1).

The archaeological exploration in this region fills the geographical gap within an area stretching from the Jordan Valley (Ibrahim et al 1976, 41-66), the Karak Plateau (Miller 1991; Ninow 2002, 151,156), Dhiban Plateau (Chang-Ho and Atiat 1997, 115-128) the Southern Ghor (King et al 1996,429-449) and the eastern coast of the Dead Sea (Amr et al 1996, 429-449).

In fact, the archaeological survey of 2002 was the primary nucleus for all the archaeological projects in the region afterwards. The plateau located along the eastern side of the Dead Sea, has never received any attention from archaeologists. There are two reasons for that: Firstly, the area was completely isolated geographically before the construction of the road along the coast line of the Dead Sea and was not known during the nineteenth century when most of the other parts of Palestine were being mapped, and systematically explored for archaeological remains .Secondly, scholars have depended too much on Nelson Glueck evaluation of the archaeological remains in southern Jordan, based on the survey which he conduct-

ed during 1933-38.

However, archaeologists have become increasingly aware that Glueck's archaeological survey of Jordan was superficial in comparison to his survey of Palestine (Millar 1979, 79; Ibrahim et al 1975; Chang-Ho and Atiat 1997, 115-128).

The description of early travelers who explored south of Wadi Mujib suggests that Glueck missed many of the sites. The results of our archaeological survey of Al-Mujib Nature Reserve have shown that he missed a number of sites there as well.

The aim of this paper is endeavor to shed light on the new archaeological sites uncovered within the reserve during the first season of this reconnaissance survey that took place in February 2002. The author has conducted the fieldwork with the assistance of a team including Jum'ah Kareem (co-director)-- unfortunately, he died before he was able to participate in the survey-- Younes Shdeafat (archaeologist), Zuhair Al-Zu'by (representative of the Department of Antiquities), Ja'far Al-Bostanjy (surveyor and photographer), Yousef Abu-Zghearit (draft man) and the following graduate students of the Department of Archeology and Tourism at Mu'tah University: Salha Gharreb, Heyam Mohammed, Kholooud Aqrabawi, Ziad lemon, Hisham Hamaydeh, Hashem Smadi, Mohammad al-Majaly, and Firas al-Adeileh who joined the survey team only during the first week. The team members were accommodated in the field at Raddas station (Al-Mujib Nature Reserve housing facility). The team members are grateful to Dr. Fawaaz Al-khrisheh (director of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan) for his kind permission of the work and to Mr. Khaled Al-Irany (director of the Royal Society for Conservation of Na-

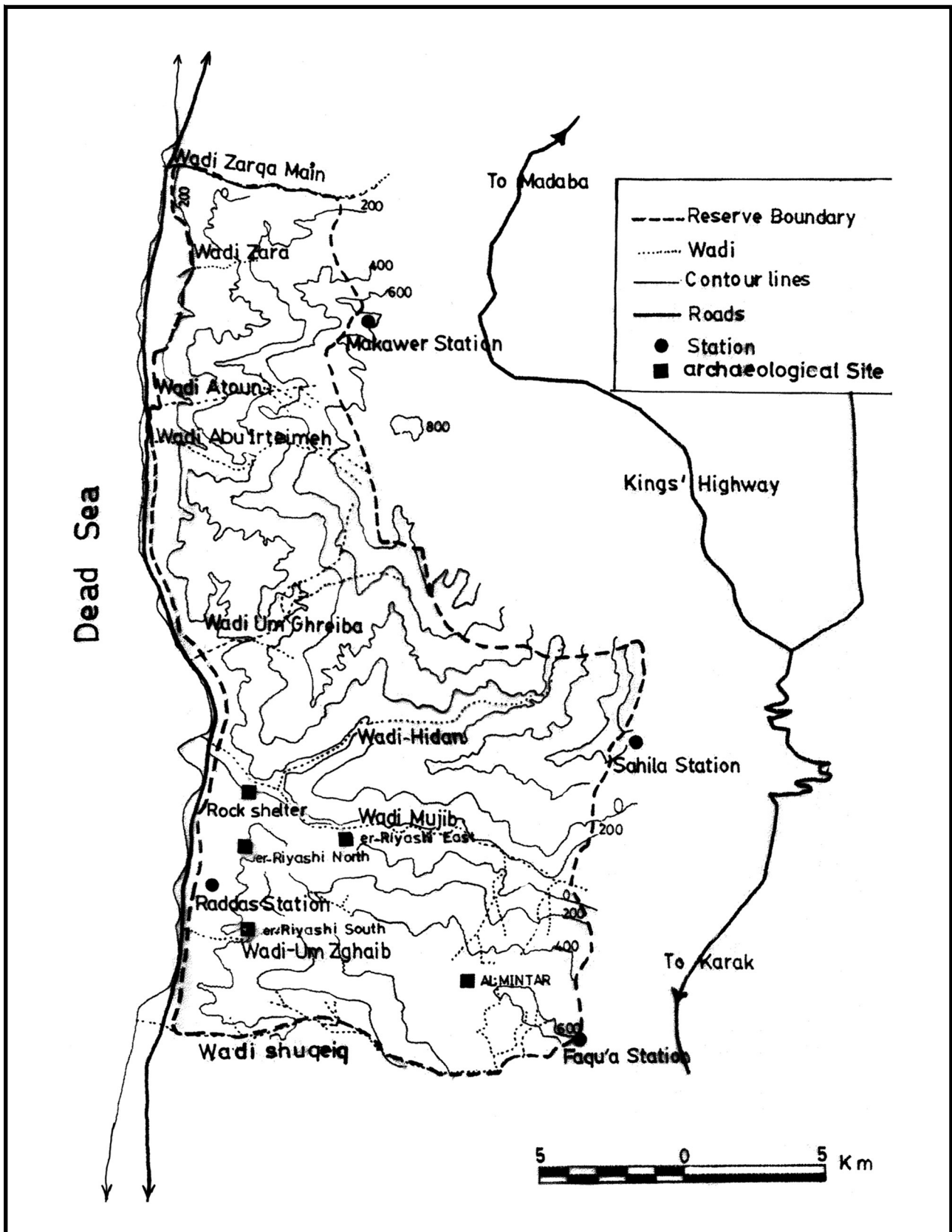


Fig. 1. Topography of Mujib Nature Reserve.

ture) for the financial support, smoothing the work and making our stay in the reserve so agreeable.

Al-Mujib Nature Reserve stretches between Wadi Zarqa-Ma'in to the north and Wadi Shqeiq to the south, with Wadi Mujib at the middle. The reserve was established in 1987 by (RSCN). Wadi Mujib is one of the main features of the reserve after which it was named. The Wadi is one of the least disturbed and polluted river systems left in Jordan. It has a 200-meter-deep sandstone gorge east of its outlet onto the Dead Sea. This plateau is cut at intervals by deep Wadis such as, Wadi Zarqa-Ma'in, Wadi Mujib and Wadi Shqeiq; each of these Wadis generally flows westward and pours into the Dead Sea (Parker 1982, 1-26; Haviv 2000, 74). From the information presented above, we understand that, owing to the dramatic changes in altitude and the presence of flowing ravines, the reserve is seated on the most ragged highland of Jordan. In fact, the rocky massif and ravines are the typical feature of the region, which was almost naturally defended by the surrounding sandstone mountains (Fig.2).

From the topographical position of the region we can understand the reason for which the Royal Society for Conservation of Nature has established a breeding center there. The aim of this center is to reintroduce and protect the Nubian Ibex (wild mountain goats) because the topographic nature of the region is highly favorable to this kind of animals.

This region is exceptionally very dangerous; I have never in life traveled where the descent is very steep, and where there is no regular road over the bare sand rocks. The survey team had often missed their way every day, and many of them had suffered severe falls.

The terrain is treacherous and only accessible by horseback, thus limiting the amount of equipment that can be carried to a stay of only several days (Donner 1964, 90; Worschech et al 1986, 290).

The main inconvenience of the region was that it did not have a natural spring for a supply of fresh water. To remedy this obstacle, the inhabitants dug out cisterns and reservoirs to collect rain water. The cisterns were hewn in the rock adjacent to catchments areas. It is readily apparent that the site shows the famous Nabataean technique for providing and conserving water in this arid region. Among the ruins are rectangular reservoirs and dams, now largely buried underneath the drifting sand. Its wall can still be made out under the sand. The ruggedness and vertical cliffs of the region are comparable to that of Petra, especially to the west. Indeed its bare rocks and ravines are so inhospitable for human habitation that it is remarkable to discover a permanent settlement within such a hostile environment: a reason no doubt that precluded earlier surveys.

It is fairly certain that Al-Mujib Nature Reserve received its name from Wadi Mujib that was named in the Old Testament as Arnon, and was one of the stations of the Israelites since the exodus from Egypt to Canaan. The Arnon River was revealed in the biblical and historical sources as the border between the Amorite kingdom in the north and the Moabite kingdom in the south.

In fact, Jordan and Wadi Al-Mujib in particular appear as a marginal area in the Old Testament which relates that Sihon, king of Heshbon (Hisban), who occupied part of the Moabite Kingdom and established his Amorite Kingdom, kept the river Arnon as the border between the two Kingdoms (Numbers 21:26).



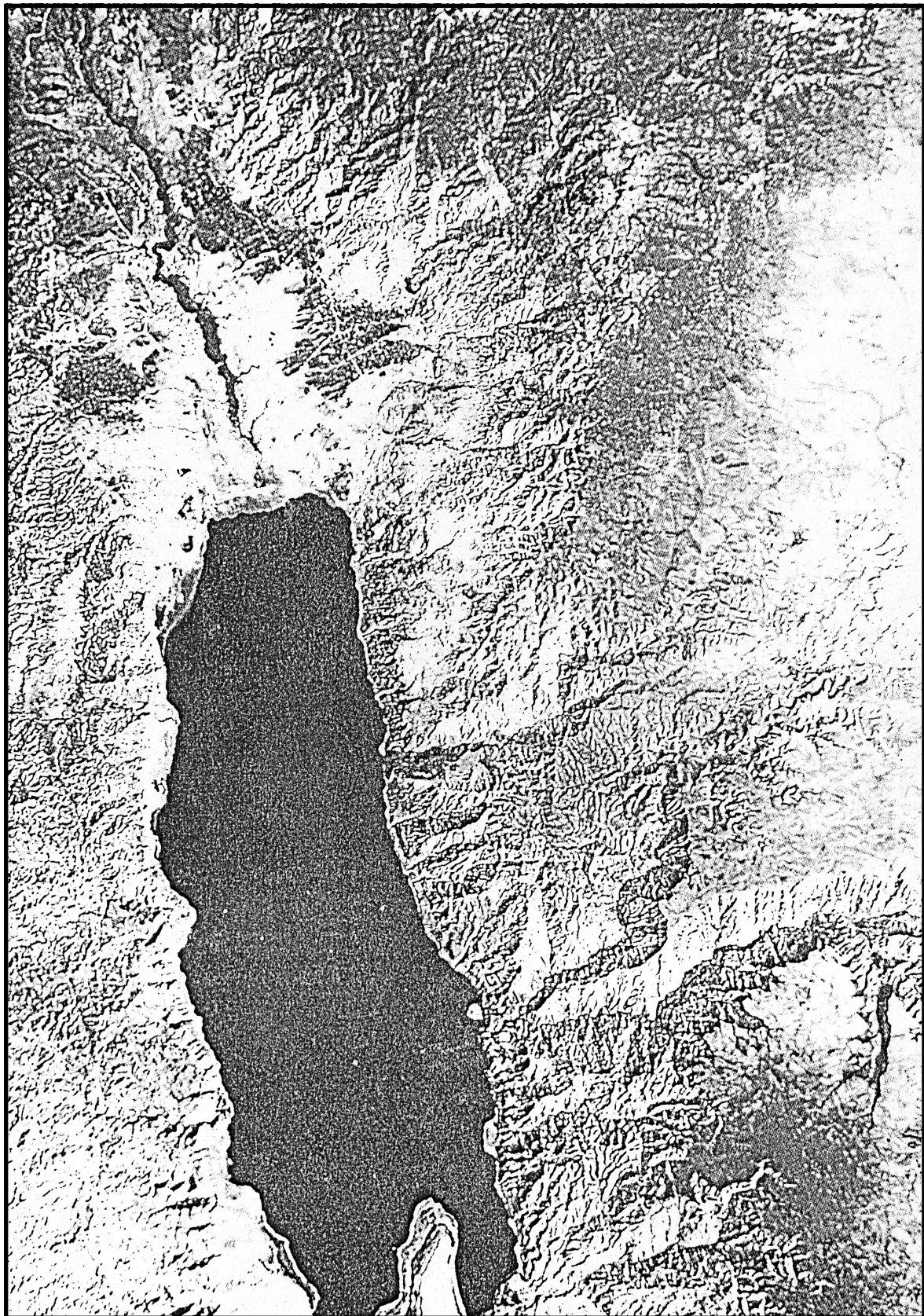


Fig. 2. Aerial photo of the region east of the Dead Sea.

Wadi Arnon was mentioned as well by Josephus when he related how Sihon king of Heshbon, refused and enforced his troop to stop the Israelites from crossing Wadi Mujib (Josephus, 1967, 519). Eusebius, in his *onomasticon*, observed that the Arnon River was "a very treacherous place with ravines, called the Arnonas, extending north of Areopolis, in which garrisons of soldiers keep guard everywhere due to the terrifying nature of the place" (Eusebius, *onomasticon*, 10, 15-20)

From the previous information we understand that the Arnon River appears in the Old Testament as a border area between the Kingdoms. This is observed in the following verses: "Now these are the kings of the land, which the children of Israel smote and possessed their land on the other side of Jordan toward the rising of the sun, from the River Arnon unto mount Hermon, and all the plain on the east. Sihon King of the Amorites who dwelt in Heshbon, and ruled from Aroer, which is upon the bank of the River Arnon, and from the middle of the river, and from the half Gilead, even unto the river Jabbok which is the border of the children of Ammon" (Joshua 12:1-2).

This statement is related in a different wording: "and we took at that time out of the land of the two kings of the Amorites the land that was on this side Jordan, from the river of Arnon unto mount Hermon" (Deuteronomy 3:8).

The prominence of the river Arnon is well attested in several historical periods from literary sources. The Arnon River was in Moses' time the northern border of Moab, and it was crossed by the Israelites under the leadership of prophet Moses during their exodus to Canaan. This information is confirmed by

King Mesha of the 9th century B.C who claims in the Moabite stone inscription to have taken the territory north of the Arnon from the tribe of Gad who occupied it before.

The Arnon River appears as well on the stele of Mesha where the king mentions among his achievements the following: "I have made the highway at the Arnon." The meaning of this feat is that he constructed the road across the Arnon River (Ginsburg 1872, 47).

In Greco-Roman times, a famous thermal bath called "kallerr hoe" (beautiful springs) was situated between Wadi Zarqa-Mai'n and Wadi Mujib. The historical sources point out that Herod the Great was taken to this thermal, hoping to find relief before his death in Jericho in the fourth year B.C (khouri 1988, 87; Strobel 1990, 81-85; Strobel 1997, 271-280).

In the first century A.D Josephus proposes to place the escaping of Su'dat-- the Nabataean princess, the daughter of Aritas IV, the wife of Herod Antipas-- in the region located south of Wadi Arnon after the love affairs of her husband with his cousin Herodias. The region was in no way favorable for escape attempts. Thus each attack could easily be countered (Josephus XV 111, V 1)

This proposition seems to be widely accepted by the archeologists where the historical sources confirm that the Nabataean princess succeeded in effecting her escape from the fortress of Machairous to one of the Nabataean sites south of Wadi Arnon (Glueck 1934, 61; Strobel 1997, 278).

It's obvious that this event shows the state of affairs between the Nabataean and the Maccabean and this event is perhaps one of the sequences of events leading to the war between them (Barakat 2002, 109-112).

The discovery of the Nabataean sites lacking any pattern of settlement installation in this region may testify to the military nature of the region during the Nabataean period; the topographical composition of the region can support this supposition. Moreover, the discovery of Nabataean sites near the Dead Sea offered what seemed an indisputable proof for the commercial activities and attested to the first historical reference to the Dead Sea mentioned by Diodorus who related that Hieronymus of Cardia, a contemporary and friend of Antigonus, had good relations with the Nabataeans when he served as governor of the Asphalt lake or Dead Sea (Graf 2001, 51).

During the Byzantine period Wadi al-Mujib was revealed as the border between the province of Arabia in the north and the province of Palaestina Salutaris of Tertia in the south (Piccirillo 1990, 43).

It is clear that there is a common agreement in presenting mountains and thermal sources as characteristic of the region on the east bank of the Dead Sea (Alliata 1999, 123).

The thermal bath and the territories of Al-Mujib Nature Reserve are represented in the 6th century A.D on the pilgrimage Madaba mosaic map (Alliata 1999, 121-124), which shows representation of three springs within an Oasis of palm trees, next to the words "thermal callirhoe" (Piccirillo 1989, 76-94; Meimaris 1999, 25-36; Homes and Hennessey 1989, 633-39). This region is represented with a pictorial realism with or without caption, which makes it easily identifiable (fig. 2).

## Results:

The first season of the archaeological survey of the region resulted in the discovery of five sites; two of which were known from the

archaeological survey of Jordan which was headed by Nelson Glueck between 1932 and 1933, and three sites were new ones (fig. 4). It was found that Glueck's site descriptions and dates were essentially accurate, although he primarily tended to visit those sites that were marked on existing map and mentioned in the Old Testament, and thus he missed three sites in the reserve. The five sites that were visited are listed below, together with their pottery, and they are located with their local Toponym on figure 2.

During February 2002, in the course of a few days visit of inspection to that part of Jordan lying on the eastern side of the Dead Sea, the following sites were visited: Er-Riyashi north, Er-Riyashi south, Deir Er-Riyashi, rock shelter with three large incised Latin crosses, and Rujm Al-Manarah.

The first three sites received their names from their location in relation to Raddas station, Al-Mujib reserve housing facility.

### Er-Riyashi north:

This site is the most promising in the whole area. It should be noted that this site was never mentioned or drawn by Glueck or any other archaeologist. The building is completely Nabataean in style, located nearly one hundred meters south of Wadi Mujib: accessed only by means of a natural fault in its eastern side.

It has an elementary plan, with only two rooms of different sizes; the larger room measures 3x4 m, and the smaller 3x3 m. The foundations of the building rest directly on the bedrock and the walls are, for the most part, two courses wide, consisting of small boulders and large cobbles. The courses are quite irregular, and the wall lines are not perfectly straight. Some of the courses are preserved to a height

of 1.5 meter. The main construction was of uneven courses of large, uncut stones, with small stones in the interstices. Some of the stones are roughly square, but others are quite irregular in shape. A trial clearance in the northern side demonstrated the existence of stairway consisting of three steps hewn in the bedrock of sandstone, leading down to one horizontal row of niches hewn as well in the bedrock. The row of niches is located at an average height of one meter from the bedrock.

The second room has a doorway in the western wall giving connection with an open court in front of the building, while the northern wall of the room comprises one horizontal row of square apertures (0.3x0.4m). They are located at an average height of one meter from the bottom of the wall. They are not as opening escape that admits light. These apertures should be studied in connection with the niches (Fig 3).

At this stage of research we are uncertain about the architectural remains uncovered in those sites and for what purpose they were constructed. But it is reasonable to assume that the architectural remains served a religious purpose since the archaeological data support this view, for the row of niches furnish a tangible proof of Nabataean religion. Therefore a rescue excavation is urgently recommended, and more work must be done to determine just what function this building served in antiquity.

### **Er-Riyashi south**

The site has escaped the notice of most scholars; it was recorded neither by Glueck nor by any other archaeologists. It is a great rocky-massif, which rises sharply above the region for nearly one hundred meters. It looks like a natural fortress, the only approach to the summit being from the east, though some ef-

fort was made during the survey to lessen the difficulties of the climb. From the west and the south edges, a full panorama view of the Dead Sea and Wadi Shqeiq spreads out. The dominating position, overlooking the Dead Sea and all the approaches to the rock massif, suggests that it might have had some relation to military purposes. From a strategic point, it is well situated to guard the approaches of Wadi Shqeiq from the south and the Dead Sea from the west. The choice of this location for this site may have been due to the marvelous view from the top of bare rocky-massif overlooking all directions. For purposes of defense the site was well chosen, being bounded on the southeast by Wadi Shqeiq. On the west and northwest sides it is bounded by a deep, dry wadis. Only the east side of the rocky-massif is connected to the headland from which it extends.

The site is situated slightly more than two km southeast of Er-Riyashi north on the precipitous promontory close to the steep bank of Wadi Shqeiq. The site covers an area of 20m (north-south) by 40m (east-west), and is composed of a central building that commands a panoramic view over the Wadi Shqeiq, Dead Sea, Jordan valley and the entire surrounding terrain.

It is very difficult to trace the exact building plan of the central building because of its bad state of preservation, yet a careful examination leads to the conclusion that it has a rectangular plan. It became evident that the architectural elements were of the same general character as the elements discovered at Er Riyashi north. The pottery collected at this site and its vicinity indicates the Nabataean epoch. The analysis of the architectural remains clearly indicates its close connection to that of Er-Riyashi north. Therefore, it is estimated that the value of studying the ceramic material found at Er-

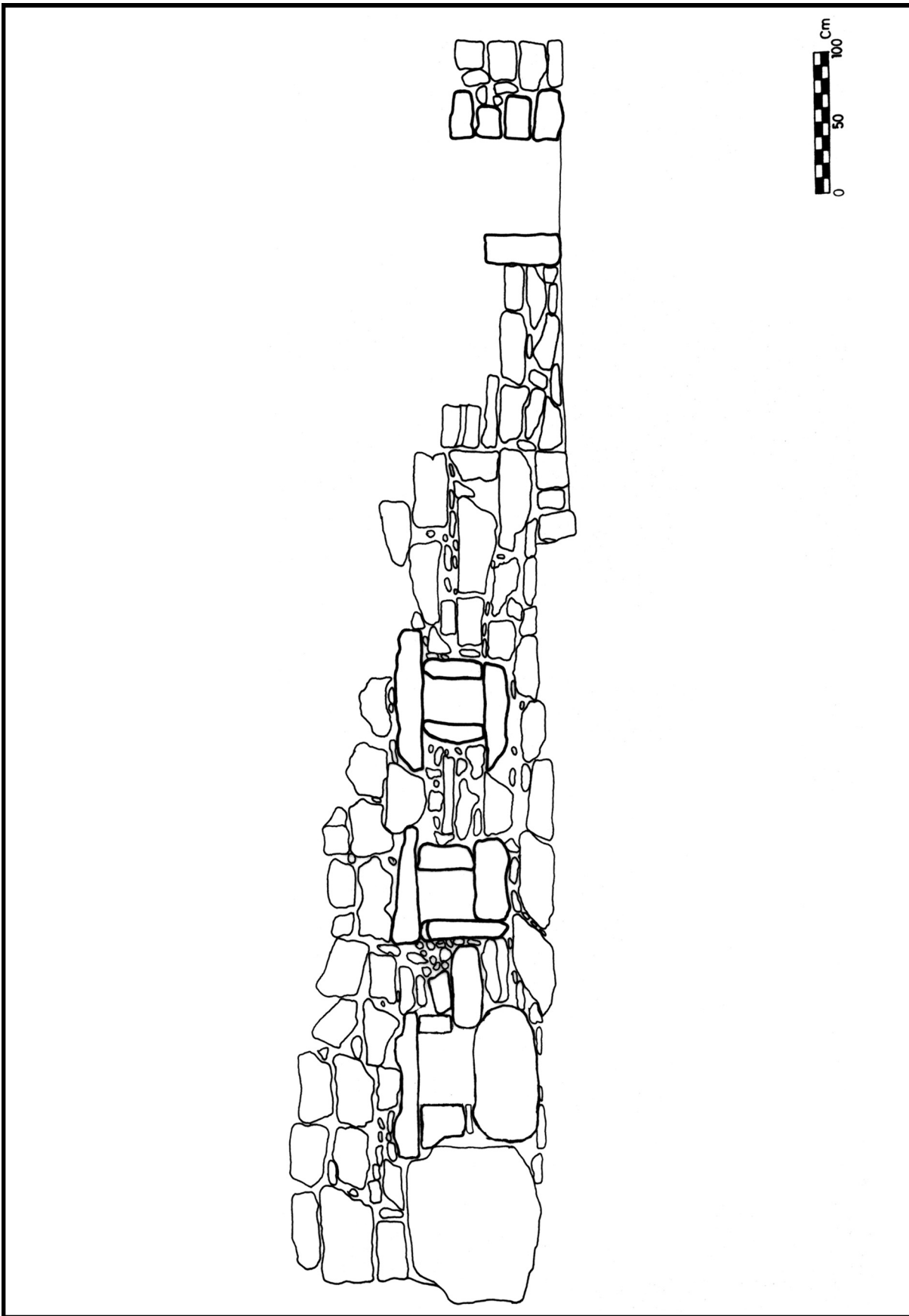


Fig. 3: er-Riyshi-North section drawing of the northern wall.

Riyashi North and at Er-Riyashi South will enrich our knowledge of the Nabataean pottery.

The well is bottle or pear-shaped, cut into the sandstone rock. It is capped by slabs with square openings about (0.50m X 0.50m). The well was hewn in the rock adjacent to the catchments areas. It was supplied with water by forms of conduits partly built and partly cut into the bedrock. The water entered the cistern through a plastered settling basin located in both sides of the cistern to allow the heaviest particles to filter out of the water before it flowed into the well. It seems that the well has been the main water sources for the site.

At the southeast of the well there is a rectangular cistern hewn in the sandstone rock adjacent to catchments areas. It was roofed by traverse arches, a common method in Nabataean architecture.

It is readily apparent that the site shows the famous Nabataean techniques for providing and conserving water in this arid region.

### Deir Er-Riyashi

It is a rectangular structure oriented east-west, located on the top of a spur extending into Wadi Al-Mujib at a point east of its junction with Wadi Al-Heidan (fig 2). It is a large building built for the most part of hewn blocks. Its walls are still standing to a height of 60 c.m. The site was misplaced by fathers Piccirillo and Alliata in their splendid publication, *Um-Al-Rasas Myfa'ah* in which they placed the site at the southern side of Wadi Heidan (Piccirillo and Alliata 1991: fig 3).

The unique reference to the site occurs in the work of Nelson Glueck in 1933 who referred to it as Byzantine church. He reported the site in some detail as the follows: "the walls of the Dar follow the natural contour of

the bare rock .... on the northeastern side there are three chambers. These rooms face an inner court, paved with large, rude, roughly squared stone tesserae. There are two large cisterns at either end of the court. The pottery found belongs to the late Byzantine period. The isolated Dar Er-Riyashi, extremely difficult of access, was undoubtedly a monastery" (Glueck 1934, 59-60). This identification has been widely accepted by archaeologists (Piccirillo and Alliata 1991), but this identification contradicts the opinion of Strobel who interpreted the structure as fortress. (Strobel 1997, 277).

We saw Deir Er-Riyashi essentially as Glueck described it, except that there is a much greater discernible compartment wall inside the building. A small trial clearance in the eastern side demonstrated as well the existence of superimposed pavements, the upper one is of gray marble slab though it is not of superior quality while the lower is of colored mosaic. From its rich color and small tesserae it seemed to indicate the existence of a mosaic floor of superior quality.

Unfortunately, some illicit excavations have recently taken place, causing damage to the eastern side of the monastery where the ruins of this site showed no indication of an apse.

It is note worthy that the site was occupied during the Byzantine period but was never used before or after this period.

Therefore, it is estimated that the value of studying the ceramic material found in the site will add to our knowledge of the Byzantine pottery. A later publication will present in detail the ceramic evidence find in the monastery with a complete analysis of the related literary and documentary material. It is remarkable that the site lacks any pattern of settlement installation. Therefore, the monastery should be

studied as a memorial site dedicated to Moses in connection with the crossing of the Israelites of Arnon River under the leadership of prophet Moses since the exodus to Canaan.

For this reason, it may be suggested that the monastery was a retreat of the monks since it is fairly clear that most of the Holy places visited by Christian pilgrims are of Jewish origin and also could be of shared attendance (Alliata 1999, 121-124).

The Arnon River is represented in Madaba Map with a pictorial realism with caption that makes it easily identifiable. It was the northern border of Moab in the past and the line border between the province of Arabia and the province of Palestine Salutaris during the Byzantine period (Numbers 21:26; Piccirillo 1990, 43). It seems clear that the site had been depicted in Madaba map in which a church was represented at Wadi Al-Mujib in the edge of the missing part of the map. Unfortunately, the ancient Toponym of the site did not completely survive. What is left of its ancient Toponym was only the first two letters of the caption. For the sake of understanding the historical and religious information of the site, rescue excavations should be quickly launched. Its poor surviving condition today, owing to the illicit excavations which have recently taken place, call for such urgent excavations. Moreover, the recent report from the excavations at Deir al-Qatar al-Byzanti, ten km south of the reserve, provide publication of the closest Byzantine site to Deir Er-Riyashi east and the Rock Shelter ornamented by three Latin crosses.

### Rock shelter

It lies on a ledge of mountain of a height of about 300 meters on the east shore of the Dead Sea. The isolated natural cave, having an extremely difficult access and surrounded by a

deep valley and clefts, was undoubtedly the retreat of the monks in the Byzantine period. The rock shelter commands a splendid view of the northern half of the Dead Sea. From the site you can enjoy the sunset over the Dead Sea and the beautiful shining Moon to the night. But it was in no way favorable for human installation.

As I said, it was more of a rock shelter than a cave, a seasonal dwelling place on a ledge under an overhanging rock. Judging from the pottery collection and flint implements recovered, it was probably occupied for some considerable time, but the artifacts are not at all homogeneous in character, and belong only to two distinct periods: late Neolithic and late Byzantine. Numerous pottery sherds were found all around the rock shelter, and a large number of those sherds belonged to the Bronze Age and the Byzantine Age.

It is notable that the late Neolithic period is the earliest occupation of the site. So this discovery has assigned something to the history of the early settlement in the region.

To judge from the large number of Byzantine sherds found at the site, one can say that the rock shelter was probably first used during the Neolithic period and perhaps then reused in the Byzantine period; it is quite possible that the rock shelter has not been subsequently used.

The religious character of the rock shelter during the Byzantine period is confirmed by the existence of three huge incised Roman crosses ornamenting the eastern side of the rock shelter which, it seems clear, was converted into a retreat for the monks.

The closest immediate parallel to the rock shelter and the Latin Crosses are the cells of

Dayr Al-Qatar Al-Byzanti, published by Holmgren and Kaliff. The Latin crosses in the rock shelter could be interpreted as the representation of the crucifixion of Christ. This find contradicts the opinion of Holmgren and Kaliff who interpreted the crosses uncovered in the three cells at Dayr al Qatar al-Byzanti as the insignia of the monks, incised by pilgrims or as exorcising marks (Holmgren and Kaliff 1997, 332, fig.13).

Even though the place has no standing ruins, the site can be recognized as Byzantine by the evidence of the three incised crosses and by the pottery sherds which belong to the Byzantine period and having been picked up in the immediate vicinity of the site and on the slopes below. Unfortunately, no date is available for the rock shelter, and the pottery sherds from this site have not yet been studied in detail. But the preliminary reading of the field indicates a high persistence of Byzantine occupation.

### Rujm el-Manara

At the western side of Fagu'ah village there is a group of hills known as Jabal el-Manara. At the top of the hills a number of cairns which appear to have been small watch-towers. The largest one, rujm el-Manara, stands at the top of the highest hill.

It is a watch-tower built on a flat-topped rise, overlooking and guarding the approaches of the Dead Sea. In the center of this flat-top area there is a large ruined stronghold that seems to be a Nabataean watch-tower. The outer wall of the stronghold is about 1.5 m thick and is built of large, roughly hewn limestone blocks. A gateway is situated at the southern side. Inside the outer wall are a confusing maze of ruined tower foundations. A careful inspection of the site shows the existence of a large

empty courtyard in front of the southern side of the stronghold. It is worth noting that the majority of sherds collected from this site are dated to the Nabataean period. Moreover, the survey team saw Rujm el-Manara as Glueck described it (Glueck 1934, 59).

### Conclusion

To conclude, the survey results have revealed that the Nabataean and Byzantine periods were eras of significant occupation in the region, and evidence has been found that suggests that a building can be interpreted as a Nabataean sanctuary at Er-Riyashi North and a Byzantine Monastery can be identified at Er-Riyashi East.

With regard to the original patron(s), we suggest that Nabataean merchants might have established the sanctuary to serve as a place of worship when they traveled to the Dead Sea region. We also suggest that, before the annexation of the Nabataean Kingdom in 106 AD, a Nabataean garrison could have been stationed nearby, an assumption supported by the presence, in the region, of two public buildings that lacked any evidence of settlement patterns. This hypothesis appears plausible because there is historical evidence that relations between the Nabataeans and the Maccabaeans were quite strained during this period (Josephus xv 111, v 1; Barakat 2002, 60-66, 109-112). Moreover, the monastery of al- Riyashi east, dating to the late Byzantine period, could be identified as one of the pilgrimage sites after its representation in Madaba Mosaic Map. The discovery of a Byzantine sanctuary at Wadi al-Mujib shows that many places shown in the Madaba Mosaic Map are still waiting to be identified. Therefore, rescue excavations are urgently recommended to uncover the an-



cient Toponym of the site in order to restore the inscription referred to at the sanctuary as one of the pilgrimage site in the missing part of the Madaba Map .

In conclusion, one can say that Al-Mujib Nature Reserve shows clear evidence of Nabataean to late Byzantine occupation, with possi-

ble gaps in between. However, further excavations are needed to provide additional information.

The historical documentation for this region is just beginning, and continuing excavation will help enlighten our understanding of the people who once lived and worshipped in the area.

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ملخص: شهد الأردن، خلال السبعين سنة الماضية، العديد من المسوحات، والحفريات الأثرية؛ لكن هذه المنطقة، موضوع البحث، كانت تشكل فراغاً جغرافياً بين المناطق المحيطة بها، التي سبق مسحها؛ إلا أن هذه المنطقة، لم تشهد في السابق، أي نشاط أثري يذكر . وقد كُشف، خلال المسح الأثرى للمنطقة، عن ثلاثة مواقع نبطية، وموقعين بيزنطيين. وقد خلت هذه المواقع تماماً من أية مظاهر استيطان بشري؛ لكن من الواضح، أن المنطقة كان لها أهميتها الإستراتيجية، خلال الفترة النبطية، إضافة إلى أهميتها الدينية، خلال الفترة البيزنطية؛ ذلك أننا نجد تمثيلاً لهذه المنطقة على خارطة مادبا الفسيفسائية، بوصفها من مواقع الحج المسيحي. وعلى ضوء ما تقدم، فإن المنطقة، تستحق المزيد من البحث الأثري، للإجابة على التساؤل، حول انحصار استخدام هذه المنطقة، خلال الفترتين النبطية والبيزنطية، إضافة إلى التحقق من استخدام هذه المنطقة، خلال تلك الفترات.

#### **Notes**

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