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OBSERVATIONS ON THE BYZANTINE CHURCH AT JABAL HAROUN NEAR PETRA, JORDAN

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The Finnish Jabal Haroun Project, the first large-scale Finnish archaeological project in the Near East, has entered its concluding phase of activities. Launched in 1997 by Prof. Jaakko Frösén as its director, and sponsored by the Academy of Finland and the University of Helsinki, the Project is designed as an interdisciplinary investigation at Jabal an-Nabi Haroun (the mountain of the Prophet Aaron), ca. 5 km SW of Petra in southern Jordan.¹ According to the Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions, the mountain is considered to be the place of burial of Moses' brother Aaron. Currently, the peak of the mountain is occupied by the 14th-century Muslim shrine with a sarcophagus believed to contain Aaron's remains. However, it is an extensive, ruined architectural complex located at ca 1270 m asl., on a plateau of the mountain, ca 70 m below and ca 150 m to the west of the peak, which is the focus of the FJHP investigations. Byzantine historical sources related to Jabal Haroun, while pointing to the sanctity of the mountain, are generally scarce. Several accounts concerning the monastic presence there are preserved from the Crusader period.² But the information provided by the Petra Papyri, discovered in 1993, is the most relevant here. Papyrus Petra inv. 6 (Papyrus Petra Daniel C. and Nancy E. Gamber) dated to June 15, A.D. 573, mentions "the House of our Lord the Saint High-Priest Aaron" outside of the city of Petra.³

¹ The research on the subject of this article has been carried out within the framework of the Research Center "Ancient and Medieval Greek Documents, Archives and Libraries" at the University of Helsinki, which is part of the "Centres of Excellence in Research" program of the Academy of Finland.

² G. L. Peterman and R. Schick, "The Monastery of Saint Aaron," *ADAJ* 40 (1996) 473–480.

³ J. Frösén and Z. T. Fiema, "The Petra Papyri", *ACOR Newsletter* 6.2 (1994) 1–3.

The combination of this information with the aforementioned religious tradition associated with Jabal Haroun, and the results of the early exploration in the area, would strongly suggest that the architectural remains on the high plateau, which were otherwise recognized as remains of a monastic complex, can indeed be identified as the Monastery of Saint Aaron. However, the ultimate confirmation of this hypothesis could come only through the archaeological excavations of the ruined complex. During the past six fieldwork seasons (1998–2003), a large basilican church and a chapel, and some auxiliary structures and rooms were exposed. The research on the data and finds provided by the fieldwork indicates that the complex, in addition to its monastic function, had most probably also served as a pilgrimage center dedicated to the veneration of St. Aaron. This monastic-pilgrimage center appears to have existed between the later 5th and the 8th century A.D., if not later.⁴

Description and Analysis

The site, which measures ca 62 m N-S x 48 m E-W, is an irregular quadrangle the extent of which is marked by the back walls of the structures. The central location is occupied by the church and a chapel which face an irregular court with a rock-cut cistern on the western side, and a series of rooms surrounding a courtyard on the northern side. This northern part of the complex most probably served as a pilgrims' hostel. The southern side of the complex consists of as yet unexcavated rooms and spaces which seem to have flanked the main entrance to the monastery. The western side of the

⁴ For the results, see the yearly reports: J. Frösén et al., "The Finnish Jabal Haroun Project Report on the 1997 Season", *ADAJ* 42 (1998) 483–502; J. Frösén et al., "The 1998 Finnish Jabal Harûn Project. A Preliminary Report", *ADAJ* 43 (1999) 369–410; J. Frösén et al., "The 1999 Finnish Jabal Harûn Project: A Preliminary Report", *ADAJ* 44 (2000) 395–424; J. Frösén et al., "The 2000 Finnish Jabal Harûn Project: Preliminary Report", *ADAJ* 45 (2001), 351–76; J. Frösén et al., "The 2001 Finnish Jabal Harûn Project: Preliminary Report" *ADAJ* 46 (2002), 391–407. Other major publications include: Jaakko Frösén and Z. T. Fiema (eds.), *Petra – A City Forgotten and Rediscovered*, Helsinki 2002, A volume associated with the exhibition organized by the Amos Anderson Museum, Helsinki, Finland, and Z.T. Fiema, "The Byzantine Monastic/Pilgrimage Center of St. Aaron near Petra, Jordan", in G. Claudio Bottini, L. Di Segni and L. Daniel Chrupcala (eds.) *One Land – Many Cultures. Archaeological Studies in Honour of Stanislaw Loffreda OFM*, Jerusalem 2003, 343–358

monastery is occupied by the large multi-roomed structure which seems to date to the Nabataean-Roman periods, and which was apparently later incorporated into the monastery.

Although the relative chronology of particular structures at the site is well established, and significant chronological indicators (ceramics, lamps, and glass) were found in well-stratified deposits, an overall chronological sequence is currently available only for the church and the chapel which form one, relatively self-contained unit. On the other hand, the datable ceramic material from the church is mixed and thus largely meaningless, except for the material recovered in soundings under the undisturbed floors. Therefore, a better understanding of the history and phases of the existence of the Jabal Haroun church will largely depend on the architectural, decorative and structural parallels. As such, whenever appropriate, comparison is made here with the Byzantine church of the Virgin Mary at Petra, excavated by the American Center of Oriental Research in 1992–97, and published in 2001.⁵ That church seems to be the closest parallel to the monastic church at Jabal Haroun.

Phase I (later 5th–early 6th centuries A.D.)

The early church was a tripartite, monoapsidal basilica, internally measuring ca. 22.6 m (max.) x 13.6 m, with seven columns in each of the two rows. When compared with the size of the Petra church, dated to the later 5th century A.D., which is internally ca. 23.21 m. long and ca. 15.35 m. wide,⁶ the Jabal Haroun church is of close dimensions. Therefore, the ratio of the inner length to inner width, being 3 : 2 for the Petra church, is also comparable for the Jabal Haroun church. This length to width ratio is relatively typical of earlier churches in Palestine (4th–5th century), characterized by long and narrow aisles.⁷ The later 5th century date for the

⁵ Z. T. Fiema, Ch. Kanellopoulos, T. Waliszewski and R. Schick, *The Petra Church*, Amman 2001.

⁶ Z. T. Fiema, "Reconstructing Culture History of the Petra Church: Data and Phasing," in Z. T. Fiema, Ch. Kanellopoulos, T. Waliszewski, and R. Schick, *The Petra Church* Amman 2001.

⁷ J. W. Crowfoot, *Early Churches in Palestine*, London 1941, 54, 61; R. H. Smith, and L. P. Day, *Pella of the Decapolis. Vol 2.*, Wooster 1989, 84. See also A. Negev, "The Churches of the Central Negev – An Archaeological Survey", *RB* 81 (1974) 400–11. The monoapsidal type in Syria is generally dated to the fifth century, see H.C. Butler in E.

Jabal Haroun church is also supported by the ceramic material, not later than the mid-5th century, recovered from the inner fill of the main walls of the church.

The apse, ca. 5.2 m long at the chord, was flanked by two pastophoria, similar to those of the Petra church in its early phase (IV). A marble floor was laid out throughout the church. The early, marble-clad, rectangular bema was unusually narrow but fully contained within the nave, as in the Petra church.⁸ The apse had a two-tiered synthronon installation that shows affinities with the five-tiered synthronon of the Petra church. The clearly preserved remains of the bishop's throne in the Jabal Haroun church were accessed by the steps centrally superimposed on the synthronon tiers. However, while the Jabal Haroun synthronon is clearly an original installation, and not added later, as in the Petra church, the throne appears to have been added later (*infra*). The one-to-three tier synthronon types are generally better attested before the 6th century – an observation which also supports the 5th-century date for the Jabal Haroun church.

This date is also supported by other evidence. Notably, the Jabal Haroun church might have been preceded by a simple narthex in this phase. Admittedly, the churches of the 4th–5th-century date are usually associated with an atrium rather than a narthex. But it was suggested that a narthex, probably evolved from an eastern portico, appears in the ecclesiastical architecture only around the mid-5th century, and often together with an atrium.⁹ Although at Jabal Haroun the term atrium is not fully considered technically suitable for the existent forecourt with the cistern, that space nevertheless could have functioned as an integral open-air part of the complex. Thus, the mid-late 5th-century date would again well suit the early church at Jabal Haroun which features the narthex and a preceding court. Significantly, a similar arrangement existed in the early church at Petra (Phase IV).

Baldwin Smith (ed.), *Early Churches in Syria. Fourth to Seventh Centuries. Part One. History*, Princeton 1929, 48–82.

⁸ Generally, the type of bema does not constitute any significant chronological marker (R. Rosenthal-Heginbottom, *Die Kirchen von Sobota und die Dreiapsidenkirchen des Nahen Ostens*, Wiesbaden 1982, 149, 151.

⁹ R. Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*, Baltimore 1965, 117; A. Ovadiah, *Corpus of the Byzantine Churches in the Holy Land*, Bonn 1970, 199–200.

Apparently, the chapel was built at the same time as the early church, and sharing the wall between them. The eastern end featured an apse flanked on both sides by high cupboards or cabinets with three shelves. The extant appearance of this area of the chapel seems to be associated with the succeeding phases. Only the remains of a marble floor and fragments of wall plaster still attached to the lower parts of the apse's wall, all found in the sounding in the apse, can be safely associated with Phase I. In the western part of the chapel, a roughly octagonal pit was chiselled out of the bedrock and the cruciform baptismal font with the masonry-built upper part was installed and further integrated with the bedrock using mortar. The font is small in size: ca. 0.92 m (N-S) x 0.89 m (E-W) at the opening, and no more than 0.6 m deep. The font belongs to the cruciform type which is usually masonry-built and generally earlier in date than the monolithic fonts.¹⁰ A close parallel is the large, canopied cruciform font in the baptistery of the Petra church, dated to the later 5th century A.D. Cruciform fonts were popular in southern Palestine and especially in the Negev, e.g., in the East Church at Mamfisis, the North Church at Oboda/'Avdat, and the North and South Churches at Sobata/Shivta; the first two were masonry-built.¹¹

Phase II (later 6th century A.D.)

It appears that a disaster, probably of a seismic nature, ended the Phase I occupation in the entire complex. The church was restored but also subdivided by a wall into the eastern and the western parts. The former, internally ca. 13 m (max.) long, retained its ecclesiastical function but most of the columns were removed. Only two columns were retained (representing each initial row of columns in Phase I). These were now carrying long (ca. 4.5m) E-W arches supporting the roof of the reduced-in-length church of Phase II. Although the bema must have lost most of its

¹⁰ M. Ben-Pechat, "The Paleochristian Baptismal Fonts in the Holy Land: Formal and Functional Study", *LA* 39 (1989), 173–4; "Baptism and Monasticism in the Holy Land: Archaeological and Literary Evidence", in G. C. Bottini, L. di Segni and E. Alliata (eds.), *Christian Archaeology in the Holy Land. New Discoveries*, Jerusalem 1990, 510; M. Piccirillo, "I Battisteri Bizantini di Giordania", in V. Janeiro (ed.), *Noscere Sancta Miscellanea in Memoria di Agostino Amore OFM (+1982). Volume primo: Storia della Chiesa, Archeologia, Arte. I*, Roma 1985, 355.

¹¹ Ben-Pechat (note 10) "The Paleochristian", fig 1; Rosenthal-Heginbottom (note 8) 174–200 (baptisteries in the Negev).

marble furnishing, it seems that its form was largely retained. Inside the apse, a *thronos* was inserted in the middle of the synthronon.

Inside the southern pastophorion, a sandstone floor was laid out. Close to the northern wall, a large, underground space covered by slabs was discovered but found empty. The size of that space (1.30 m long, 0.9 m wide, 0.55 m high) appears small for a tomb, but an ossuary might be conceivable. East of the "tomb," is another enigmatic, complex installation. It includes a rectangular enclosure made of sandstone slabs with a round hole (diameter 0.16 m) giving access to a pithos-like container under the floor level, and a stela-like construction made of sandstone and marble fragments, set upright in the middle of the enclosure. The pithos-container was constructed of five separate carved blocks of stone. The contents of the container gave no indication of what was stored there (liquid?), but an ecclesiastic function seems possible.

The western part of the original church, ca. 9 m long, was turned into an open court (atrium) with two original E-W rows of columns supplemented by the eastern row running N-S. No evidence for a western row of columns has been detected so far, thus the atrium must have had two porticoes located opposite each other, and probably one on the eastern side. Initially, the old marble floor was presumably in use. But later (Phase III?), that floor was partially removed and replaced by the new (extant) floor which consisted of irregular sandstone slabs supplemented by broken marble pieces. This floor, laid out ca. 0.2–0.25 m above the level of the marble floor, is markedly sloping westward to facilitate the channelling of rainwater out of the atrium, and toward the cistern.

During Phase I, some kind of an entrance porch should have preceded the church proper, being then followed further west by the courtyard with the cistern. In Phase II, a formal porch was erected – an enclosed space with a portico of four columns in the front – which now preceded the atrium. The mosaic floor in the porch featured an almost symmetrical arrangement of designs on both sides of the central door to the atrium, including armed humans and wild animals. Notably, hunting scenes are common in the mosaics of the 6th century, e.g., the mosaics at the Hippolytus Hall (6th century),¹² or at the Old Diakonikon-Baptistery in the Memorial of Moses on Mt. Nebo (A.D. 530).¹³ The central medallion of the Jabal Haroun

¹² M. Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan*, Amman 1993, 23–24; 58–59.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 135, 146.

mosaic – a complex geometric design of interlacing squares and ribbons – is strikingly similar to the central panel of the narthex mosaic in the church at Gharandal, tentatively dated to the 6th century.¹⁴ However, except for the bordering chevron pattern, the geometric design in the center, and the occasional fragments of human or animal bodies, the designs are not preserved since the mosaic was heavily altered by later, iconoclastic activities.

Some changes also occurred in the chapel. The original western wall of the chapel seems to have suffered a destruction. A new wall was constructed further east, reducing the length of the chapel by ca. 3 m. It seems that the baptismal font was still functional during this phase. A new marble floor was laid out in the apse and in the area of a new transversal bema located in front of it. The altar table was probably still a portable, or so-called "four-legged" installation.

Phase III (7th century A.D.?)

It is less certain whether Phase II was also ended by a disaster but this remains a distinct possibility. Resulting changes were major; in the church they included the functional replacement of the columns (although still retaining them *in situ*) as structural supports with free-standing pillars supporting E-W arches. Simultaneously, N-S arches, supported by the pilasters, spanned the spaces of the nave and side aisles. Throughout this phase, changes and modifications took place in the bema area. The bema itself was raised and laterally enclosed by two "counter-like" low walls, somewhat similar to those in the Petra church in Phase V, or in the sanctuary of the monastic church at Deir 'Ain Abata.¹⁵ On the left (northern) side of the bema, a stepped and plastered structure was constructed, fully integrated with the wall enclosing the bema. This structure must have supported the ambo.

During the same phase, the early baptismal font in the western part of the chapel was abandoned and backfilled. Instead, a new, also cruciform and

¹⁴ N. Ricklefs, "The Church Mosaics", in A. Walmsley "The Church at Arindela (Gharandal) of Palaestina Tertia", *LA* 47 (1997), 501–3, fig.5.

¹⁵ For Petra, see Fiema (note 6); for Deir 'Ain Abata, see, K. D. Politis, "The 1992 Season of Excavations and the 1993 Season of Restorations at Deir 'Ain 'Abata", *ADAJ* 37 (1993) 507, fig. 6.

masonry-built font was erected at the left (northern) side of the bema. The font is well preserved and it also includes an integrated container between two of the arms of the cross. On the bema, a large altar masonry base or pedestal was erected. The structure is hollow inside, having a small compartment (0.54 m x 0.45 m x 0.65 m) with the opening towards the apse. The marble fragment of an inscription, which reads APΩN, was found in front of the pedestal. The fragment could have belonged to an edge of an altar table placed on top of the pedestal. The small compartment inside the masonry pedestal might have served as a depository of reliquaries which would be easily accessible and available for display on various occasions. This would be generally consistent with the practices observed in *Palaestina I, II and III* and *Arabia* during the Byzantine period.¹⁶ Although in this particular case, the reliquary would not be located in a shaft or fosse under the structure of the altar on the bema,¹⁷ but rather under the altar table, such cases are also known.¹⁸ The appearance of the fixed altar (as opposed to portable or four-legged installations) in Phase III is also consistent with the chronological observations. The fixed altars appear relatively late, i.e., at the end of the 6th century and generally later.¹⁹

Phase IV (8th century A.D. and later?)

The changes related to this phase might have originated in response to another destruction. It is also possible, however, that these were simple but solid measures to further reinforce the structure of the church against potential earthquakes. Accordingly, the spaces between the free-standing

¹⁶ P. Donceel-Voûte, "La mise en scène de la liturgie au Proche Orient IVe–IXe s.: les provinces liturgiques", in R. F. Taft (ed.), *The Christian East, Its Institutions & Its Thought*, Roma 1996, 328.

¹⁷ As at Umm al Rasas, see E. Alliata, "I reliquiari e altri elementi architettonici", in M. Piccirillo and E. Alliata (eds.), *Umm al-Rasas-Mayfa'ah I. Gli scavi del Complesso di Santo Stefano*, Jerusalem 1994, 312–14; and A. Michel, "Le installazioni liturgiche", in M. Piccirillo and E. Alliata (eds.), *Umm al-Rasas-Mayfa'ah, I*, Jerusalem 1994, 117, 119, note 15.

¹⁸ A. Michel, "The Liturgical Installations", in M. Piccirillo and E. Alliata (eds.), *Mount Nebo. New Archaeological Excavations 1967–1997*, Jerusalem 1998, 394.

¹⁹ N. Duval, "L'architecture chrétienne et les pratiques liturgiques en Jordanie en rapport avec la Palestine", in K. Painter (ed.), *Churches Built in Ancient Times. Recent Studies in Early Christian Archaeology*, London 1994, 170, 203.

pillars were walled up and pilasters built (or rebuilt) against these pillars and against the main northern and southern walls of the church. In the southern aisle, two columns were used instead of the pilasters. Secondary walls built directly on the pavements of the northern pastophorion and in the area in front of the narthex may belong to this or later phases. Notably, such barriers and partitions are well known from other Palestinian churches in the Umayyad period (mid-7th-mid-8th centuries A.D.).²⁰

A massive buttress was built on the atrium's side against the wall that partitioned the early church in Phase II. The buttress, built as a wall-enclosed space filled with layers of debris, stones and reused material (including column drums), is currently ca. 2.18 m wide and ca. 2 m high. It stands directly on the upper (extant) floor of the atrium.

Probably during that period (or earlier), the damage had been inflicted upon the mosaic floor. The iconoclasts had removed not only almost all tesserae forming faces but also main parts of human and animal bodies, and replaced them with plain large-size tesserae, in the manner of a careful obliteration rather than a wanton destruction. This damage relates to the images of animals and ordinary people, in opposition to the 8th century Byzantine iconoclasm that specifically targeted sacred images. This kind of deliberate damage, which nevertheless preserves the mosaic in its entirety, is generally dated to the 8th century (late Umayyad-early Abbasid period), and is known from other churches in Jordan and Palestine as well as from the Jewish synagogues in the region.²¹ Particularly notable, deliberate but not complete damage can be observed at the Church of the Lions in Umm ar-Rasas.²² The evidence of careful mosaic obliteration, as at Jabal Haroun, should indicate that in the 8th century the church would have been still

²⁰ E.g., the church of St. Mary at Rihab and the Upper Church at Quweisma. See, M. Piccirillo, "The Umayyad Churches of Jordan", *ADAJ* 28 (1984) 338. For similar installations in the church of St. John the Baptist (#95) at Khirbet as-Samra, see J-P. Humbert and A. Desreumaux, "Huit campagnes de fouilles au Khirbat es-Samra (1981–1989)", *Revue biblique* 97 (1990) 261. See also partitioning walls built in the nave and the aisles at the Anchor Church (the Abbasid phase) at Tiberias, which effectively divided the interior into several rooms or compartments (Y. Hirschfeld, "The Anchor Church at the Summit of Mt. Berenice, Tiberias", *Biblical Archaeologist* 57/3 (1994) 126, 132.

²¹ Piccirillo (note 12) 42.

²² *Ibid.*, 211.

functioning in the ecclesiastical capacity.²³

Later Phases

It is uncertain which parts of the entire structure still retained their ecclesiastical function during the later phases of the complex's existence. Structural integrity of the building is also not supported as the apse's semidome seems to have collapsed by then if not earlier. The evidence of the collection of marble fragments, glass and stone tesserae, and glass shards is noteworthy. Dumps or collection points of such material have been found in the south pastophorion, in the ruined apse of the church, in the cupboards in the chapel, in various places in the atrium, and in other places in the excavated parts of the complex. Some spaces within the church and the atrium were temporarily or casually occupied during later periods, a fact exemplified by ashy spots, fireplaces and the abundance of bones (primarily fish) in strata above the original marble floor. Finally, substantial stone tumbles, either reflecting natural decay and deterioration of structural parts or subsequent seismic-related destructions, had definitely terminated the occupation in the church area.

Comparative Observations

On the basis of his work in central Jordan, M. Piccirillo has distinguished two main periods of ecclesiastical building activities. In the 5th and in the beginning of the 6th century, the construction concentrated on fulfilling the practical liturgical purposes. In the second half of the 6th century, new luxurious building projects and the beautification of older churches seem to have taken place.²⁴ Chronologically, these two periods would roughly correspond to Phases IV –VI at the Petra church, and Phases I and II of the monastic church at Jabal Haroun.

Undoubtedly, the comparisons between the Petra church and the Jabal Haroun church are not only based on purely chronological distinction, superficial observations, and the geographical proximity of both places.

²³ Ibid., 42.

²⁴ M. Piccirillo, "Rural Settlements in Byzantine Jordan", In Adnan Hadidi (ed.), *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan II*, Amman 1985, 261.

There are some striking similarities between both churches which do not seem to be accidental. The dimensions of both churches, the manner of construction and initial decorations are largely comparable, which may imply the involvement of the same team of architects and builders. Perhaps this hypothesis may also explain the initial monoapsidal form of both churches, the presence of a narthex but the lack of a well-developed and confined atrium, the cruciform baptismal fonts, etc. Even in the later phases of existence (Phases VI-VII, IX of the Petra church and Phases IV and later at Jabal Haroun), when the ecclesiastical function of both edifices was considerably reduced or poorly attested, certain cultural phenomena are equally attested. These include the construction of simple, partitioning walls, or the evidence for collection of still useful material (mosaic tesserae, glass).

There, however, the comparisons end and some substantial differences occur in the history of both churches. The most important seems to be the overall function. While the Church of the Virgin Mary at Petra might have been a metropolitan church of *Palaestina Tertia*, the church at Jabal Haroun must have retained its monastic-pilgrimage function until the end of its active existence. The difference in the time-span of the ecclesiastical existence is also considerable. The Petra church may not have survived long beyond the end of the 6th century due to the disastrous fire and the subsequent ecclesiastical abandonment. As such, the early 8th-century iconoclasm did not leave its destructive mark on the superb floor mosaics of that church. On the other hand, the Jabal Haroun church appears to have continued long after the end of the 6th century, albeit in a gradually reduced and seemingly impoverished form.

Particularly instructive is to compare the transition between Phases IV and V of the Petra church and Phases I and II of the church at Jabal Haroun, which temporally may probably be assigned to early through mid-6th century A.D. There is no evidence for a destruction of the early church (Phase IV) at Petra. If reflecting on the two periods distinguished by M. Piccirillo (*supra*), the Church of the Virgin Mary had indeed experienced a considerable spatial expansion, architectural re-definition, and it benefitted from a sumptuous, although often careless and somewhat haphazard redecoration program. On the other hand, the Church of St. Aaron had experienced a destruction at the end of Phase I. While the function of the church and the chapel was possibly somewhat redefined, the reconstruction

resulted in a substantial contraction of the church's size (and of the chapel) and only a modest, pragmatic redecoration, primarily exemplified by the mosaic floor in the narthex.

At any rate, both churches experienced substantial remodelling at the beginning of Phases V (Petra church) and II and III (Jabal Haroun church), whether or not prompted by a prior destruction. But the Petra church was transformed into a triapsidal church while the Jabal Haroun church retained its original form. The transformation from mono- to triapsidal form, i.e., the installation of apses in places formerly occupied by the pastophoria, is generally dated to the early through mid-6th century. On the basis of the examples from the neighboring Negev, that change was postulated to have been linked to the re-emphasis on the cult of Martyrs and Saints,²⁵ and the associated liturgical changes (such as the introduction of the rite of the Great Procession and Prothesis) which affected overall architectural arrangements and the location of the reliquaries.²⁶ An alternative view concentrates on the variations in the organization of the sanctuaries and in the deposition of the relics in triapsidal churches, and a resulting uncertainty and difficulty in associating an architectural form—mono- or triapsidal—with particulars of the specific cult and liturgical requirements.²⁷ The emergence of or the transformation into the triapsidal basilicas was also associated with a purely aesthetic purpose, and the form itself derived from classical architecture.²⁸ It is certainly necessary, however, to distinguish between churches which were initially monoapsidal and underwent the transformation, and the new triapsidal churches which feature substantially changed, square-like proportions (wider but shorter) and which first appear in the later 6th century.

²⁵ For an exhaustive bibliography on the cult of Martyrs and Saints in Palestine, see Sh. Margalit, "The Bi-Apsidal Churches in Palestine, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Cyprus", *LA* 40 (1990) 321–334 and note 6.

²⁶ See extensive discussions by A. Negev, "The Cathedral of Elusa and the New Typology and Chronology of the Byzantine Churches in the Negev", *LA* 39 (1989) 129–142; Sh. Margalit, "On the Transformation of the Mono-Apsidal Churches with Two Pastophoria into Tri-Apsidal Churches", *LA* 39 (1989) 143–164; Duval (note 19); and Y. Tsafir, *Excavations at Rehovot-in-the-Negev. Vol I: The Northern Church, QEDEM* 25, Jerusalem 1988, 47–49, the latter on the impact of the rite of Prothesis on triapsidal churches in the Negev.

²⁷ Rosenthal-Heginbottom (note 8) 223–230, 233.

²⁸ A. M. Schneider, "Südjüdische Kirchen", *ZDPV* 61 (1938) 108.

In this context, it is worthwhile to review the changes in the form and function of the Jabal Haroun church and the chapel in Phase II, followed by further structural changes (support system) in Phase III. Wall I divides the original church into the western part (atrium) and the eastern part, the latter being a wide but shorter church proper. Initially, it was thought that this reduction in size associated with the non-transformation into the triapsidal form should specifically be related to the lack of proper financing for the total rebuilding of the church, i.e., the execution of some kind of cheap reconstruction design. This argument is still at least partially tenable. After all, the Phase II church at Jabal Haroun is not only smaller in size but also seemingly deprived of much of its marble furnishing. Destroyed or damaged marble chancel screens and posts were apparently not replaced, while their broken fragments were used as a fill in Wall I, or as replacements in the damaged marble floor. Overall, the Phase II church does not impress with wealthy furnishing and decoration, as does the Petra church in Phase V. However, the somewhat simplified and depleted of costly marble decoration appearance of the church in Phase II, should not entirely relate to a substantial impoverishment of the monastic community at Jabal Haroun.

Attention should be directed to the re-emphasis on the cult of Saints and Martyrs, evidenced in the 6th century. The installation of the new bema in front of the apse of the chapel at Jabal Haroun in Phase II, and the construction of a large masonry-built altar pedestal in Phase III, seem to indicate a redefining of the function of the chapel. Perhaps that redefinition remained in relation to a church or a chapel on the summit of Jabal Haroun, recorded by Wiegand at the beginning of the 20th century,²⁹ but no longer surviving. It is not possible to establish its construction date but equally nothing prevents that upper church from being considered coexistent with the early monastery. If the upper church originally housed important relics, such as Aaron's, its possible damage or destruction at the end of Phase I or Phase II could have caused the translation of the relics down to the rebuilt chapel of the monastery. The substantial altar pedestal, empty inside, would best accommodate relics. As such, the chapel, at least in Phase III (if not earlier), would have become a memorial chapel. Notably, the construction of the new baptismal font in Phase III indicates that the baptismal function and

²⁹ Th. Wiegand, *Sinai* (Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen des Deutsch-Türkischen Denkmalschutz-Kommandos, Heft 1), Berlin 1920, 136–45.

practices there were not abandoned altogether. Rather, by their proximity to the bema and the altar, they seem to become even more liturgically interrelated.

Such changes would then have made it unnecessary to transform the Jabal Haroun church into a triapsidal edifice. The cult at Jabal Haroun was overwhelmingly oriented around Aaron. If his relics were now housed in a chapel, which was an integral part of the ecclesiastical building of the monastery, that made the church a memorial edifice as well, without a compelling need to display or venerate any other holy relics in there. Although the potential presence of other relics in the ecclesiastical complex at Jabal Haroun cannot be totally excluded either but there would have been no liturgical need to transform the church's pastophoria into side apses to accommodate such relics. Thus the northern pastophorion had retained its original function also in Phase II, probably as a sacristy.

However, some less understood changes had occurred in the southern pastophorion. An enigmatic installation briefly described above should date to Phase II, but its function is unclear. Notably, during the 2000 season, small fragments of monochrome (red on white) painted plaster with Greek writing were found adjacent to the walls in this room. The Greek letters revealed a fragment of Psalm 91 (no. 90 in the Septuagint).³⁰ The text may allegorically refer to the famous plague of the Justinianic period, which began in A.D. 541–2, and affected large areas of the Near East and Europe. Although there are no extant sources indicating the occurrence of the plague in Petra, it is possible that during that time someone quoted the psalm, writing it as a prayer on the wall inside the church, perhaps seeking a measure of comfort in its pronouncements. On the other hand, a less dramatic explanation would relate the text to the new function of the pastophorion, perhaps that of a funerary chapel for the inhabitants of the monastery. In such case, the installation in the southern pastophorion may, perhaps, be interpreted as an ossuarium.

Finally, returning to the partitioning of the church at the beginning of

³⁰ Psalm 91: 4–7: "He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday. A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you." For detailed description see J. Frösén, "The FJHP: Epigraphic Finds", in *Petra – A City Forgotten and Rediscovered* (note 4), 181–88.

Phase II, this change does not need to be viewed as a reduction of the church in size, resulting solely from its prior destruction and the subsequent lack of funds for a proper reconstruction to its original form. In fact, by this partitioning, the church complex received a well-defined atrium which would better serve the needs of the pilgrims than the poorly defined Phase I atrium located around the central cistern. Furthermore, the shorter yet wide church would better fulfill the architectural design related to the newly introduced rites of the Great Procession and Prothesis. In its form, the Jabal Haroun church of Phase II much resembled new basilican churches built in the later 6th century, which, while featuring 3 apses, were also characterized by more square-like proportions.

The interpretive observations offered above will necessarily remain as preliminary hypotheses, probably even after the end of the fieldwork. Nevertheless they offer some new insights into the history of the Jabal Haroun church, while integrating this structure into a larger framework of the ecclesiastical architecture of the Byzantine East.

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