

Latest report (December 2002) by Prof. Dr. Stephan Schmid

The International Wadi Farasa Project (IWFP) focuses on one of the most fascinating tomb complexes of ancient Petra, the capital of the Nabataeans in southern Jordan. The project is directed by Professor Stephan G. Schmid (University of Montpellier III) who is a founding HSNES member. From 2001, the HSNES has supported the project, which is sponsored by the Association for the Understanding of Ancient Cultures (Basel) and the Palestine Exploration Fund (London).

The Wadi Farasa East has two main terraces that are connected by steps leading further up to the 'High Place of Sacrifice' (fig. 1). The main complex is situated on the lower terrace, with the 'Soldier's Tomb,' and opposite a triclinium, or banqueting hall, with beautifully carved interior architecture. Between these two main rock-cut monuments of the lower terrace, there once stood a peristyle courtyard, surrounded on three sides by colonnades. On the upper terrace is the so-called 'Garden Triclinium', a relatively luxurious living area built in the 1st century AD with an associated complex water catchment system.

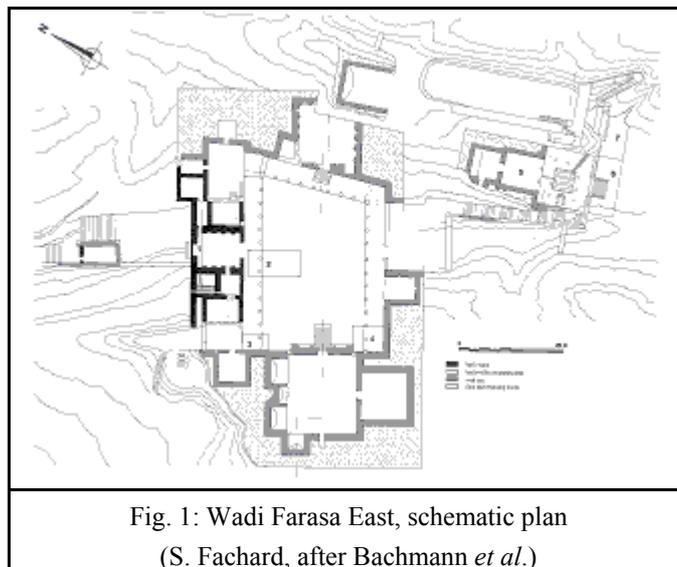


Fig. 1: Wadi Farasa East, schematic plan
(S. Fachard, after Bachmann *et al.*)

The monuments in the Wadi Farasa formed part of the Nabataean capital of Petra dated between the 1st centuries BC and AD. The buildings can be compared to rich Hellenistic houses like the ones known from Delos or to Roman villas as seen in Pompeii (cf. Schmid 2001B).

The third season of the IWFP was conducted in September 2002. The team consisted of Caroline Huguenot, MA (Lausanne), Isabelle Sachet, MA (Paris), Dr Konstantinos Politis (HSNES, Chairman), Khaled Ahmed Al-Houaura, MA (Department of Antiquities of Jordan representative), and 16 workmen from the B'dul and Sa'idiyeen tribes and was led by Professor Stephan G. Schmid.

Following the results of the previous seasons (Schmid 2001A; also reported in Delteon 2001: 5-6) work on the upper and lower terraces of the Wadi Farasa East continued with the following soundings and trenches: On the upper terrace work in trench 5, containing

the so-called 'Garden Triclinium' and the space in front of it, continued in order to completely clear the two cisterns only partially excavated in 2001. Further, the first rock cut room of the triclinium itself was cleared from the remains previously used to shelter for sheep and goats. On the lower terrace sounding 1 was extended towards east, south and west, exposing almost the entrance complex (fig. 2).



Fig. 2: Wadi Farasa East, lower terrace from North
(photo by S.G. Schmid)

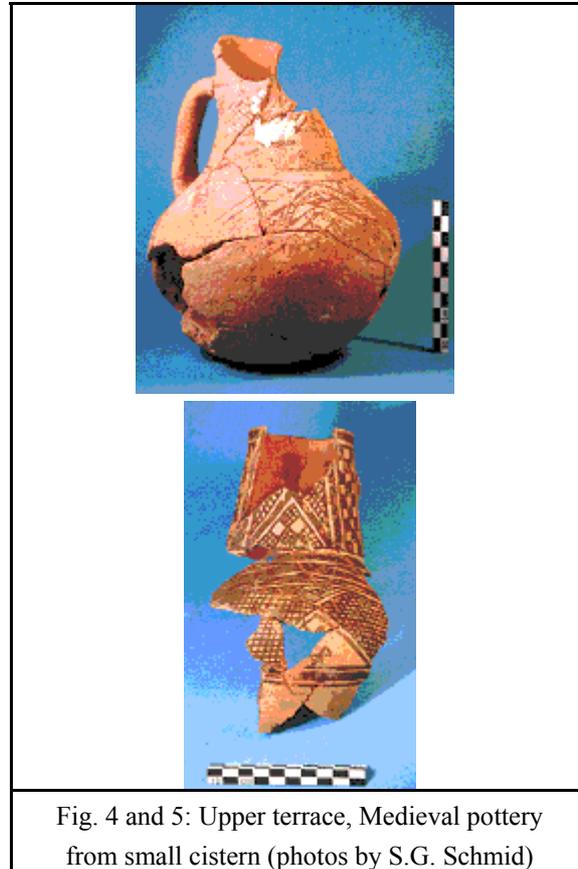
In addition a trench was opened in front of the 'Soldier Tomb' with the objectives of locating the doorway leading into the tomb and to identify the supposed stairways leading into the courtyard. According to the results of that trench, it is possible to propose for the first time in the history of research a tentative reconstruction for the complete façade of that monument (fig. 3).



Fig. 3: Lower terrace, Soldier Tomb; tentative
reconstruction

During Crusader and Medieval times, this area was reused as is apparent by the construction of new walls and characteristic pottery from the 11th - 13th centuries AD. Brünnow and von Domaszewski had found what they believed was a Crusader tombstone inside the 'Garden Triclinium' (Brünnow and Domaskewski 1904: 275 fig. 307). During the 2001 season of the IWFPP four more of these tombstones were discovered, supporting the idea of an important medieval occupation of the area.

Dr Jacqueline Studer made a preliminary study of the animal bone and botanical remains from the Medieval-period cistern recovered by total on-site sieving. The results showed that roughly three quarter of the bones belonged to fish, particularly Red Sea parrotfish. Beside these remains, some lavishly painted pottery dating to the 11th to 13th c. AD was discovered in the cistern (figs. 4. 5).



The first two years of the IWFP's field seasons focused on opening test trenches aimed at understanding the organisation of all the ancient installations. During the 2002 field season a systematic cleaning of the lower terrace was begun from the north main retaining wall with the long-term goal of completely clearing the area. This will allow better control of water drainage, particularly during winter flooding and consequently, better protection against erosion of the rock cut monuments. On the upper terrace, the second room of the 'Garden Triclinium' needs to be cleared.

Bibliography

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