



HAL
open science

New data on the Epigraphy of the Northern Decapolis (North-Western Jordan)

Jean-Baptiste Yon, Nabil Bader

► **To cite this version:**

Jean-Baptiste Yon, Nabil Bader. New data on the Epigraphy of the Northern Decapolis (North-Western Jordan). *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan: Ethics in Archaeology*, 13, Department of Antiquities of Jordan, pp.373-377, 2019. hal-02461973

HAL Id: hal-02461973

<https://hal.science/hal-02461973>

Submitted on 26 Aug 2022

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

New Data on the Epigraphy of the Northern Decapolis (North-Western Jordan)

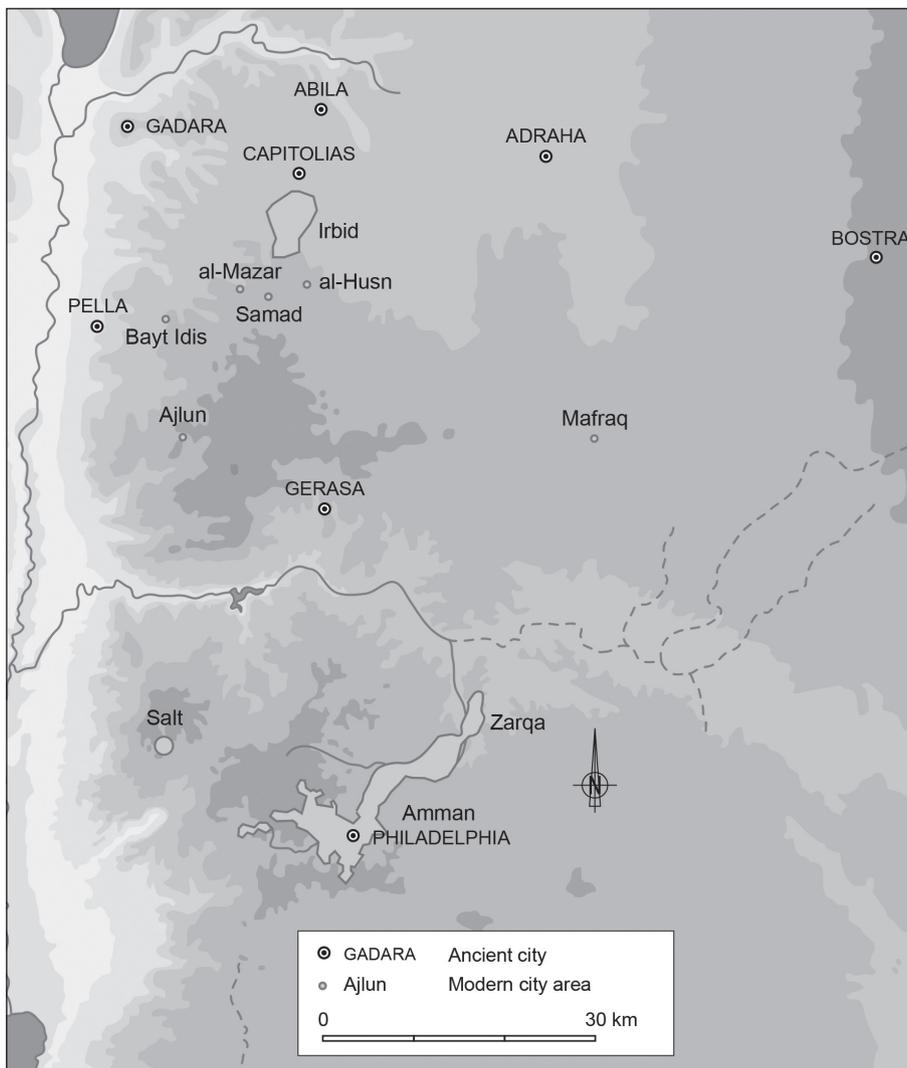
Our work in Jordan is part of the Inscriptions de la Jordanie Project (Greek and Latin Inscriptions in Jordan), conducted under the supervision of Dr. Pierre-Louis Gatier (CNRS Lyon) and Prof. Nabil Bader (Yarmouk University), in agreement with the Department of Antiquities of Jordan. The basic goal of the project is to gather published and unpublished material together, as well as examining Greek and Latin inscriptions in order to bring new discoveries to light. This article provides the first results of a fruitful cooperation which began in 2013, and has since then experienced new developments. For the sake of simplicity, the Inscriptions de la Jordanie Project has divided the northern part of the country in smaller zones to achieve quicker results.

The present authors (Prof. Nabil Bader and Dr. Jean-Baptiste Yon) have responsibility for the North-Western area of the project, including the hinterland of modern-day Irbid and the ancient cities of Abila, Gadara and Pella; the latter three included in the Graeco-Roman Northern Decapolis. We shall commence with a general overview of the epigraphic documentation, with examples of relevant

material, and then present some new results from our work, specifically an inscription from Capitolias/ Bayt Rās.

The Greek cities of modern North-Western Jordan belonged in antiquity to an ill-defined group of settlements known in the literature as the Decapolis (Ten cities). They are referred to in two documents, one by Pliny the Elder (*Natural History* V.74.1) and the other by Ptolemy the geographer (*Geography* V.15.22–23); however, each of them includes more than ten cities. As is evidenced by the map (FIG.1), the list should be supplemented by many sites and villages. Inscriptions have been found from at least fifty sites.

Our main objective is to produce a catalogue of all previously known inscriptions, taking the great diversity of material into consideration; for example, the painted text found in a tomb at Abila, published by one of the project supervisors, P.-L. Gatier (Gatier 1994: 37, nr.1, fig.1 = *SEG* 44, 1379). Gadara has so far been the most prolific site, with more than fifty texts, most of which have been published in *Gadara Decapolitana*, by Prof. Thomas Weber (Weber 2002). At Gadara, as at other sites, a



1. Map of North Western Jordan.

variety of inscriptions have been found, such as mosaics from churches, official or public texts, testimonies on the impact of the Roman army, and dedications to emperors, all of which contribute to our knowledge of Jordan in antiquity. A very important category provides evidence of religious or cultic practice, both pagan and Christian; for example, a dedication to a celestial Arabic god found at Pella (*SEG* 41, 1567). As usual, funerary inscriptions are the most frequent, either on wall paintings such as those found in the tombs of the Necropolis at Abila, or engraved on tombs or funerary stelas, which are ubiquitous in other parts of the Near East. A particularly interesting funerary mosaic, due to its rarity, is from a Christian tomb found at Gadara, which includes the names of three members of a family (?), who were buried there

(Weber 2002: 302, nr.IS 47).

All in all, with the major exception of Gadara, no site is exceptionally rich in inscriptions. It is true for both Pella and another of the Decapolis cities, Capitolias, a few kilometers north of Irbid. Until major archaeological excavations took place in the 1980's and at the beginning of the present millennium, its coinage was almost the only extant evidence for the ancient city (Lenzen and Knauf 1987; Bowsher 2011). Capitolias is not mentioned in the list of Pliny, but is included in that of Ptolemy, which concurs with what we know of the local era. The foundation of the city of Capitolias was either 97 or 98 AD, as evidenced by its coinage, at some point between Marcus Aurelius and Macrinus. Its name, Capitolias, attests it was a Roman foundation. The most important recent

discovery has been that of a theater, excavated in 2002, situated on the eastern edge of the modern village of Bayt Rās. The site has been extensively dug, and structural remains of the monument are impressive. On the eastern side, one of the corridors (a *parodos*) was blocked during secondary usage, using the entrance of a tomb, together with its lintel and doors. Even more interesting are the remains of a Greek inscription in a *tabula ansata* high above ground level. This inscription was badly defaced soon after its discovery almost fifteen years ago and has never been published. This paper for the 2016 *ICHAJ* Conference is the perfect setting to rectify this, thanks to a copy kept by Nabil Bader in his archive. Even at the time of the discovery, the inscription was not completely preserved; a tentative reading is proposed here:

Υ[π]έρ [σω]τηρίας καὶ νείκη[ς]
 το[ῦ] κυ[ρίου] ἡμῶν Γαλλινοῦ.
 [Σε]β[αστοῦ] ὑπατε[ύ]ντος Νουμηρίου
 4 Σεου[ή]ρου ἐργοδιωκ[τοῦ]ντος
 Α<ῦ>ρηλίου Ἀνδρομάχου *vac.*
 τοῦ κρατίστου καὶ λογιστοῦ
vac. ἐκτίσθη, ἔτι ρξγ´. *vac.*

“For the salvation and the victory of our Lord Gallienus Augustus, when Numerius Severus was governor and Aurelius Andromachos, *vir egregius* and *curator*, oversaw the work, (this) has been built, in the year 163.”

As the local era began either AD 97 or 98, the adjusted date would fall between 259 and 261. As Gallienus’ reign started in 260, 259 can be excluded. A provisional date of 260/261 can be proposed.

Our inscription is very similar to other texts from the same period found in the province of Arabia; for example, an inscription found at Adraha (modern Dera’; see *IGLS* XIV, 13-17), or another found at Irbid, which is even closer to Capitolias. The inscription, which was discovered at an unspecified location near the modern city of Irbid *ca.* 1905, related to the construction of a city wall: Irbid. Limestone block 56×66×8.5cm.

Whicher and Clermont-Ganneau 1906: fig. 1 (*AE* 1907, 67; Pflaum 1952: 315-316; Meimaris *et al.* 1992: 168, with fn.27). *cf.* Pflaum 1952: 307, fn. 2; *IGLS* XIV, *ad* nr.17.

Ἀγαθῆ Τύχῃ.

Υπὲρ σωτηρίας τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν αὐτοκράτορος Μάρκου Ἀντωνίου Γορδιανοῦ Σεβ[αστοῦ]

4 ἐπὶ Δομιπτίου Οὐαλεριανοῦ τοῦ λαμ[προτάτου] ὑπατι-

κοῦ, ἐφεστῶτος Καλ[πορνίου] Σατορνεῖνου χειλιάρχου,

προεδρείας Θεοδώρου Βάσσου, ἐπισκοπευόν-

των Αὐρ[ηλίων] Σαβεῖνου Νεαγίου καὶ Σαβεῖνου Βάσ-

8 σου τῶν βουλευτῶν, καὶ Ζηνοδώρου Ἀπολινα-

ρίου συνβ[ουλεύοντος], διαταγῆ Φλ[αυίου] Οὐήρου ἐκ δημοσίου

πήχ[εις] ρλ´. ἔτ[ε]ι ρλγ´.

“To the Good Fortune. For the salvation of our Lord the Emperor Marcus Antonius Gordianus Augustus, when the illustrious Domitius Valerianus was governor, under the direction of the tribune Calpurnius Saturninus, during the proedry of Theodoros son of Bassus, with the councillors Aurelius Sabinus son of Neagios and Aurelius Sabinus son of Bassus (serving) as inspectors, and the advice of Zenodoros son of Apolinarius, according to the testament of Flavius Verus, with public funding. 130 cubits. Year 133.”

According to the era of the Provincia Arabia, 133 can be interpreted as AD 239 (133 + 106), which fits perfectly with the reign of Gordianus III (AD 238-244). This would not be the case if dating was calculated from the foundation of Capitolias, as the date would fall during the reign of Severus Alexander (AD 222-235).

Similarities with the text of Capitolias are self-evident: for the salvation of the emperor a building was constructed under the supervision of a governor and with the work of local magistrates or notables. At Adraha,

the construction was a city wall. At Capitolias, it is difficult to state definitively if the stone with the inscription was later reused in a wall. Alternatively, it could be evidence for the transformation of the theater into a part of the defensive wall of the city at the time of Emperor Gallienus.

The significant difference between Capitolias and Irbid is the use of the era of the province of Arabia. Gadara and Pella were already included in the Roman province of Syria-Palaestina in the third century, and Capitolias belonged to the province of Palaestina II in the fourth century. This difference could be used as evidence that Capitolias was not part of Arabia in the period following the annexation of the former Nabataean Kingdom (after 106), and that Irbid did not lie within the territorial boundaries of Capitolias, since the chronological framework used there does not correlate with the foundation in 97-98.

Indeed, one of the main problems with the Decapolis cities is to determine the extent of their civic territories. The use of different eras is a very useful criterion for that purpose. It has been argued, with good reason that the inscriptions found at al-Mazār (Bader and Habash 2005: 191-192, nr.1), Şamad (or Khirbat Banī Mālik, Meimarīs *et al.* 1992: 170, nr.31) and al-Ḥuşun (*SEG* 47, 2064) could be dated according to the era of the province of Arabia, thereby proving that these localities were not located within the territory of Capitolias. As Capitolias is roughly located between Abila and Gadara in the north, with Irbid and the *provincia Arabia* to the east and south respectively, one could argue that its territory extended to the south-west in the direction of Pella. Indeed, there are some indications that this is correct; at Bayt ʿĪdis, a few kilometers east of Pella, but farther from Irbid, a mosaic inscription from a church was dated to the year 507 and Indiction 7 (Melhem and al-Husan 2001: 47; *SEG* 51, 2060). If calculated according to the era of either the *provincia Arabia* or that of Pella,

there is no agreement between the year and the indiction. However, if the chronological dating relating to Capitolias, which was founded in AD 97 or 98 is used, the adjusted date would be AD 604, which is in agreement with Indiction 7. In this case, Bayt ʿĪdis would have belonged to Capitolias, whose territory encompassed a rather surprising extension towards Gadara and Pella in the west.

Another important point to note is that Numerius Severus did not appear in the lists of Roman provincial governors, neither in *provincia Arabia* nor in Syria Palaestina (the latter a likelier location for Capitolias). As a matter of fact, very few of the governors for these two provinces can be identified during this period (Thomasson 1984: 326; Davenport 2010: 351). As for the *curator* Aurelius Andromachos, one Andromachos was *dioiketes* (that is, the chief financial official) in Egypt (*P.Oxy* 10.1264, dated AD 272; *cf. PIR*² A587). He had the same rank of *egregius*, or *kratistos* in Greek, and could possibly be the same individual.

Taking the evidence presented above into account, initial results from our collaborative research contribute to a better understanding of the region in antiquity, particularly with regard to the territorial boundaries of the cities of the Decapolis in the Roman Period. Surprisingly, the territory of Capitolias, present-day Bayt Rās, extended far to the west, whilst the eastern border extended to the immediate vicinity of Irbid. With the help of the Department of Antiquities, further fieldwork is bound to enrich the corpus of Greek and Latin inscriptions in this area, and our knowledge of the history of Jordan during the Greek and the Roman Periods.

Bibliography

- Bader, N. and Habash, M. 2005. Greek Funerary Inscriptions from Northern Jordan. *Syria* 82: 189-197.
- Bowsher, J.M.C. 2011. The Foundation of Roman Capitolias. *ARAM* 23: 35-62.
- Davenport, C. 2010. The Building Inscription from the Fort at Udruh. *JRA* 23: 349-357.

- Gatier, P.L. 1994. Les inscriptions. Pp.37–49 in A. Barbet et Cl. Vibert-Guigue (eds.), *Les Peintures des Nécropoles Romaines d'Abila et du Nord de la Jordanie*, Beirut: Institut français d'archéologie du Proche-Orient.
- Lenzen, C.J. and Knauf, H.A. 1987. Beit Ras/Capitolias. A Preliminary Evaluation of the Archaeological and Textual Evidence. *Syria* 64: 21-46.
- Meimaris, Y.M., Kritikakou, K. and Bougia, P. 1994. *Chronological Systems in Roman-Byzantine Palestine and Arabia. The Evidence of the Dated Greek Inscriptions*. Athènes/ Paris: National Hellenic Research Foundation, De Boccard.
- Melhem, I. and Al-Husan, A. 2001. First Season of Excavation at Khallit 'Īsā-Şīr/Bayt Īdis (Arabic), 2000. *ADAJ* 45: 33-50.
- Pflaum, H.G. 1952. La Fortification de la Ville d'Adraha d'Arabie. *Syria* 29: 307-330.
- Weber, T.M. 2002. *Gadara–Umm Qēs I. Gadara Decapolitana. Untersuchungen zur Topographie, Geschichte, Architektur und bildenden Kunst einer "Polis Hellenis" im Ostjordanland*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Whicher, G.M. and Clermont-Ganneau, C. 1906. A Greek Inscription from the Hauran. *AJA* 10: 289-294.

**STUDIES IN THE HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY OF JORDAN XIII:
ETHICS IN ARCHAEOLOGY**

SHAJ 13 (2019)

Contents

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	17	Andrea Vanni Desideri	97-
SYSTEM OF TRANSLITERATION	19	NOTES ON TWO MANJANIQ	107
TABLE OF CONFERENCES	20	COUNTERWEIGHTS FROM	
SPEECHES	21	MAMLUK ASH-SHAWBAK	
<i>HRH, Prince El-Hassan Bin Talal</i>	21		
<i>Dr. Monther Jamhawi</i>	27	Angela Atzori, Jihad Haroun	109-
		and Gaetano Palumbo	113
Abdalla J. Nabulsi	31-	MANAGING WORLD HERITAGE	
CREMATION BURIALS IN JORDAN:	43	SITES IN JORDAN: FROM	
A REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE		PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE TO	
		OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES	
Abdulqader Al-Husan and Julien Aliquot	45-		
NEW GREEK INSCRIPTIONS FROM	50	Barbara Reeves	115-
DAFYANA IN NORTH-EAST JORDAN		THE NABATAEAN AND ROMAN	127
		TOWNS AT HUMAYMA: AN	
Achim Lichtenberger and Rubina Raja	51-	URBAN DESIGN PERSPECTIVE	
THE DANISH-GERMAN JARASH NORTH-			
WEST QUARTER PROJECT: RESULTS	71	Bernd Müller-Neuhof	129-
FROM THE 2014-2015 SEASONS		THE EBA COLONIZATION OF THE	142
		NORTHERN BADIYAH: FIXING THE	
Alex Peterson	73-	CHRONOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK	
CERAMICS IN CONTEXT: MIDDLE	83		
ISLAMIC EVIDENCE FROM		Chang-Ho C. Ji	143 -
THE DANISH-GERMAN JARASH		THE ANCIENT ROAD IN WADI ZARQA'-	157
NORTHWEST QUARTER PROJECT		MA'IN, NORTH OF KHIRBAT ATARUZ	
Andrea Polcaro and Juan Ramon Muñiz	85-	Craig A. Harvey	159-
PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF THE 2014-	96	A PRELIMINARY TYPOLOGY OF BRICK	180
2015 EXCAVATIONS CAMPAIGNS AT THE		AND TUBULI FROM THE LATE ROMAN	
EARLY BRONZE AGE I SETTLEMENT		BATH AT 'AYN GHARANDAL, JORDAN	
OF JABAL AL-MUTAWWAQ, MIDDLE			
WADI AZ-ZARQA', AREA C			

Annotated by B A Porter¹³ - Jan 1 2020

David F. Graf CENTRAL JORDAN EPIGRAPHIC PROJECT	181- 194	Gary Rollefson LATE NEOLITHIC VARIABILITY IN LITHIC TECHNOLOGY AND TYPOLOGY FROM TWO AREAS OF THE BLACK DESERT OF JORDAN	261- 269
David Vila BETWEEN HERE AND THERE: LOCATING ABILA OF THE DECAPOLIS IN THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE	195- 202	Gary Rollefson WALK ON THE WILD SIDE: PREHISTORIC ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE DESERTS OF JORDAN	271- 285
Davide Bianchi NEW ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERIES IN THE BASILICA OF THE MEMORIAL OF MOSES, MOUNT NEBO	203- 212	Giorgia Cesaro, Giuseppe Delmonaco and Bilal Khrisat MANAGING PUBLIC AWARENESS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ON LANDSLIDE RISK AT THE PETRA ARCHAEOLOGICAL PARK: THE CASE OF THE "PETRA SIQ STABILITY PROJECT"	287- 294
Dieter Vieweger SITES AFTER EXCAVATION: NATIONAL PARKS AND PUBLIC EDUCATION	213- 222	Guido Vannini THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL MISSIONS: FOR A NEW CULTURAL APPROACH, BEYOND THE CRISIS. THE 'FUTURE' EXPERIENCE OF THE EUROPEAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL MISSION 'MEDIEVAL PETRA' OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORENCE	295-309
Elisa Pruno and Raffaele Ranieri MEDIEVAL POTTERY IN SOUTH JORDAN: THE CASE-STUDY OF HMPW IN ASH-SHAWBAK CASTLE	223- 230	Gül Şen RETHINKING THE EARLY OTTOMAN PERIOD IN JORDAN: THE CASE OF TALL HISBAN	311- 319
Élisabeth Lesnes MADABA AND ITS LATIN CHURCH OF SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST: A SYNTHESIS	231- 242	Győző Vörös THE HISTORY OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL MISSIONS TO MACHAERUS	321- 336
Elodie Vigouroux and René Elter THE MEDIEVAL HAMMAM OF KHIRBAT AD-DAWSAQ: AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL INVESTIGATION	243- 256	Ignacio Arce REASSESSMENT OF THE BUILDING PHASING AND ENTRANCE HALLS OF THE Umayyad PALACE OF QASTAL AL-BALQA'	337- 360
Franco Sciorilli RESTORATION AND REHABILITATION OF BYZANTINE BASILICA OF MEMORIAL MOSES AT MT. NEBO, JORDAN. ARCHITECTURES AND MOSAICS BY THE CUSTODY OF HOLY LAND	257- 260		

Ina Kehrberg POTTERY AND LAMPS FROM THE FOUNDATION- AND UPPER WALLS CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE GERASA HIPPODROME. EXCAVATIONS 1984- 1996 BY ANTONI A. OSTRASZ	361- 372	Mark Driessen and Fawzi Abudanah THE UDHRUH INTERVISIBILITY: ANTIQUÉ COMMUNICATION NETWORKS IN THE HINTERLAND OF PETRA	453- 473
Jean-Baptiste Yon and Nabil Bader NEW DATA ON THE EPIGRAPHY OF THE NORTHERN DECAPOLIS (NORTH-WESTERN JORDAN)	373- 377	Marta D'Andrea, Andrea Polcaro, Suzanne Richard and Douglas R. Clark THE NEW MADABA REGIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM PROJECT (MRAMP)	475- 487
Jérôme Norris THE ANCIENT NORTH ARABIAN INSCRIPTIONS FROM WADI RAMAN IN THE HISMA DESERT	379- 394	Michele Nucciotti and Lorenzo Fragail AYYUBID RECEPTION HALLS IN SOUTHERN JORDAN: TOWARDS A 'LIGHT ARCHAEOLOGY' OF POLITICAL POWERS	489- 501
John Peter Oleson THE TRAJANIC AUXILIARY FORT AT HAWARA (MODERN HUMAYMA), JORDAN	395- 406	Moritz Kinzel, Anne Harpelund, Marie Jørkov, Pia Wistoft Nielsen, Christoph Purschwitz, Anna Soria, Mette Thuesen and Ingolf Thuesen LIFE AND DEATH AT SHAKARAT AL-MASA'ID: RESULTS OF THE 2014 AND 2015 SEASONS	503- 512
Jutta Häser A BYZANTINE-UMAYYAD MONASTERY AND A NEW INTERPRETATION FOR THE CISTERN IN AREA III ON TALL ZAR'A	407- 412	P. M. Michèle Daviau and Stanley Klassen LINKING IRON I SITES ON THE MADABA PLAIN: THE EVIDENCE FROM COLLARED PITHOI	513- 529
Katja Soennecken BETWEEN COLLAPSE AND CONTINUITY: LATE BRONZE AGE TO IRON AGE TRANSITION ON TALL ZAR'A	413- 420	Paul J. Ray A SERIES OF IRON AGE DOMESTIC BUILDINGS IN FIELD C AT TALL JALLUL	531- 538
Koji Oyama HERITAGE ROUTE ALONG THE KING'S HIGHWAY: NETWORKING MUSEUMS AND HERITAGE SITES	421- 431	Paul Z. Gregor WATER SYSTEM OF TALL JALUL	539- 544
Konstantinos D. Politis THE DISCOVERY, EXCAVATION, STUDY, CONSERVATION AND EXHIBITION OF KHIRBAT QAZUN	433- 446	Raouf Abujaber CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT "THREE HISTORIC SITES COMPLETELY DESTROYED IN AS-SALT"	545- 552
Luisa Goldammer TRADE AND CULTURAL EXCHANGE - LATE BRONZE AGE CYPRIOTE IMPORT WARE FROM TALL ZAR'A	447- 452		

Robert Wenning	553 -	Ueli Bellwald	595 -
APPROACHES TO NABATAEAN	563	WADI AL-JARRA DAM	608
RELIGION - SCULPTURE AND RELIGION		REHABILITATION PROJECT, PETRA	
Rokitta Krumnow	565 -	Zbigniew T. Fiema, Stephan G. Schmid	609 -
THE CHIPPED LITHIC ARTEFACTS	574	and Bernhard Kolb	616
FROM THE NEOLITHIC		THE NORTHEASTERN PETRA	
SETTLEMENT OF AL-HUSAYYAH.		PROJECT: AN ASSESSMENT	
A PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT			
S. Thomas Parker	575 -	Zeena Sultan	617 -
NABATAEAN AND LATE ROMAN	584	THE RITES (DUTIES) OF WORSHIPPING	625
DOMESTIC COMPLEXES AT PETRA		AMONG THE NABATAEANS	
Susanne Kerner	585 -	Zeidan A. Kafafi	627 -
THE RITUAL LANDSCAPE OF	593	WHO OWNS THE PAST: JORDANIAN	640
MURAYGHAT: THE EXCAVATION		ARCHAEOLOGICAL MASTERPIECES	
		AT THE INTERNATIONAL MUSEUMS	

SHAJ 13 (2019) ARABIC SECTION

الفهرس

- o ICHAJ LIST مؤتمرات « دراسات في تاريخ وآثار الأردن » السابقة
- pp 7-17 ISMAEL MILHAM منهجية العمل الأثري في التصدي للتزييف
- Methodology of Archaeological Work
in Addressing Falsification إسماعيل ملحم
- ABDUL QADER AL HUSSAN نقوش عربية إسلامية مؤرخة من البادية الشمالية الشرقية - المفرق
- 21 Dated Arabic Islamic Inscriptions عبدالقادر الحصان
- from North - East Desert
- pp 19-30