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champs de recherche résultant des contacts passés et présents entre
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*Ce volume des Annales présente les événements qui ont eu lieu
au Centre Scientifique de l'Académie Polonaise
des Sciences à Paris en 2022.*



Symposium finalizing the realization of the Polish-French partnership project HARMONIA financed by the National Science Center 220

Daniel Źarski

Résumé



Serotonin type 6 receptor antagonists: recent progress in sustainable synthesis methods and novel therapeutic applications 225

Paweł Zajdel

Résumé



Mathematical physics: new developments and perspectives 231

Marcin Napiórkowski

Résumé



Cultic traditions versus social transformations in Cyprus and the Levant during the late Hellenistic and early Roman period ... 238

Jolanta Młynarczyk

Résumé

Claire Balandier & Eric Chabert

Nea Paphos, colline de « Fabrika ». Trois espaces souterrains à usages cultuels en fonction aux époques hellénistique, romaine et byzantine 241

Claire Balandier

« Underground Nea Paphos », Carrières hellénistiques et sanctuaires souterrains de la colline de Fabrika 243

Claire Balandier, Jolanta Młynarczyk, Mariusz Burdajewicz

The temple and the “stibadium”: excavations and hypotheses 246

Claire Balandier, Jolanta Młynarczyk, Monika Rekowska

Fabrika Hill: the Triclinium area 251

Mariusz Burdajewicz

Khirbat es-Sar (Jordan) as a cultic site. Research questions and perspectives 255

Anna Kubicka-Sowińska

Architectural reconstruction of the temple and its cultic surroundings from the rock-cut remains on Fabrika Hill, Nea Paphos259

Adam Łajtar

Hellenisation of Egyptian cults under the Ptolemies: the case of Amenhotep son of Hapu 261

Jolanta Młynarczyk <i>The „bothros” and the banqueting topography of Fabrika</i>	263
Eustathios Raptou <i>YEROSKIPOU-PACHYAMMOS, un nouveau site hellénistique : Sanctuaire ou palais fortifié ?</i>	267
Monika Rekowska <i>Searching for the lost decoration of the temple on Fabrika hill</i>	270
Laurent Tholbecq <i>Les installations rupestres à ciel ouvert à Pétra (Jordanie) : un aperçu général</i>	271
Laurent Tholbecq <i>Théâtres associés à des espaces culturels au Proche-Orient romain : à propos de quelques travaux récents</i>	274
 Le désir de l'immédiateté et la crise des formes de médiation dans la culture contemporaine	282
Andrzej Leder, Paul Zawadzki <i>L'homme rivé dans un environnement nébuleux. Résumé</i>	
 Symposium on Control in Power Electronics, Electric Drives, Renewable Energy Sources and Smart Grids	289
Marcin Morawiec <i>Résumé</i>	
 Polish-French symposium on new regulations of reproduction: the role of adipokines	298
Agnieszka Rak <i>Résumé</i>	
 Pathogens-pathogens and pathogens-microbiome interactions in wildlife: their detection and their influence on zoonotic risks	305
PUBLICATIONS	311
 Des collections aux musées. Collectionneurs et passeurs culturels au temps de Feliks Jasiński (1861-1929) / From Collections to Museums: Collectors and Cultural Mediators in the Time of Feliks Jasiński (1861-1929)	312

Mariusz BURDAJEWICZ

***Khirbat es-Sar (Jordan) as a cultic site.
Research questions and perspectives***

In 2018 and 2019, the team from the Polish Centre of the Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw, conducted two seasons of fieldwork at Khirbat es-Sar in western outskirts of Amman (Philadelphia of the Roman period). The aim of the research was to understand the nature and chronology of that spectacular site which, occupying an excellent strategic position, was topped with a monumental architectural complex. Consisting of an “Ammonite tower” re-used in the Roman period as a temple and an arcaded courtyard added to it, this compound is surrounded by unspecified walls apparently of later periods. In 2018, a reconnaissance survey was conducted within the area fenced by the Department of Antiquities, during which a preliminary plan of the site was worked out; it was based both on the electric resistivity method and on the mapping of visible architectural remains. In 2019, test trenches were opened, providing the first insight into the stratigraphy of the site.



Phot. 1. Remains of ‘Ammonite tower’ (in the background) and arcades of the Roman-period forecourt of the temple (phot. M. Burdajewicz)

They allowed to identify the Roman-period level with several superimposed floors above it. Those earthen floors demonstrated that the site was densely inhabited, and the Roman structures were extensively re-used starting from the Abbasid times, but especially in the Ayyubid-Mamluk period. So far, no Byzantine to Umayyad-period architectural remains have been identified, which requires further investigation in the area.

The results of the preliminary fieldwork at Khirbat as-Sar have confirmed the considerable scientific potential of the site. In 2022, a new research project of the Faculty of Archaeology, University of Warsaw, has been launched financed by the National Science Centre (UMO 2021/43/B/HS3/00813). The new project addresses the dynamics of the *longue durée* relationship of the hinterland/periphery with the city/town in Central Transjordan. It is based on investigations at Khirbat es-Sar (Sara) against the background of historical and cultural development of Amman, covering the period from the Ammonite Iron Age to the Middle Islamic period (c. 8th cent. BC - 14th cent. AD).

Among several research objectives, two issues will be crucial to understanding the nature of the site.

The Iron Age II period: a much-debated issue concerning tower structures (some of them square and some round) built around Amman and so characteristic of its periphery landscape. The chronological propositions range from the Neolithic(!) through the Bronze Age, Iron Age, Persian and Hellenistic periods until the Roman times. The disagreement also extends to their function: were they independently functioning structures (shelters for local communities? storehouses? watch-towers? cult places?), or were they part of a well-organized advanced defence system around the capital against the external enemies? Possibly the towers weren't military structures built and operated by the state but constructed by local communities to protect agricultural installations from nomadic raids. It is also questionable who built the towers: either the Ammonites, which may seem obvious, or the Assyrians during their imperial expansion to the south.

The Greco-Roman period: during that period, the tower was adapted for a temple with the classical Vitruvian order (fragments of Ionic column bases still preserved in the vestibule) and an arcaded courtyard was added to it in the Roman times, c. 3rd century AD. At that time, the site was probably an important religious centre, whose monumental character indicates prominence beyond just local. Nevertheless, the possible connections to religious cults in the capital itself remain to be determined.

It is obvious that the future study of the sacred complex at Khirbat es-Sar should be placed in a wider perspective of the process of Hellenization and Romanization of indigenous cults in the Greco-Roman East. This issue, common to other cities of Decapolis, still needs investigation and clarification. Numismatic, epigraphic, and, to a lesser extent, archaeological sources provide information about the religious life in Philadelphia. Among the most popular deities worshipped in the city, the following should be mentioned: Zeus Ammon, Heracles, Tyche, Demeter, Athena, Aphrodite, Dionysos, Hermes, Harpokrates. Further research may determine whether any of these deities, or some others, were worshipped in Khirbat es-Sar.

The remnants of material traces of temples/sanctuaries in the capital itself are few. They are located on the Citadel:

- the temple of Heracles (AD 161-166); an Ammonite inscription dated to the 9th century BC suggests the existence of an altar or temple dedicated to the Ammonite god Milkom.
- two *temenoi*, of which only remains of walls surrounding the presumed two temple buildings have been found under the Umayyad palace.

In the *chora* of Philadelphia at least two *extra-muros* temples/sanctuaries have been localized. One is attested only by the epigraphical evidence from er-Ragib, ca. 12 km southeast from the Amman Citadel. An inscription found in the city necropolis refers to the sanctuary of Zeus and Demeter (Astarte). The other temple is known from the ruins at Khirbat es-Suq, 14 km south of the centre of Amman. The temple

consists of cella, vestibule and a courtyard, probably surrounded by a wall. The columns are topped with Ionian capitals.

The case of the tower temple at Khirbat es-Sar seems to be particularly promising and offers a chance of gaining new and essential information regarding the religious life in Philadelphia. This is because this hybrid structure presents a unique combination of the native architecture rooted in the Iron Age with elements of classical Greco-Roman temples. An extremely important task is also to determine the structural and, above all, functional relationship between the tower temple and the chronologically later arcaded courtyard in front of it.

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