

Petra Sculptures

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Up to 2019, six seasons to document Petra's ancient sculptures had been carried out (for the best previous such project, see El Khouri 2010) . The project, started in 2013 under the premise of "protecting by publication," was finished just before the large reorganization of the Petra Museum in the spring of 2019. The old museum inside the Petra Archaeological Park, the Cave Museum, and the exhibition in the visitor center were closed and replaced by the wonderful new Petra Museum near the entrance to the site. The storerooms of the old museum were totally emptied and the materials transferred to another place. More than 800 figural sculptures have been documented by my project, and a first large volume is planned for 2023. It contains about 400 objects from the center of Petra, all from known find-spots, mainly from excavations, although it excludes the French Expedition to Petra and the American excavations at the ad-Dayr plateau. Those finds are still being studied by the excavators.

The decision to present the sculptures by findspot, area, and complex instead of grouping them by subject was the correct one, considering the fragmentary status of many sculptures. In the description of each sculpture, the focus is put on four points: the exact place and the context where the sculpture was found, a description of the state of preservation, a description of the motif, and a classification with a review of previous interpretations. The manuscript contains more than 900 pages and includes photos of each object (usually providing more than one view). Due to the coronavirus pandemic and limited access to libraries, art-historical classification caused a delay in publication.

The second planned volume will contain the rock-cut figural art around the center of Petra (112 sculptures) and finds from the suburbs Wadi Musa, Beidha, Khirbet Brak, and Sabra (eighty sculptures). We do not know the findspot of seventy-eight sculptures from Petra. Another forty-four sculptures were bought at Petra and found their way into various museums and collections.

In my paper read at the 2015 International Conference on the History and Archaeology of Jordan (ICHAJ) in Florence, I demonstrated that there is surprisingly more than is commonly known in every respect. The documentation will be a basis for a better understanding not only of single sculptures but also for complexes, developments and changes, intentions, and the general character of the sculpture at Petra.

Reference

El-Khouri, Lamia. 2010. *Nabataean Stone Sculptures at Petra, Amman and Wadi Musa (Bait Al Anbat)* [in Arabic]. Amman: Jordan University Press.





Fig. 1. Great Herculaneum Woman, Jordan Archaeological Museum, Amman. A Roman import from the early 3rd century CE, this sculpture was found in 1933 between Wiegand's "Palace" and the Temple of the Winged Lions. (Photo by L. J. Kramer.)