



Preface

Anyone who drives down from the Jordanian capital Amman towards the luxury Dead Sea resorts can notice—after passing a military checkpoint—a few box-shaped stone tables standing on a slope to the left of the main road. A Bedouin family is usually camping amongst them, and they seem to tolerate each other quite well.

This tolerance has, unfortunately, not been the case with a large standing stone on a slope just a bit further south, which was clearly pulled down by ignorant but greedy gold-diggers in 2005, around 5000 years after having been erected! *Sic transit gloria mundi*...

During the four years (2003–2007) I spent in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, I devoted a lot of my free time to searching for megalithic stones, both standing and fallen. I am not sure whether it was the memories of their counterparts in the Netherlands, the *hunebedden*, which attracted me at first, or whether it was their shape and often imposing size. However, the more I got to know them, the more I became fascinated by them and yearned to find others. And Jordan—although it is not generally known—has very much to offer in this respect. Tourists tend to go to Petra, Jerash, Mount Nebo, maybe to Umm Qais, the Umayyad ‘castles’ and the Baptism site, but normally not much beyond. Only few venture off the beaten track and even then, hardly ever to a megalithic site. But I soon discovered their charm and mysterious appeal. As I dug deeper into the subject, I got acquainted with the impressive, but sometimes almost inaccessible, scientific literature, which in turn brought me to new sites, often personally ‘rediscovering’ them as if I had been a nineteenth-century traveler. In the end, I spent quite a lot of time in the libraries of the American Center of Oriental Research and at its British, French and German counterparts in Amman as well as at the Department of Antiquities. Slowly, I plowed my way through the ever-growing amount of references, but always with a longing to go out and hunt the ‘big stones’ themselves.

Even though it lacks adequate maps, Jordan is an easy country to travel through, thanks to its geography and thanks to the hospitality of its people. In Amman, it would be very hard to find anyone at all who can direct you to megalithic sites, but locally, the dolmen fields and standing stones are usually



Porthole-type dolmen at Dahmiah

known and respected, sometimes as *beit al-ghoul*, the house of the ghost. Unfortunately, the pressure of an ever-growing population, the price of land, agriculture, stone quarrying, gold digging and other factors are a threat to them, nowadays bigger than ever before.

Gradually, my initial wish to discover these sites turned into a desire to help to protect them. I realized that they could not, in spite of all their might, withstand the progress of civilization and if not adequately cared for, would eventually succumb to other interests. I therefore thought of raising awareness of these imposing but silent witnesses of the past with the Government of Jordan (and in particular the Department of Antiquities) as well as the academic world

and the general public in Jordan and abroad. I did this through articles in journals and newspapers, creating a Jordan Dolmen Society (JODOS) within the existing Friends of Archaeology, stimulating research and excavations, taking people to sites and finally, by writing this book.

Whereas dozens, if not hundreds, of books have been written on the subject of megalithic monuments in Western Europe, very little attention has been given to this phenomenon in the Levant. In fact, nineteenth-century travelers seem to have had a better eye for them than today's tourists, and sometimes even than modern archaeologists. Admittedly, much has been recorded in specialized scientific articles and archaeological publications, but the general public remains, by and large, unaware of this imposing aspect of Jordan's landscape archaeology.

I thought to make a modest contribution by enhancing this knowledge, being conscious of how much work there still is to be done, and how imperfect my own efforts will necessarily remain. Obviously, I could not strive for completeness, and inevitably I have overlooked or somewhat neglected some sites, such as the ones around Deir Abu Sa'id (Wadi Ziqlab) in the north, as well as Ras al-Naqb and Wadi Rum in the south. Some important references may also have been ignored, although I tried to include all the main literature. Omissions in whatever sense will hopefully be forgiven and dealt with in future, more exhaustive, publications. Science is continuing and discovers (sometimes rediscovers) new horizons.

I hope, nonetheless, that this publication will incite others to further research into, and protection of these ancient sites, as well as provide a guide to the curious visitor. Therefore the book is divided into two parts, a general introduction and a field guide. The first part is necessary for anyone who wants to get acquainted with the subject and is, by and large, divided into a section on dolmens and another on standing stones. The second part is the more exciting one, I feel, and hopefully will stimulate the reader to go and find those monuments which I myself was happy to rediscover. He or she may find others as well!

Finally, whom to thank? Many have joined me, provided me with advice, stimulated my own work. These were Jordanian scholars, government representatives as well as amateur enthusiasts of my own type. The non-Jordanian scientific community has, over decades, made an impressive contribution to research into megalithic phenomena and their place in archaeology.



Standing stones at Qulban Beni Murra, with modern tribal markings

But first of all, my gratitude goes to H.R.H. Prince El Hassan bin Talal, a patron of the history of Jordan, for his extremely kind introductory words. I have always been impressed by his knowledge and dedication to the dialogue between cultures, both in the Middle East and outside.

I would like to thank the Department of Antiquities and its director, Dr. Fawwaz Al Khraysheh, the foreign archaeological institutes in Amman, as well as the École Biblique in Jerusalem, where I spent so much time and where I received much help. Above all, my thanks go to the renowned American Center of Oriental Research and its directors, first Dr. Pierre Bikai and Associate Director Dr. Patricia M. Bikai, then Dr. Barbara A. Porter as well as the Assistant Director Chris Tuttle. ACOR's invaluable library became an oft frequented place

of retreat during weekends, before or after a long trip in the field. I am infinitely thankful to ACOR and Barbara Porter, who edited the final version of this book, for their confidence in me and for including it in the ACOR publication series. The cost of production has been borne largely by ACOR, with a contribution from Shell in Jordan, for which I am grateful.

My thanks equally go to my wonderful friend Isabelle Ruben, with whom I visited so many places in Jordan and who accepted the very ungratifying task of editing my book, as well as taking care of its layout. It is thanks to her that the book makes any sense at all. I would like to thank Maartje Al Sharif, who helped substantially with the first draft of the book, and Claire Ruben for indexing it.

Many evenings were pleasantly spent at the house of Dr. Hisham Khatib, whose impressive library I shamelessly, but thankfully, plundered. Several Jordanian photographers, Sima Zureikat, Karma Hijawi, Anees Maani and Mohammad al-Sarayrah helped me with some of the pictures and thus demonstrated the difference between an amateurish documentor and an artistic eye.

Finally, I would like to thank the Jordanian, as well as foreign archaeologists who helped me through their articles, by answering my questions and by showing me around, including Professor Zeidan Kafafi, Mr. Adeeb Abu Shmeis, Dr. Gerrit van der Kooij and his team, Dr. Tara Steimer-Herbet, Dr. Elzbieta Dubis, Professor V. Juan Fernández-Tresguerres, Dr. Uzi Avner and many, many others. I merely tried to bring together the impressive scientific work that they, and many before them, had already realized. Luckily, those of my friends who joined me on my trips stimulated me to turn my obsession into the book which you now hold.

The vignettes, where they appear, are line drawings taken from C. R. Conder's *The Survey of Eastern Palestine* I, unless otherwise stated.

