

Mount Nebo area (including Wadi Jadideh)

The area around Mount Nebo, the sanctuary of Moses, is dotted with dolmens and other megalithic remains. There are a few remains just north of Mount Nebo, but most of them are to the south and southwest. They were first mentioned by the famous explorer and ornithologist Tristram who visited the area in 1872. A few years later, Conder described them at length in his *Survey of Eastern Palestine* (1881).

Turning north towards Ain Musa (the spring of Moses), coming from Madaba just before arriving at Mount Nebo, the remains of several dolmens are visible alongside the road and are mainly still recognizable by their capstone.

The area is also known for circular structures, often on hilltops, made of large boulders. Sometimes they may have had a monolith inside and seem to have been tombs rather than towers. According to the Danish archaeologist P. Mortensen they most probably date to the Late Bronze and Iron Ages.



Wadi Jadideh dolmens



Kueijiyeh, one of the biggest dolmens in Jordan

Much larger circles, which seem to have been enclosures of some kind, are more frequent south of Mount Nebo. Some of them, south of the Zerqa Ma'in river, are so big that I was able to recognize them on a satellite photo! No pottery has been associated with them, and they remain a type of site that needs to be properly studied.

One very big stone circle is the so-called 'Conder's circle', south of Mount Nebo and close to Ain Jadideh. This circle, actually a large circular wall with a diameter of 119 m and a thickness of several meters, was first described by Conder and his team, who camped inside it in 1881, while exploring the dolmen field nearby. Mortensen has recently excavated a Chalcolithic–Bronze Age settlement inside this large circle.

The dolmen field of Wadi Jadideh/Jideid is one of the most impressive in Jordan ('Jadideh', as it is now called, means 'new'; the 'Jideid' version of Conder, differently spelled, possibly comes from the root 'Jedd', which he in turn considered related to the biblical 'Gad'). The local names of Masloubiyeh and Kueijiyeh are also connected to this area.

The principal dolmen field is on the slope, south of Conder's circle (the Masloubiyeh side), where Mortensen counted about 200 megalithic structures, including 157 dolmens as well as alignments and 21 (rather small) menhirs. Back in 1881 Conder's team measured, examined and sketched not less than 162 dolmens!

The dolmens are often arranged in small groups, with alignments of small standing stones connecting them. The open end of most of the dolmens face east and have a floor slab. Under the floor slab a first burial may have taken place, with use of the floor slab above for sacrificial purposes. The dolmens may have been used again later, but only for primary burial purposes, the remains being subsequently reburied elsewhere. Contrary to most dolmen fields, these dolmens are often built directly on the bedrock, not on a platform.

Mortensen also noticed 21 menhirs within the dolmen field, the highest measuring 3.35 m.

When Musil visited the place in 1901, he noted the lack of evidence of burials, or any other evidence of human activities in or around the dolmens. Still, the few late Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age sherds, flints and fragments of basalt jars suggest that the field was built and in use during the first half and the middle of the fourth millennium BC, according to Mortensen.

The Kueijiyeh field is clearly connected to the main field and faces it from the east, but it has less dolmens. All the same, one of the most impressive dolmens in Jordan still stands on its southern slope. There are more dolmens on the surrounding slopes.

How to get there

Wadi Jadideh

N 31°44'13.2"

E 035°43'51.8"

Kueijiyeh

N 31°43'51.0"

E 035°44'25.9"

The dolmen remains north of Mount Nebo are scattered on both sides of the small road which turns right, about 1 km east of Mount Nebo, towards Ain Musa (springs of Moses).

For Wadi Jadideh, you need to walk and/or climb a bit. There are several ways to get to the dolmens:

1. Taking the road to Mount Nebo from Madaba, turn left about 2 km before Mount Nebo, in the direction of the Byzantine churches of Mukhayyat. Once on that road, turn to the right and subsequently descend into the Wadi Jadideh valley. After having passed a group of smaller cairns (and one lonely dolmen) you come to the bottom, climb the other side (four-wheel-drive needed!), turn left and stop at Conder's circle. The dolmens located above the circle can be reached by foot in ten minutes.
2. The dolmens can also be approached from the southeast, taking the road which leads from Madaba to Masloubiyeh (and continues from there towards the Dead Sea). At Masloubiyeh, turn north, and descend from the top of the hill towards the Wadi Jadideh. They can be found scattered on the slopes.
3. The Kueijiyeh hilltop can be reached from Madaba along different roads leading west, e.g., by taking the road to Mount Nebo, turn south (left) before the terrain becomes broken and again turn sharp right (westwards) at a fork in the road about 1 km south.

References:

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