

Thermal Springs, Medical Supply and Healing Cults in Roman-Byzantine Jordan

“et in locis plurimis (scil.: Palaestinae) aquae suapte natura calentes emergunt ad usus aptae multiplicium medelarum . . .”

Ammianus Marcellinus, Res Gestae VIII 14,12

Introduction

Early in the fourth century AD, ‘Amr ibn-Luhayy usurped the custody of the shrine at Mecca from al-Harith and expelled the Jurhumite kings from the Holy precinct of the Ka‘ba. As he took over the rule on the Sacred House he became very sick. According to Ibn al-Kalbi¹ an Iraqi scholar of the eight/ninth century AD, he was told about a hot spring in Syrian al-Balqa which has to be identified with the region south of Amman in central Jordan. If he would go there, he would be cured. So he went to the thermal spring, bathed therein, and was delivered from evil. During his stay there, he noticed that the inhabitants of the place worshipped idols. He queried them saying, “*What are these things?*” and they replied, “*To them we pray for rain, and from them we seek victory over the enemy*”. Thereupon he asked them to give him [a few of those idols], and they did. He took them back with him to Mecca and erected them around the Ka‘ba.²

This is not the place to review the historical authenticity of this particular journey and the medical cure. ‘Amr ibn-Luhayy is said to have introduced various idols to Central-Arabian Lihyan from Syria³, where statues of Greek and Roman gods and goddesses were common before the spread of Christianity. In the pre-Islamic period, there are alleged to have been 360 idols venerated at

the shrine of Mecca (FIG. 1).⁴ Of these the most important were al-‘Uzza, Allat, and Manat – all three regarded as female deities –, and Hobal, a large male image.

Tradition in this respect may well be correct because the names of these idols are attested in Bilād ash-Shām by Nabataean inscriptions already several centuries earlier.⁵ On the other hand, the anecdote by ibn al-Kalbi sheds considerable light on thermal springs and their medical exploitation in Jordan, well comparable to those mentioned by Ammianus Marcellinus for Palestine (above).⁶ Healing cults during the pre-Islamic periods obviously stood in syncretism with fertility and military gods. It is the aim of this paper to give an account of the sites, the nature of the cults and, if possible, evidence of therapeutic practice. It should be pointed out that healing cults are not an exclusive feature of pagan religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam as well in their holy scripts focus on healing of diseases, metaphorically for the delivery of the soul.⁷ The majority of the miracles of Jesus the Nazarene consisted in healing and exorcism. In this consequence the redeemer was already in the Byzantine period assimilated to the Greek healing god Asklepios, as is firmly evidenced by a notice on the church history of Eusebius on a statuary group in Caesarea Philippi/Paneas.⁸

The topic of healing cults and medical supply coincides quite well with the general theme of the Sixth Conference on the History and Archaeology of Jordan:

¹ Hisham ibn-al-Kalbi, *Kitab al-Asnam* 5,13 (34 ed. R. Klinke-Rosenberger (Leipzig 1941).

² *The Book of Idols*, being a translation from the Arabic of the *Kitab al-Asnam* by Hisham ibn-al-Kalbi, transl. N. A. Faris, Princeton Oriental Studies XIV (Princeton, N. J. 1952) 7. For the historical background F. Altheim - R. Stiehl, in: *Abriß der Geschichte antiker Randkulturen*, ed. W. D. v. Barloewen (Munich 1961) 180 f.

³ Cf. F. Grohmann, *Arabien. Kulturgeschichte des alten Orients*. Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft III.1,3,3,4 (Munich 1963) 85; J. B. Glubb, *The Great Arab Conquests* (London - Melbourne - New York 1963) 30f.

⁴ Cf. the representation of the Holy Prophet Muhammad removing the idols from the *al-Ka‘ba* shown on a Persian book illumination of the late 16th century AD, tempera on paper: Museum für Islamische Kunst Berlin - Staatliche Museen Preußischer Kulturbesitz, 2nd ed. by K. Brisch - A. Hauptmann-von Gladiss - J. Kröger *et al.* (Berlin-Dahlem 1979) 17 Abb. 2.

⁵ Cf. D. Sourdél, *Les cultes du Hauran à l'époque romaine*. B.A.H. 53 (Paris 1952) 67f.74 (al-‘Uzza); 69 ff. (Allat); M. Gawlikowski, *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* 18,4 (Berlin - New-York 1990) 266ff.; H.

Donner, *Isis in Petra* (Leipzig 1995) 7.

⁶ In general on this subject cf. H. Dechent, *ZDPV* 7, 1884, 173ff.; S. Krauss, *Ha-Kedem* 1, 1907/8, 105ff.; idem, *Ha-Kedem* 2, 1909/10, 32ff.; A. Friedmann, *Zeitschrift für Balneologie, Klimatologie und Kurort-Hygiene* 6, 1913, 429ff.; S. Lachmann, *Palästina* 7-9, 1933, 221ff.; I. Simon, *Revue d'histoire de la médecine hébraïque* 122, 1977, 53f.; *ibid.* 124, 1978, 7ff.; *ibid.* 125, 1978, 33ff.; *ibid.* 126, 1978, 57ff.; E. Dvorjetski, *Progress in Rheumatology* 4, 1990, 134ff.; idem, *Medicinal Hot Springs in Eretz Israel during the Period of the Second Temple, the Mishna and the Talmud I-II* (Hebrew, unpublished). Ph-D. (Jerusalem 1992); idem, *Aram* 4, 1992, 425ff.; idem, in: Eleventh World Congress of Jewish Studies (Jerusalem 1994, in print).

⁷ For this subject in general cf. *Heil und Heilung in den Religionen*, ed. K. Hoheisel - H.-J. Klimkeit (Wiesbaden 1995) passim.

⁸ Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* 7,18,1; cf. O. Keel, in: *Peregrina Curiositas*, Festschr. D. van Damme, Hrsg. A. Kessler - Th. Ricklin - G. Wurst, *Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus XXVII* (Friburg/Switzerland 1994) 162ff. (with further reference).



1. The holy Prophet Muhammad with the help of Ali removes the pagan idols from the Ka'ba. Book illumination from Shiras/ Iran, dated between AD 1585 and 1595, tempera on paper, Height 29.3 cm; Width 17 cm. Berlin, Museum for Islamic Art, Staatliche Museen Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Inv.-Nr. 44/68.

Landscape resources and human Occupation in Jordan throughout the Ages.

Betomarsea/ Maiumas and the Source of 'Ayn Sara of al-Karak

The mosaic map of Mādabā figures a site named BHTOMΑΣPEA H K(AI) MAIOYMAΣ ⁹ by inscription (FIG. 2). The locality is symbolized as a centrally domed building flanked on both sides by vaulted wings. One may



2. Byzantine mosaic map of Palestine (detail), Saint George, Mādabā.

also assume that it was a theatre with annexes. Beneath this structure some unidentifiable plants and perhaps flowing water of a brook are shown, apparently indicating that the place is near water and rich in vegetation. H. Donner¹⁰ convincingly identified Betomarsea with 'Ayn Sara at the north-western foot of the steep hill of al-Karak, nowadays a recreation centre. The source flows cold water only, which is important for the drinking water supply of the modern town. In the environment of the spring a limestone capital of Aeolic type (FIG. 3)¹¹ was found and indicates that the occupation of the site goes back at least to the Iron Age. In the Greco-Roman period Betomarsea was obviously a house for cultic purposes or a club. Maiumas was the name of a popular licentious feast with water amusements and symposia, widespread in the ancient Near East.¹² It remains to be known if medical cures were practised at Betomarsea.

The Thermal Springs of Baaras

The springs of Baaras are variously mentioned by Flavius Josephus,¹³ Eusebius¹⁴ and Petrus the Iberian.¹⁵ The site was identified as modern Hammāmāt az-Zarqā'.¹⁶ Situated in the gorge of Wādī az-Zarqā', Mā'in (FIG. 4). Shown at the eastern littoral of the Dead Sea on the mosaic map of Mādabā (FIG. 5), the fragmentary inscription . . .] AAPOY must be conjectured as *[ΘEPMA B] AAPOY.¹⁷ According to Flavius Josephus a mysterious red plant, probably a mandrake belonging to the species of the rue (*ruta graveoleus L*),¹⁸ growing in that area provided magical power to expel demons. He further refers to the ther-

⁹ H. Donner, *The Mosaic Map of Madaba. Palaestina Antiqua* 7 (Kampen 1992) 40f. s.v. I owe thanks to U. Hübner (Mainz) who attracted my attention to this site.
¹⁰ ZDPV 98, 1982, 181ff.
¹¹ The capital was found in 1982 in the foundation trench dug for the construction of the rest-house at the site, measurements 124 x 74 cm, today reused in the masonry of a modern wall. For the type cf. Y. Shiloh, *PEQ* 109, 1977, 39ff.
¹² Donner, *Madaba Map*, loc. cit. 40. For the Maiumas festivals see also n. 61.
¹³ Bell. Jud. VII 6,3.

¹⁴ Onomastikon 44:21-46:2.
¹⁵ 87-90 ed. Raabe (Leipzig 1895).
¹⁶ H. Donner, ZDPV 98, 1982, 175ff.; idem, *Madaba Map* loc.cit. 39 Nr. 9; U. Hübner (forthcoming). I extend my thanks to U. Hübner for making results of studies on the site and photographic material available to me.
¹⁷ First identified by J. Manfredi, *RB* 13, 1903, 266ff.
¹⁸ cf. S.S. Kottek, *Medicine and Hygiene in the Works of Flavius Josephus. Studies in Ancient Medicine* 9 (Leiden - New York - Cologne 1994) 130f.



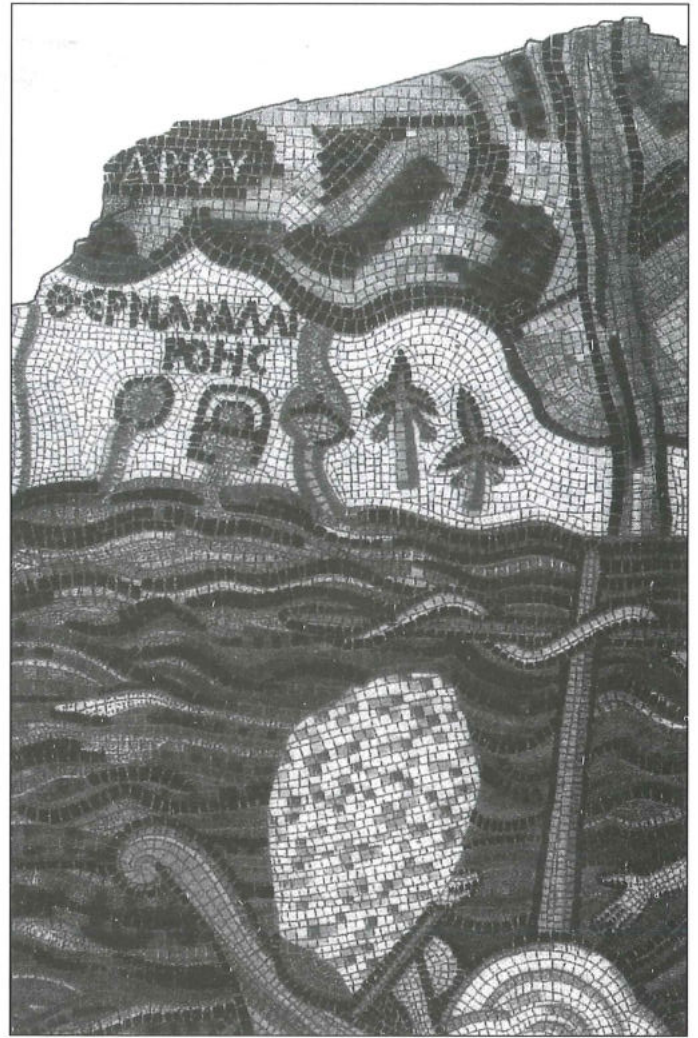
2. Iron Age limestone capital of "proto-Aeolian" type, found at 'Ayn az-Zāra springs close to al-Karak.

mal springs with waters of different taste and oscillating temperatures. A cure in the spa of Baraas was considered suitable for the treatment of various diseases, especially to strengthen the nervous system. Apart from the botanical and hydrological conditions the valley has geological deposits of brimstone, alum, and ferrous sulphate - minerals well known in ancient pharmacy.

The site has never been investigated archaeologically. U. Hübner¹⁹ recently emphasized the connection of a votive inscription²⁰ found at al-Harra in southern Syria to the local cult of the Baaras springs. The altar is dedicated by a certain Diomedes Charitos, a Roman official of the Batanaea in the rank of a governor (*eparches*) and military commander (*strategos*). Probably this man was cured by the same therapy at Baraas as later 'Amr ibn Luhayy. For the sake of his recovery he donated the votive offering to Zeus Beelbaaros, the local Baal of Baaras, who perhaps was identical with the Moabite god Kemosch.²¹ Unfortunately no imagery survived to tell the features of this deity.

The Hot Springs of Kallirhoë

The oasis of az-Zāra²² nestles on a slope of the Jordanian plateau at the eastern shore of the Dead Sea; at a distance of about 1,5 km south of the az-Zarqā' Mā'in. The steep mountain range recesses to a semicircular bay with rock terraces. Based on the Mādabā map²³ the site is firmly identified with Kallirhoë, which is mentioned in the Natural History of Pliny the elder.²⁴ King Herod the



3. Byzantine mosaic map of Palestine (detail), Saint George, Mādabā.

Great was taken there to find relief from his pains prior to his death in 4 BC.²⁵ Ancient geographers such as Solinus Polyhistor²⁶ and Claudius Ptolemaeus²⁷ refer to Kallirhoë with relatively exact geodetical data. Rabbinic tradition²⁸ influenced even Christian geography: In accordance with these Hieronymus²⁹ states that the thermal water of the springs flows into the Dead Sea.

The mosaicist of the Mādabā map represented three constructions (FIG. 4): a round pool from which water flows, a square reservoir with an apse, probably a nymphaeum of customary type, and a channel widening in the plain, barraged by a wall or a dam, pouring water into the

¹⁹ Hübner, *loc.cit.* (in print).

²⁰ D. Sourdel, *Les cultes du Hauran à l'époque romaine*. B.A.H. 53(1952) 45f. Pl. 4,1.

²¹ U. Worschech, *Ugarit Forschungen* 24, 1992, 393ff.

²² Cf. H. Donner, *ZDPV* 79, 1963, 59f.; A. Strobel, *ZDPV* 82, 1966, 149ff.; idem, *ZDPV* 93, 1977, 247ff.; idem, in: J.B. Hennessy - D. Homés-Fredericq, *Archaeology of Jordan II 2. Akkadika* Suppl. VIII (Leuven 1989) 633ff.; idem, *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Evangelischen Instituts für Altertumswissenschaft des Heiligen Landes* 1, 1989, 173ff.; G. Reeg, *Die Ortsnamen Israels nach der rabbinischen Literatur*. Beihefte Tübingen Atlas des Vorderen Orients Reihe B Nr. LI (Wiesbaden 1989) 51f.; 482; 559f.; C. Clamer, *ADAJ* 33, 1989, 217ff.; A. Strobel, in: S. Kerner, *The Near*

East in Antiquity. German Contributions to the Archaeology of Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Egypt I (Amman 1990) 81ff.; R. Deines, 'Jüdische Steingefäße und pharisäische Frömmigkeit', *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* 52(Tübingen 1993) 159ff.; Hübner, *loc.cit* note 3.

²³ Manfredi, *loc. cit.* 266ff.; Donner *loc.cit.* 39f. Nr. 10.

²⁴ *Nat. Hist.* V 16,9.

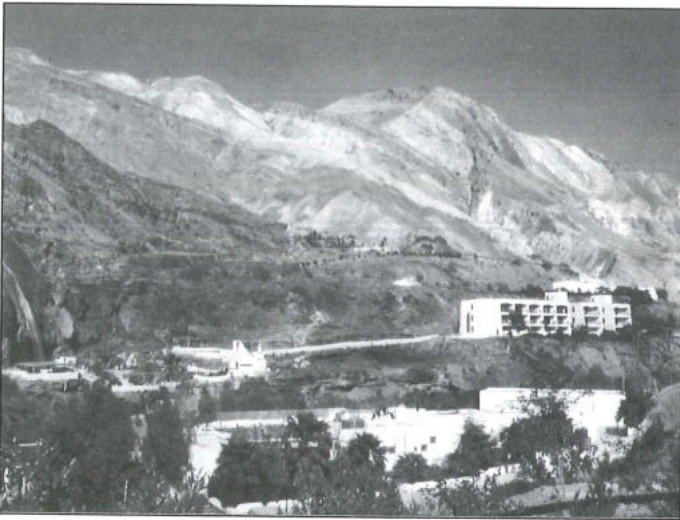
²⁵ Flavius Josephus, *Bell. Jud.* I 617 = *Antiqu.* XVII 171.

²⁶ *Coll. rer. memor.* 35,4.

²⁷ *Geogr* V 16,9.

²⁸ *Targ. Jon.*; *jMeg* I 9.

²⁹ *Quaest. ad Gen.* 10,19.



5. The hot springs of Wādi az-Zarqā' Mā'in.

lake. This construction was probably a basin for bathing filled with flowing hot water which could be mixed, when required, with cooler waters or with minerals. The archaeological remains at the site are rather poor. Only the third installation might perhaps be identical with a rectangular depression, which local people call *al-Madās*, chiselled into the rock. All other constructions vanished entirely. This is due to the construction material available at the site: It consists of coarse basaltic tuff, a rather porous and layered stone which is easy prey to corrosion.

Traces of ancient harbour installations have been destroyed by road works. What has been excavated in the mid-80s by C. Clamer and A. Strobel looks much like a Roman villa compound with rooms aligned along a central peristyle courtyard. The whole oasis, the lushness of which is indicated on the Mādabā map by two date palms, was obviously fenced by a massive masonry wall.

The Hot Springs at Ḥammāt Abū Dāble and the Cult of Sarapis in Pella

The baths of Abū Dāble³⁰ located in the upper Jordan rift valley at a distance of approximately two kilometers north of the Decapolis city of Pella / Ṭabaqat Faḥil. According to the only literary reference in the Jerusalem Talmud,³¹ Rabbi Zeira made a trip from Palestine to Transjordan between AD 279 and 359 for the purpose of using the hot springs of Pella. The relating rabbinic dispute concerns the problem of ritual clean and unclean localities, whether the Pella baths were within the customary boundaries of Judaism or not. Most interpreters of this passage followed



6. Statuary fragment of enthroned Sarapis, found in the fill of the staircase of the civic complex at Pella.

A. Neubauer³² in assuming that the thermal spring was near Pella rather than within the city's territory itself. If so, the present hot spring of Ḥammāt Abū Dāble is a possibility although the scarce ruins at the spot are insufficient to conclude the existence of monumental buildings. It is not convincing to locate the famous Nymphaeum of Pella here, which is shown on numerous quasi-autonomous coins of the late second - early third century AD.³³

G. Schumacher,³⁴ on the other hand, supposed that the spring should be located at downtown Pella. This locality, nowadays known as the Wādi Jirm al-Mawz in the local dialect, was renowned in antiquity for its abundance of water.³⁵ Several sources still today grant outstanding fertility to this place. In antiquity the city's centre must have housed a pagan shrine which was later transformed into a Christian church. Traces of the former building were uncovered at the site of the so-called civic complex: Two fine columns of dark chloritic limestone were reused in the atrium of the Byzantine sanctuary to flank the central portal.³⁶ In the fill of the staircase leading up to the Cathedral, a fragment of a statue (FIG. 6) made out of blue Egyptian schist was uncovered. It features an enthroned deity draped with a thick garment covering the legs up to the hip. The dark stone and the characteristic drapery indicate that the Pella fragment once belonged to a copy of the

³⁰ G. Schumacher, *Pella* (London 1888); S. Kraus, *Talmudische Archäologie I* (Leipzig 1910) 216 note 74; C. Steuernagel, *ZDPV* 49, 1926, 20f. = *Der Adschlun* (Leipzig 1927) 404f.; H. Bietenhard, *ZDPV* 79, 1963, 28 n. 30 = *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt II* 8 (Berlin - New-York 1972) 225f. note 30; R.H. Smith, *Pella of the Decapolis I* (Wooster, Ohio 1973) 57f. Nr. 60; M. Avi-Yonah, *Gazetteer of Roman Palestine. Qedem V* (Jerusalem 1976) 63 sv.; Th. Weber, *Pella Decapolitana. Abhandlungen des Deutschen Palästinavereins XVIII* (Wiesbaden 1993) 6 with n. 5.

³¹ jShev'it 6,1; Smith *loc. cit.* 57f. Nr. 60.

³² *La géographie du Talmud* (Paris 1868) 274.

³³ H. Nicolet, in: *Coins, Culture, and History in the Ancient World. Numismatic and other Studies in Honour of B.L. Trell*, ed. L. Casson - M. Price (Detroit, Mi 1981) 51ff.

³⁴ *Loc.cit.* 88f.

³⁵ Cf. Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* V 14: "... Pellam aquis divitem ..."; Weber *loc. cit.* 8 n. 18.

³⁶ R.H. Smith - L.P. Day, *Pella of the Decapolis II* (Wooster, Ohio 1989) 56f.; R. H. Smith, *Aram* 4, 1992, 205 n. 25.

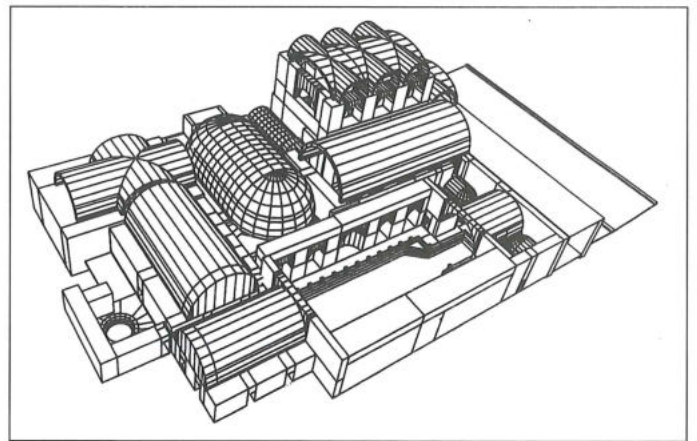
famous Alexandrine cult statue of Sarapis, created in the early Hellenistic period by the Greek sculptor Bryaxis.³⁷ Consequently one may conclude that there was a Sarapeion in the centre of ancient Pella. Egyptian Sarapis integrated multiple functions: He was a fertility god and the master of the underworld. Apart from this, Sarapis had also a distinctive medical aspect as indicated by a considerable number of marble votive feet found in Palestine and Transjordan.³⁸

The Hot Springs at Emmatha / Ḥammāt Gader and the Cult of Asklepios at Gadara

Already in the Hellenistic period Gadara seems to have been a city where medical therapies were practised. The Philinna-Papyrus of the first century BC preserves an incantation in metrical Greek prose against every type of inflammation.³⁹ The earliest evidence for the nearby thermal springs in the gorge of the river Yarmouk and the development of a spa settlement at the site of Emmatha/Ḥammāt Gader dates back to the reign of Antoninus Pius. There are no literary references to that site before the middle of the second century AD. Even well informed authors of the first century AD such as the geographer Strabo, the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus or the polymath Pliny do not know anything about the place. It is first mentioned by rabbinic sources in connection with a seasonal food-market⁴⁰ and with an interpretation of the sabbatical rules.⁴¹ But in the early third and fourth centuries AD both Origenes⁴² and Eusebius⁴³ refer to Gadara as a city with "famous" thermal springs in its territory. According to Cyril,⁴⁴ bishop of Jerusalem (348-386 [?] AD), after an earthquake, most likely that of the year 363 AD, the Gadarene springs ('Aina d-Gader) turned into blood. Modern eyewitnesses of such natural catastrophes confirm

our assumption that this apocalyptic metaphor might be explained by the red soil of the area mixed with groundwater during seismic activities. A considerable number of restoration inscriptions found in the thermal building indicate that major damage caused by this and subsequent earthquakes were urgently repaired.⁴⁵ Between 423 and 460 AD empress Eudokia, spouse of Theodosius II, dedicated a metric Greek inscription in dactylic hexameters for the lyric praise of the main bathing hall (*clibanus*).⁴⁶ Building activities are still proved in the Islamic period, for instance by a Greek inscription dedicated on December fifth, 663 AD, referring to a clearance and restoration of the *clibanus* during the reign of Abdallah Mu'awiya.⁴⁷

Due to the hot spring 'Ayn Maqle, the thermal complex (FIG. 7) lacks artificial heating installations. The water emerges with a temperature of 51 °C from a small pool in the southwestern part of the building and is circu-



7. Isometric reconstruction of the thermal complex of Ḥammāt Gader.

³⁷ Cf. W. Hornbostel, *Sarapis. Études préliminaires aux religions Orientales dans l'empire Romain* (Leiden 1973) passim.

³⁸ For votive feet in Palestine and Transjordan see *Enciclopedia della Bibbia IV* (Barcelona 1963) 1091f. with Fig. (Askalon); Weber loc. cit. 93f. Pl. 53,3 (Petra); B. Bagatti, *Excavations in Nazareth I*. Publications of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum XVIII (Jerusalem 1969) 315f. Fig. 238 (Nazareth); M. Avi-Yonah, *IsrExpJ* 2, 1952, 118ff. (Mount Carmel); R.-Dussaud, *Monuments Palestiniens et Judaïques* (Paris 1912) 29 (Jerusalem, votive of Pompeia Lucilia). For these monuments in general see S. Dow - O. S. Upson, *Hesperia* 13, 1944, 58ff.; D.K. Hill, *Hesperia* 15, 1946, 60ff.; L. Castiglione, *ZfS* 97, 1971, 30ff.; idem, *StAeg* 1, 1974, 75ff.; M. Le Glay, in: *Hommages à M.J. Vermaseren* (Leiden (1978) 573ff.

³⁹ P. Maaß, *JHS* 62, 1942, 33ff.; K. Preisendanz, *ChronEg* 26, 1951, 406f.; idem, *Mitteilungen aus der Papyrussammlung der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek zu Wien* 1956, 113; R. Merkelbach, *ArchPfl* 16, 1958, 85f. Nr. 1046; L. Koenen, *ChronEg* 37, 1962, 167ff.; A. Henrichs, *ZPE* 6, 1970, 204ff.; E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (175 B.C.-A.D. 135), 2nd rev. ed. by G. Vermes - F. Millar - M. Black II. (Edinburgh 1979) 136 n. 255; M. Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament X* (3rd ed. Tübingen 1988) 152f.; R. W. Daniel, *ZPE* 73, 1988, 306; Th. Weber *JbÖsterrByz* 42, 1992, 266 n. 35; D.F. Graf, *Aram* 4, 1992, 33 n. 99; M.W. Dickie, *ZPE* 100, 1994, 119ff.

⁴⁰ *Midrasch Kohelet rabba* V 10,1.

⁴¹ *jErubin* V 8.

⁴² Comm. in *Evang. Ioanni* XLI.

⁴³ *Onomastikon s.v. Γαδάρρα*; s.v. Αἰμαθ. cfl. Georgios Synkellos, *Ecloga Chronographica* 559; Ioannes Cotovicus, *Itinerarium Hierosolymitanum* 360.

⁴⁴ S.P. Brock, *BSOAS* 40,2, 1977, 271.

⁴⁵ J. Green - Y. Tsafir, *IEJ* 32, 1982, 91ff.; J. Meimaris, *Theologia* 54, 1983, 393; SEG XXXVI (1986) 411 Nr. 1343; L. Di Segni - Y. Hirschfeld, *IEJ* 36, 1986, 251ff.; L. Di Segni, *Aram* 4, 1992, 311f.; 311ff.

⁴⁶ J. Green - Y. Tsafir, *IEJ* 32, 1982, 79; SEG XXXII (1982) 414f. Nr. 1505; J. Green - Y. Tsafir, *Qadmoniot* 16, 1983, 28ff.; I. Meimaris, *Theologia* 54, 1983, 388ff.; J. and L. Robert, *BullEpigr* 1984 Nr. 505; L. Di Segni - Y. Hirschfeld, *IEJ* 36, 1986, 266 Anm. 86; D. Feissel, *BullEpigr* 1987 Nr. 520; Y. Hirschfeld, *ZDPV* 103, 1987, 106; H.-P. Kuhnen, *Palästina in griechisch-römischer Zeit. HbArch* II 2 (München 1990) 212 mit Anm. 292; L. Di Segni, *Aram* 4, 1992, 313; 323 FIG. 5; *New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. E. Stern - A. Lewinson-Gilboa - J. Aviram II (New York - London - Toronto 1993) 565 FIG. s.v. Hammāt Gader (M. Avi-Yonah - Y. Hirschfeld).

⁴⁷ Y. Hirschfeld - G. Solar, *IEJ* 30, 1980, 70f. SEG XXX (1980) 482 Nr. 1687; Y. Hirschfeld - G. Solar, *IEJ* 31, 1981, 203f.; J. Green - Y. Tsafir, *IEJ* 32, 1982, 94ff.; I. Hasson, *IEJ* 32, 1982, 97ff.; J. Blau, *ibid.* 102; SEG XXXII (1982) 414 Nr. 1501; I. Meimaris, *Theologia* 54, 1983, 391 n. 5; J. Bingen, *Byzantion* 54, 1984, 369f.; P. A. Jannopoulos, *ibid.* 370; Y. Hirschfeld - G. Solar, *Biblical Archaeologist Review* 10,6, 1984, 39; L. Di Segni - Y. Hirschfeld, *IEJ* 36, 1986, 265f. n. 63; SEG XXXVI (1986) 413 Nr. 1348; R. Schick, *The Fate of the Christians in Palestine during the Byzantine-Umayyad Transition, A.D. 600-750*, Ph. D. (Chicago 1987) 481f., Nr. 72; Y. E. Meimaris, *Sacred Names, Saints, Martyrs and Church Officials in the Greek Inscriptions and Papyri pertaining to the Christian Church of Palestine. Meletemata II* (Athens 1987) 180 Nr. 6; Th. Weber - R. G. Khouri, *Umm Qais - Gadara of the Decapolis. A brief Guide to the Antiquities* (Amman 1989) 11; E. Dvorjetski - R. Last, *IEJ* 41, 1991, 162 n. 35; E. Künzl - Th. Weber, *DaM* 5, 1991, 82 n. 6; L. Di Segni, *Aram* 4, 1992, 315f.; 328 FIG. 10; Y. Hirschfeld - E. Cohen, *ibid.* 284; S. M. Moors, *De Decapolis. Steden en Dorpen in de Romeinse Provinciën Syria en Arabia*. Ph. D. Leiden (s'Gravenhage 1992) 190 f. n. 5; I. Nielsen - Andersen - Holm-Nielsen (Wiesbaden 1993) 148 n. 5.

lated via channels into various basins. The hall of the fountains is most impressive because of its dimensions. This was the place where the majority of the building inscriptions had been uncovered. Closely situated to the spring is the most important bathing hall which has an oval plan and was once barrel-vaulted. Its general shape and the heat of the water in this part of the building recalled an oven to the visitors and this is surely the part, that was called the *clibanus*. Two smaller rooms in the north-west of it were the location for therapy, as vividly described by the anonymous pilgrim from Piacenza who visited the place in ca 570 AD: „We went to a city called Gadara, which is Gibeon, and, three miles from the city, there are hot springs called the Baths of Elijah. Lepers are cleansed there, and have their meals from the inn at the public expense. The baths fill in the evening. In front of the basin is a large tank. When it is full, all the gates are closed, and they are sent in through a small door with lights and incense, and sit in the tank all night. They fall asleep, and the person who is going to be cured sees a vision. When he has told it, the springs do not flow for one week”.⁴⁸

The liturgy described by this eyewitness recalls the pagan rite of incubation as executed in the cults of Asklepios or other healing gods in the Greco-Roman world. Even in Byzantine inscriptions the bathing complex of Emmatha is named a holy place. Even though of its mysterious character, the baths of Gadara must have been the place where specialized surgeons and physicians provided a reliable treatment of various diseases: In 1988 a tomb⁴⁹ was uncovered within the Early Byzantine crypt of the great mausoleum in the western suburb of Gadara. Beside various glass vessels it produced a set of cosmetic instruments made of metal. A pair of iron forceps evidences that one of the individuals buried in the grave was a dentist.

Apart from the bathing complex the spa of Gadara comprised a number of houses, inns and hostels. A colonnaded avenue divides the settled area into perpendicular compounds. A small theatre⁵⁰ was connected by the excavators to the healing cult of the site, but his *opinion* finds no support neither by architectural features nor by archaeological evidence. Vestiges of a Christian church have been located east of the main street junction. That this spot was formerly occupied by a pagan shrine remains a vague hypothesis.⁵¹ One may generally assume that Asklepios and Hygieia were venerated at Emmatha. Apart from that, Y. Meshorer⁵² identified a temple of the three

dancing Graces shown on a ring medaillon and various Gadaran coins at Emmatha, but if so, nothing of it remained.

Even though there is no convincing epigraphical evidence up to now, there were certainly cults of Sarapis and Asklepios practised on the territory of Gadara. A bearded marble mask found at Gadara⁵³ is most likely a pilgrim's souvenir from the Alexandrian Sarapeion,⁵⁴ but proves that the Egyptian fertility and healing God was venerated in this Transjordanian city as well. Asklepios is shown on a lost altar from Umm Qays (FIG. 8)⁵⁵ in a military attitude, wearing an armour and holding the spear with the serpent in the hand. A similar representation of the same warrior/healing god comes from Kufr Ma⁵⁶ on the Golan Heights, a third one has no provenance and is preserved at the Louvre in Paris.⁵⁷ The military attitude of the healing god seems to be a local feature, well comparable with the



8. Altar made of basalt showing Asklepios in military attitude, from Umm Qays, today lost.

48 Antoninus Piacent., *Itinerarium* 7; J. Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims before the Crusades* (Warminster 1977) 81; Y. Hirschfeld - G. Solar, *IEJ* 31, 1981, 202 with note 14.

49 Künzl - Weber *loc. cit.* (n. 47) 81 ff.; F. García-Martínez, *Journal of the Study of Judaism* 24, 1993, 157.

50 A. Segal, *Theatres in Roman Palestine and Provincia Arabia*. *Mnemosyne* Suppl. 140 (Leiden - New York - Cologne 1995) 45f. No. 5.

51 Y. Hirschfeld, *ZDPV* 103, 1987, 113ff.

52 *IsrExplJ* 29, 1979, 221f.; idem, *City Coins of Eretz-Israel and the Decapolis in the Roman Period* (Jerusalem 1985) 83 Fig. 225.

53 *Der Königsweg*, Exhibition Catalogue Cologne - Schallaburg - Munich

1988/89 (Mainz 1988) 276f. Nr. 250.

54 Cf. L. Castiglione, in: *Alessandria e il mondo Ellemistico-Romano*. Studi in onore di A. Adriani I. Studi e Materiali VI (Palermo 1983) 139ff.

55 P.-L. Jabalert, *Mémoires de Beyrouth* 1, 1906, 159f. Pl. II 3-5; Sourdel *loc. cit.* (see supra note 5) 47 mit note 2; S.B. Downey, *GettyMusJ* 6-8, 1978/79, 117 with n. 16; E. Künzl - Th. Weber, *DaM* 5, 1991, 82 n. 5.

56 G. Schumacher, *Der Dscholan* (Leipzig 1886) 173 Fig. 118 (= *ZDPV* 9, 1886, 337 Fig. 118-119); idem, *Across the Jordan* (London 1886) 81 Figs. 33-334; S. Abdul-Hak, *Catalogue illustré du Département des Antiquités Gréco-Romaines au Musée de Damas* (Damascus 1951) 66 Nr. 31 Pl. XXVII 2; Downey *loc. cit.* 115 Fig. 4.

Palmyrene healing god Sadrafa. A limestone relief from Palmyre, now in the British Museum, shows the god in armour, holding the spear in his right hand, around which the snake winds.

Birkatayn and the Cult of Asklepios at Gerasa

A few kilometers north of Gerasa two large spring-fed pools of *Birkatayn*⁵⁸ provided a generous extra-urban layout for cult, as individual health resort and for public recreation. The site is comparable to the spa of Emmatha or to the shrine of Daphne close to Antioche: It has the character of an holy enclosure to be reached from the city by a colonnaded ceremonial promenade or *Via Sacra*.⁵⁹

The visitor entered the area through a monumental gateway, a *propylaeum*. It has always been assumed that the small theatre located to the south of the pool was functionally linked with it. Most prominent were the festivals of Maioumas, epigraphically attested for the site.⁶⁰ The goings-on at the water orgies were severely attacked by the church fathers due to their licentious character. If they also had a special medical aspect remains obscure.⁶¹

A fine marble head of a bearded god⁶² from the basilical complex of Saints Cosmas and Damian, John the Baptist, and Saint George at Gerasa evoked a scholarly discussion⁶³ in how far Christian art adopted the iconography of Asklepios for the representation of Jesus Christ. A comparison of the Jarash head with a similar piece in the Museo Civico at Foligno⁶⁴ proves the identification of Zeus-Asklepios. Information by Eusebius, that in Caesarea-Philippi a statue of the Greek healing god had been reused for such a purpose,⁶⁵ seems to support the theory of such an iconographical transition from a pagan god to Jesus. The Jarash head was found by K. Stemmer⁶⁶ to support this assumption. On the other hand, we must

critically assert, that the find situation throws considerable doubt on the validity of this theory. The excavation report by J. Garstang⁶⁷ clearly states: "*Between the doorway of the Basilica and that of the circular church, nearer to the former, and in the cloister into which their doors open, the head was found lying upon débris about a foot from the door, and covered with more débris mixed with architectural remains*". The head was not found inside the church building but in the courtyard in front of it. If we take it for granted that the ancient statue was re-erected there during the Byzantine period,⁶⁸ it is peculiar that no other fragments of the statue were found. It is thus more conclusive to regard the Jarash head as a more or less accidental spolium reused in a later architectural context.

The Cult of Asklepios at Philadelphia / 'Ammān

During the Jordanian excavations at the Roman theatre of Philadelphia⁶⁹ some fine marble statues were uncovered. One of them (FIG. 9) represents a male torso with a cloak wrapped around the hip and draped at the back to fall across the shoulder. The left arm is slightly bent at the elbow, which is covered by drapery. The style of execution and surface finish points to a date in the second half of the second century AD. Even though head, right arm and both legs are missing, the torso can be identified as a Roman copy of a fairly known cult statue, named after the most complete copy "Asklepios Florence".⁷⁰ A small-sized marble replica of this statuary type in the Palazzo Barberini in Rome (FIG. 10) indicates that the 'Ammān torso belongs to a sculptural group representing the god of medicine together with his female counterpart, the personification of health, Greek Hygieia or Roman Salus.

For the case of ancient Philadelphia such an attribution is supported also by epigraphic evidence: A dedicatory

57 S. Ronzevalle, *RA* 1905 I, 44f. FIG. 1; Jabalert *loc.cit.* 159 n. II Pl. II 1; D. Homés-Fredericq, *Petra Inoubliable*, Exhib. Catalogue (Bruxelles 1980) 100 Nr. 69.

58 C.C. McCown, in: C. Kraeling, *Gerasa, City of the Decapolis* (Baltimore 1938) 159ff.; E. Will, *Mélibeyrouth* 37, 1960, 209ff.; I. Browning, *Jerash and the Decapolis* (London 1982) 211ff.; R.G. Khouri, *Jerash - A Frontier City of the Roman East* (London - New York 1986) 134ff.

59 On the Gerasene Via Sacra and its date cf. H. Bloedhorn, *Die Kapitelle der Synagoge von Kapernaum. AbhDPV XI* (Wiesbaden 1993) 31.

60 C. B. Welles, in: Kraeling *loc.cit.* 470f. Nr. 279.

61 For the festivals of Maioumas, which were celebrated in the cities along the Levantine littoral see RE XIV 1 (Stuttgart 1928) 612f. s.v. (S. Preiflendantz.); A. Segal, *Theatres in Roman Palestine and Provincia Arabis*. *Mnemosyne CXL* (Leiden - New York - Cologne 1995) 11 n. 33 (further bibliography). Only in Gaza it was transformed to a Christian holiday, the "day of the rosaries".

62 H.B. Walters, *BMQ* 1, 1926/27, 114 Pl. 60; J.N. Garstang, *ILN* July 31, 1926, 193; A. Futterer, *Palestine Speaks* (London 1931) 523; E. Capps Jr, *Hesperia* 7, 1938, 544 with n. 8; A.B. Cook, *Zeus - A Study in Ancient Religion II 2* (Cambridge 1940) 1197 Pl. LXXXIII; J.H. Illife, in: *Studies presented to D.M. Robinson*, ed. G. Mylonas I (Saint Louis, Mo. 1951) 711 n. 24; N. Glueck, *Deities and Dolphins* (London 1965) 312 Pl. 43a; *BClevMus* 1967, 83 FIG. 35; *Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. M. Avi-Yonah - E. Stern II (Oxford - Jerusalem 1976) 420 s.v. Gerasa (S. Applebaum); K. Stemmer, *ADAJ* 21, 1976, 33ff.; A. Kempinski - M. Avi-Yonah, *Syrien - Palästina II* (Munich - Genève - Paris 1978) 216 FIG. 75; E. Dinkler, in: *Sitzungsberichte der Akademie der Wissenschaften Heidelberg, phil.-hist. Klasse* 1980, 2, 32 n. 79-80 Pl. XIII

FIG. 20; LIMC II 1 (Munich - Zurich 1984) 888 Nr. 352 s.v. Asklepios; II 2 664 FIG. (A. Holtzmann); M. C. Bitti, *AAJ* 30, 1986, 208 n. 3; H.-P. Kuhnen, *Palästina in römischer Zeit* (Munich 1990) 290 with n. 28; M.-J. Roche, *Syria* 67, 1990, 379 with n. 7; U. Hübner, *Die Ammoniter, AbhDPV XVI* (Wiesbaden 1992) 259 n. 62; *New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. E. Stern - A. Lewinson-Gilboa - J. Aviram II (New York 1993) 473 s. v. Gerasa (S. Applebaum - A. Segal); O. Keel, in: *Peregrina Curiositas*, Festschr. D. van Damme, ed. A. Kessler - Th. Ricklin - G. Wurst, *Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus* (Göttingen - Fribourg 1994) 164 note 38; Th. Weber, *Gadara Decapolitana* (forthcoming) 472 Cat.-No. C.5.

63 See Dinkler 32f.

64 Stemmer *loc. cit.* 38f.

65 See supra n. 8.

66 *loc. cit.* 39.

67 *loc. cit.* 193.

68 For the reinstallation of ancient statues in Late Antiquity see H. Brandenburg, in: *Migratio et Commutatio. Studien zur Alten Geschichte und deren Nachleben*, Festschr. Th. Pékary (St. Katharinen 1989) 235 ff. For the reuse of sarcophagi see G. Koch, *Boreas* 17, 1994, 115ff.

69 A.K. Hadidi, *The Roman Forum at Amman*, Ph.-D. Thesis University of Missouri, Columbia, Mo (Columbia 1970) 61ff.; F. el-Fakharani, *AA* 1975, 377ff.; A. Northedge (ed.), *Studies on Roman and Islamic Amman I*. British Academy Monographs in Archaeology III (Oxford 1992) 58.

70 LIMC II 1 (Munich - Zürich 1984) 878f. Nr. 145-151; 895; II 2 646f. Nr. 146-148 s.v. Asklepios (B. Holtzmann).

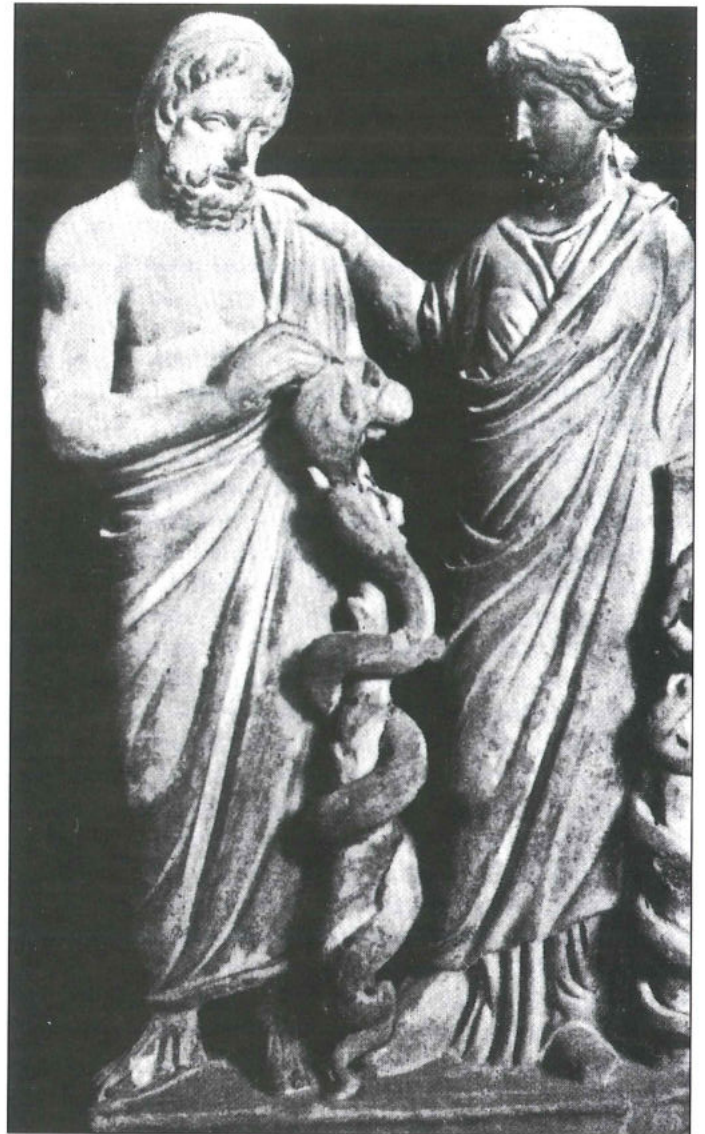


9. Marble torso of Asklepios "type Florence", found in the Roman theatre at Philadelphia - 'Ammān.

inscription found at 'Ammān, republished by Pierre-Louis Gatier,⁷¹ refers to Aesculapius/Asklepios and Salus/Hygieia as "very holy deities". The stone dates to the mid-third century AD and was donated by Terentius Heraclitus, a beneficiary of Claudius Capitolis, then governor of the *Provincia Arabia*. There is little doubt that the healing cult at Philadelphia had strong links to the Roman imperial house of Philippus Arabs, which appears in the inscription as "bonus divinae".

Conclusions

Returning to the anecdote of ibn al-Kalbi, we are now able to draw some conclusions on the nature and iconography of those pre-Islamic idols that were introduced to the shrine of Mecca by 'Amr ibn-Luhayy after his visit to the thermal springs east of the river Jordan. According to archaeological documents, predominately male divinities were venerated there. Greek Asklepios coincided with Zeus and could easily be identified with older local gods such as Baal or Kemosch. At Philadelphia / 'Ammān he was venerated with Hygieia, the personification of health. Beside these Greco-Roman gods, also Egyptian Sarapis played an important role in Jordan as a healing and fertility god. It was most likely he who was meant by the visitors of the Jordanian spas in ibn al-Kalbi's story saying



10. Statuary group of Asklepios and Hygieia, marble, Rome, Palazzo Barberini.

about their idols: "To them we pray for rain". Also the second aspect of these idols can be confirmed by the monuments: Reliefs like those from Umm Qays or Kufr Ma showing the armed healing god provide firm evidence for those of the idols with military character: "For them we seek victory over the enemy".

Photographical References

FIG. 1: K. Brisch - A. Hauptmann-von-Gladiss - J. Kröger (ed), *Museum für Islamische Kunst - Staatliche Museen Preußischer Kulturbesitz* (2nd ed. 1979) 17 FIG. 2.; 2, 6, 9: Photos by the author. 3, 5: H. Donner, *The Mosaic Map of Madaba. Palaestina Antiqua* (Kampen 1992); 4: Photo Ulrich Hübner, Kiel; 7: Y. Hirschfeld - E. Cohen, *Aram* 4, 1992, 306 FIG. 16; 8: P.-L. Jabalart, *Mélibeyrouth* 1, 1906, Pl. II; Photo German Archaeological Institute Rome.

⁷¹ P.-L. Gatier, *Inscriptions de la Jordanie II: Région Centrale, Inscriptions Grecques et Latines de la Syrie XXI* = B.A.H. 114 (Paris 1986) 38ff. Nr. 13.