A GRANITE HEAD OF ALEXANDER

THE GREAT FROM ALEXANDRIA

By

Dr. Baheia Shahin

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of Alexander the Great from Alexandria

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Alexander the Great, when he came to Egypt in the autumn of the year 332 B.C and founded the city of Alexandria, in fact, he started a romance which went over the world through many centuries.[1]

Alexander's principal aim was the political unification under a single rule, since it was not his intention that Macedonians and Greeks should be sole masters, they were to share the dominion with the former rulers of the East.[2] Therefore, the essential characteristic of the hellenistic city was cosmopolitanisem. Alexandria, as a cosmopolitan Hellenistic city, its population was as mixed as possible: Greek and Macedonian elit which followed the Greek cultural traditions, Egyptian population that lived very much as it had thousands of years earlier forming the main body of the population and a large Jewish colony.[3] Thus, a greek superstructure had to be built in ptolemaic Egypt. But from the artistic point of view, there is a realy unique character about the art in Hellenistic Egypt, that is its split personality which

had both Alexandrian and pharaonic traditions. The thoroughness of that stylistic duality is particularly well documented in the ptolemaic royal portraiture.(4)

The concept of ruler portraiture was certainly encourged by Alexander himself. It is well known that, in his lifetime, Alexander decreed that only the famous sculptor Lysippos should make his portraits, for it seems that only Lysippos brought out his real noble character and gave from to his essential excellence.(5) Our information regarding Lysippos' style is derived from ancient witers mainely from Plutarch,(6) the roman author who mentioned satisfactory detailed descriptions, due to which many portraits of Alexander were easily recognizable.(7)

The passage of Plutarch was discussed arid over-emphasized by many authors of a later period especially Schreiber. So, accorrdingly, the characteristics of Alexander's image are :-

a) The neck, was turned to the left and thus the head would necessarily be inclined to the right,(8)

b) The longmane of hair over the forehead, αναστολη Tησ Kομησ,(9) with a parting line which divides it into two halves with rising locks on either side of the head. Many

scholares considered that αναστολη is a borrowed feature from some one of the divinities most probably from a zeus type.(10)

c) The face is well-rounded and the half-open-eyes with a melting glance.(11) as in the most famous example named *"Azara Herme"*(12)

In other words and according to Plutarch's description, Lysippos was the only greek artist who had the ability to capture the Eθος 'of Alexander and made stress on Alexander's ethos more than his political position establishing the tendency of the psychological portraits in Hellenistic time and the main interest was given to the expression of Alexander's face and noble,(13) not to his physical features.

Hence, the Lysippan portraits of Alexander explained the greek point of view in emphasizing the idea of representing Alexander as a divinely hero(14) and that the general conception seems to have impressed itself so strongly upon the mind of the public,(15) because of the wide-spread use of the type after Alexander's death.(16) So, after his death Alexander 's portraits were perpetuated with reverence and circulated even more widely than it had heen during his lifetime, because he became a kind of patron deity especially in Egypt with

which his association was already strong after his visit to the Ammunium at siwa, and the priest greeted him as son of Ammon.(17)

In Egypt, many heads of Alexander are found and collected by Schreiber in his *"Bildniss Alexanders"*, as a matter of fact, those works are usually poor and have not the modelling of the first class work but the softness of the technique glozes over its imperfection.(18)

I am focusing on a granite head of Alexander the Great in the Graeco-Roman Museum in Alexandria. Although Sch-reiber mentioned it among many heads from Alexandria but it had not been studied before in a complete study. The granite material of which the head is made, as it is common in Egyptian sculpture as it is foreign in Greek sculpture, So, it is assumed that a native sculptor made it giving a striking example of the assimilation of Hellenic and native art in ptolemaic art. The head was found in Alexandria, perhaps one intended for the sanctuary of Alexander in the city.

And because a native sculptor made the granite head, it does not help us much in visualizing the expression of the original Lysippan portrait of Alexander, although the typical

features of the lysippan style, mentioned by Plutarch, are obvious :-

a) Turn of the neck,

b) The expressive glance, pathos, from the deep-set eyes,

c) The anastole over the forehead and waving side hair about the cheeks.

It is obvious that the sculptor neglected many details of the impressionist technique but we must bear in mind that head does not claim to be a portrait but it is treated in a Lysippic manner to represent the deified hero, Alexander.

It is worthy mentioning here that not long before his death, Alexander gave an official notice that he was to be regareded as a god as he was declared as the son of Ammon.[19] Hence, Alexander appeared on the coins with ram's horn of the Graeco-Egyptian God Zeus-Ammon.[20] Comperatively, many images of Alexander on different monuments such as Alexander sarcophagus and the famous Alexander mosaics gave the proof that, in his lifetime Alexander was represented with short hair.[21] One can affirim that the images of Alexander with short hair representing him as an undevini hero and leader[22] while those with long mane of hair were expressing the spirit of the devinized

Alexander.[23] But in all the portraits of Alexander both those with short hair and those with long hair. Alexander looks young because of the absence of a beard.[24]

Anyhow, on the top of the granite head here there is a large hole which must have been used to fit an ornament attached to the diadem. Some scholars claimed that it would be Ammon crown,[25] others claimed to be the uraeus.[26] But I myself accept that it would be the uraeus for the following reasons :-

1- There is a relief on the wall of a new sanctuary built in the temple of luxor to the honour of Alexander after proclaiming himself as a son of Ammon, there, Alexander is represented as an Egyptian Pharao wearing double crown over a royale headdress with uraeus.[27]

2- There is a colossal head in red granite of Ptolemy V Philopatr in the Graeco-Roman Museum in Alexandria, the Ptolemy wears in the pharaonic manner the double crown of upper and lower Egypt with the uraeus.[28]

3- There is a Hellenistic royal head dated to about 250-200 B.C in the Museum of Natural History in New Haven[29] and was made by a native Egyptian sculptor as it is made in Egyptian material (Schist) and in that royal head are the

royal headcoth, the inlay of eyes and the uraeus to confirim the Egyptianizing touch of the work.[30]

4- It is most probably that it is the uraeus because the mative sculptor would prefere to execute his work in accordance with the mative canon.

The Egyptian flavor is also obvious in inlaying eyes in the granite head of Alexander in the Graeco-Roman Museum in Alexandria[31] and that was not common in Greek art. What was inlaid here disappeared and we see nothing but the hollows but depending on other examples as in the heads representing Ptolemy IV, ptolemy V, and ptolemy VI in the Graeco-Roman Museum[32] and as in the royal hellenistic heads from News Haven.[33] Depending on such example one can assume that using inlaids for eyes became so related to the Egyptianizing touch in mixed sculpture in Hellenistic Egypt.

Concerning the date of the granite head of Alexander in the Graeco-Roman Museum in Alexandria, I can date it to the early third century B.C depending on the following facts :-

1- It is agreed that there was a revival of Egyptian art since Philopator due to the policy adopted by the ptolemies in the reign of that ptolemy as it is obvious in the reliefs of Ptolemy IV[34] and those of ptolemy VI[35] reflecting, from

the artistic point of view, the awaking of the Egyptian artistic spirit.

2- Historically speaking the chance was given to the Egyptian art to revive after the victory in the Battle of Raphia 217 B.C du to the efforts of the Egyptians and the ptolemies conciliated the Egyptians.(36) Then the assimilation of Hellenic and native art began.

3- An excellent proof of the power of the native Egyptian elements in the Ptolemaic art is the significant production of faïence vases called Queen Oinochoai dated to the early third century B.C.(37) They were designed for the festivals founded in rder to honour living or dead ptolemaic rulers and we know a good deal about the first of these festivals in Egypt, the Arsinoeia.(38) The Queen Oinchoai are clearly reflecting various degrees of Egyptianization from vessel to vessel especially in representing the queen in dress of Isis, (39) the candid flavour of the queen's portrait, the type of the alter represented, all those elements came frome Egyptian traditions to confirim the new status which the Egyptianizing tendency took place in the ptolemaic art in the early 3rd century B.C.

In summary, the granite head of Alexander here in spite of the representation of all the characteristics of Lysippan style but the material and the attribute follows the Egyptian inspiration. So, the head was made by a native Egyptian sculptor, from those, the greek esidents often patronised but they continued to work in the old Egyptian style though greek influence is evident.(40) And it is dated to the early third century B.C.

It is therefore obvious that the mixed sculpture in ptolemaic art is the result of both the mixed society and the ability of the artisit to acclimatize himself to the atmosphere in which he was working in and not at all the result of fusing of the two civilizations together.

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         pp. 123, 135 .

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13- Suhr, op. cit, p. 76

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15- Idem, op. cit. loc. cit .

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17- Tarn, W.W., *"Alexander the Great"* Cambridge, 1950,

         p. 43 .

18- Lawrence, A.W. *" Greek Sculpture in Ptolemaic Egypt"*

         in , J.E.A, XI, 1925, p. 181 .

      - Like the head from Alexandria in a poor shape and of inferior material of which the outline and the upward gaze of the eyes agree more with another head now in the British Museum with its seemingly dreamy pathos and the deep set eyes and the manner in which the lips are represented.

cf : Schreiber, op, cit fig. 6, Ph. II D.

19- Tarn, op.cit. p. 43 .

20- Hinks, R.P., *"Greek and Roman Portrait sculpture"* ,

         London, 1935, fig. 15 .

21- Pollitt, op. cit. p. 37 .

22- Many heads represented Alexander with short hair emphasizing that those images are of undevinized hero.

23- Ridgway, op. cit. p. 133 .

24- Ridgway, op. cit. p. 114 .

- After his conquest of Persia, Alexander followed that persian costum more or Alexander might wanted to remain the youthful hero like Achilles.

25- Schreiber, op. cit. p. 56 .

26- Breccia, op. cit. p 176 .

27- Noshy, I, *"The Arts of Ptolemaic Egypt"*, Oxford, 1937,
     p. 117, pL. Xv, 4 .

28- Breccia, op. cit. p. 184 .

29- Bothmer, B.V., *"Egyptian sculpture of the late period"*,
     Brooklyn Museum, 1960, PL. 96 figs. 257, 258 .

30- Idem, op. cit. pp. 131, 132 .

31- Breccia, op. cit. p. 176 .

32- Idem, op. cit. pp 184, 185 .

33- Bothmer, op. cit. pp. 131, 132 .

34- Jaquier, L. *"Les temples Ptolemaique et Romaines"*,
     Paris, 1924, III, PL. XIV, 1-3 .

35- Jacquier, op. cit., PL XXIII nos 1,2, PL, L1

- The faces were not so heavy, the eyes not so narrow. The reliefs are marked by full not heavy faces, long but

proportioned bodies, wide but not staring eyes, protruding but faintly smiling lips and careful modelling.

cf: Noshy, op. cit. p. 118 .

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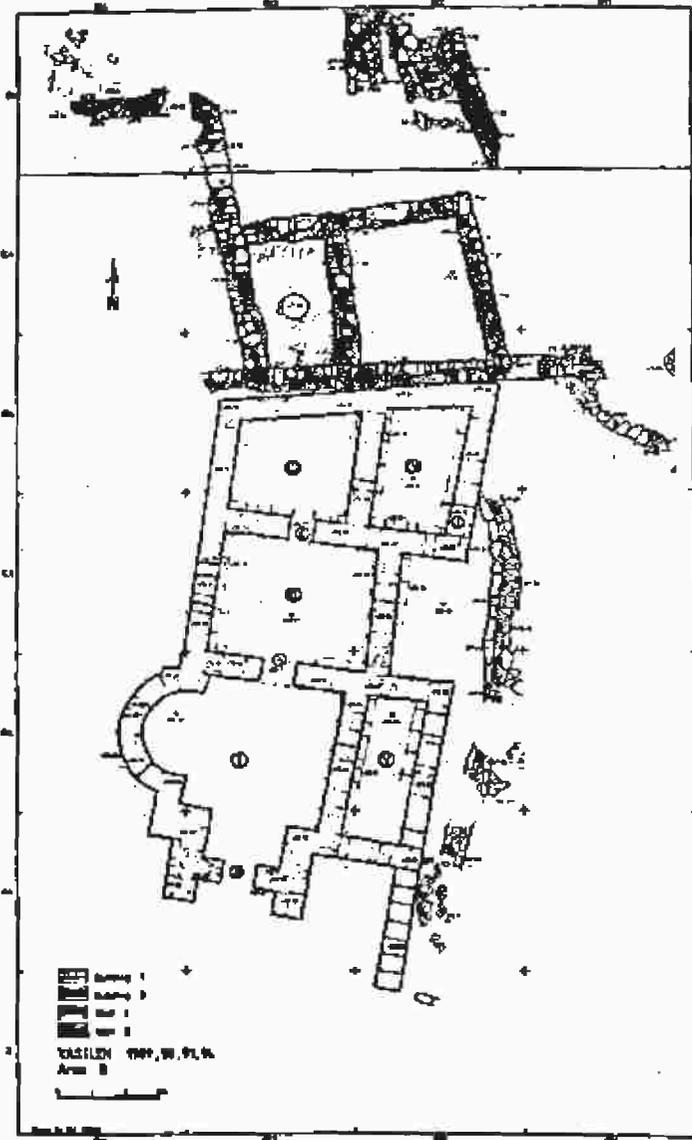
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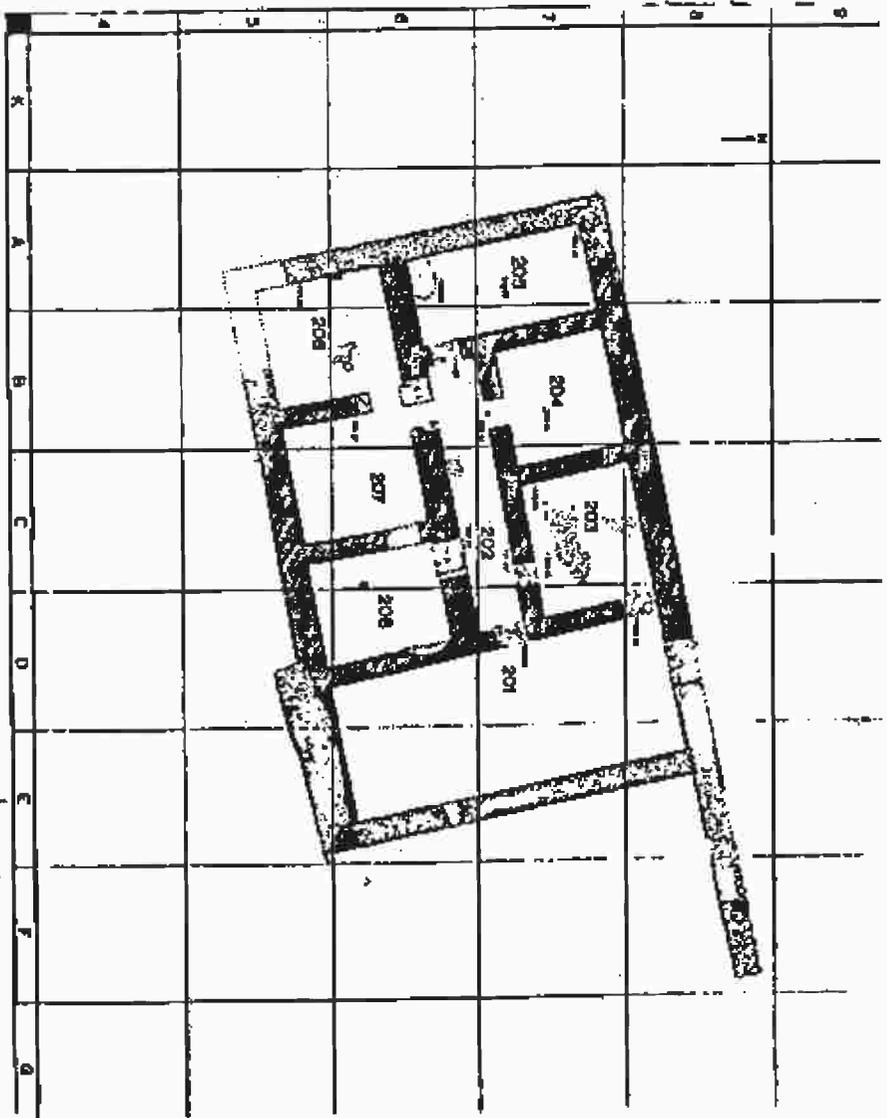11. Noshy, I, *"The Arts of Ptolemaic Egypt"*. oxford, 1937

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**The Granite Head of Alexander the Great
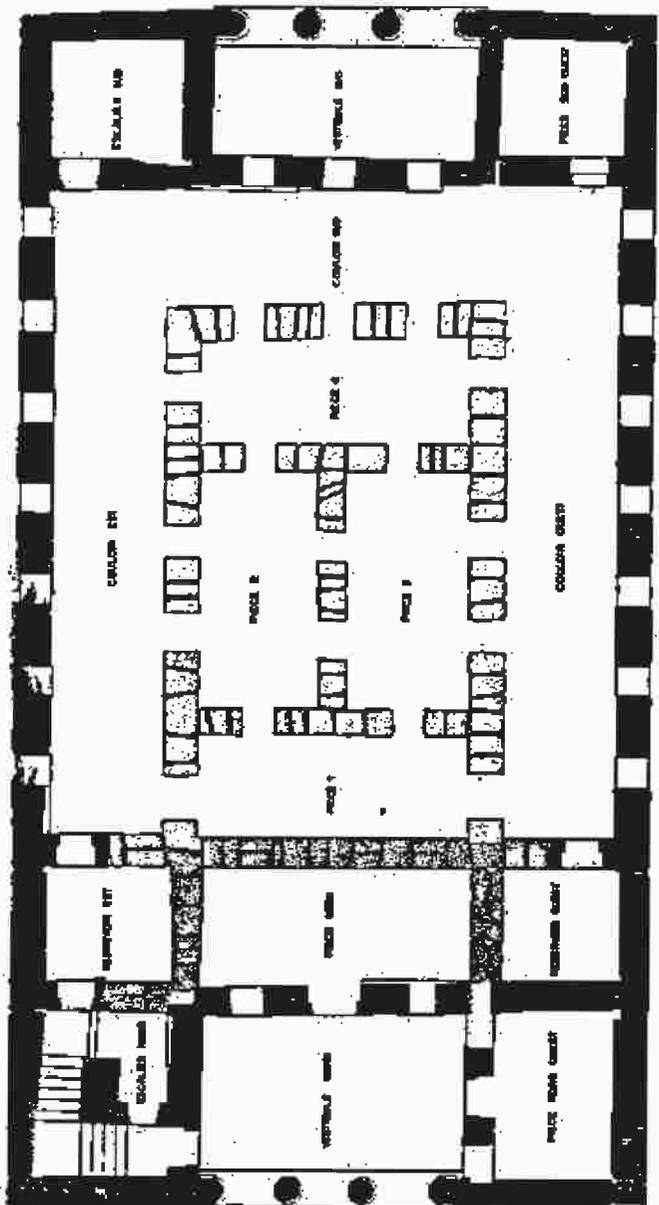in the Graeco-Roman Museum in Alexandria**

(مخطط رقم ٤)   مخطط يوضح المبنى الهلنسي في موقع البصيلة الأ

مخطط يوضح القصر الاستيطاني في تل السعيدية   (مخطط رقم ٢)

(Pritchard, 1985: Fig.149)

نموذج المعبد الكلاسيكي في سوريا في معبد بعل الأثير.

(E.Will and F.Larché, 1991, pl.8)

(تصميم رقم ٢)

مدينة إسطنبول (القسطنطينية) العاصمة القديمة للدولة العثمانية
(تركيا حالياً)
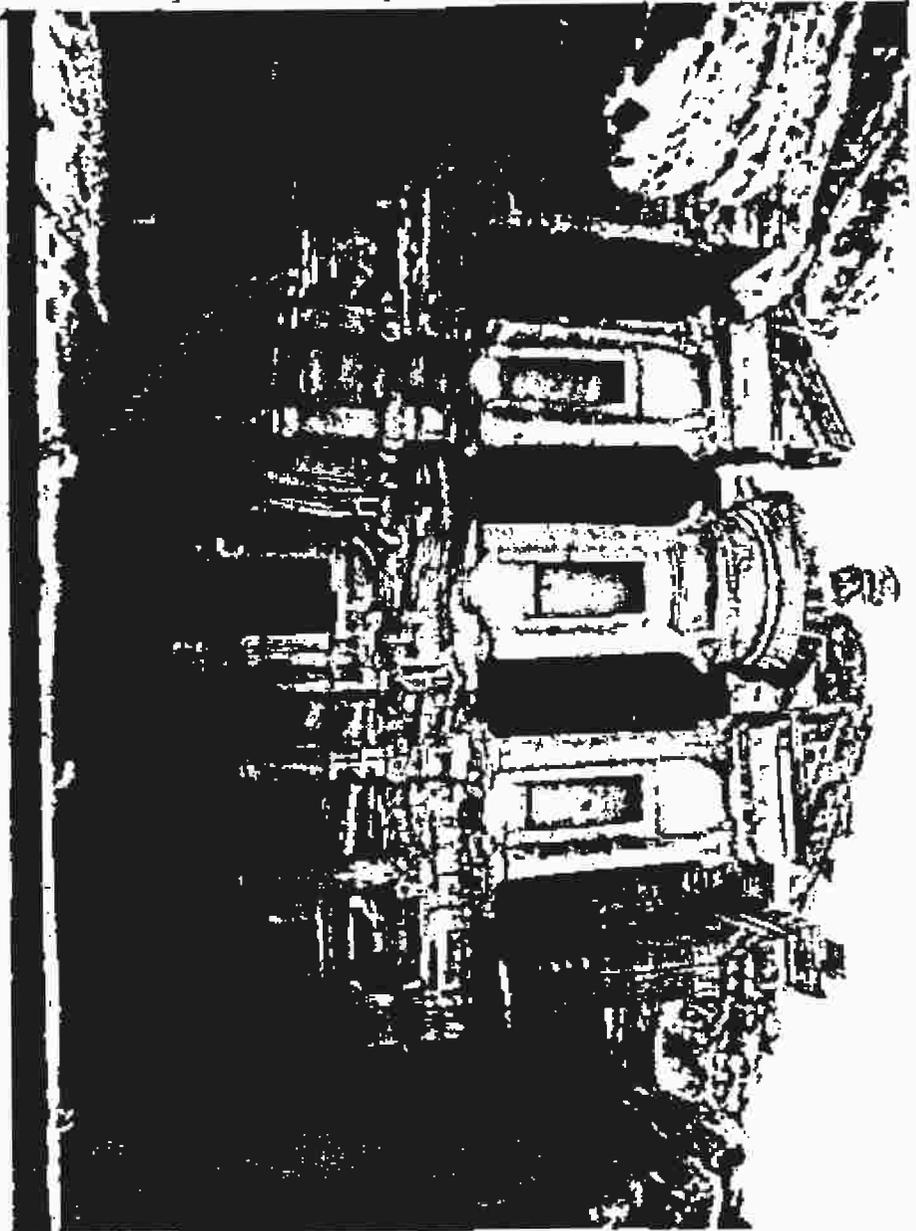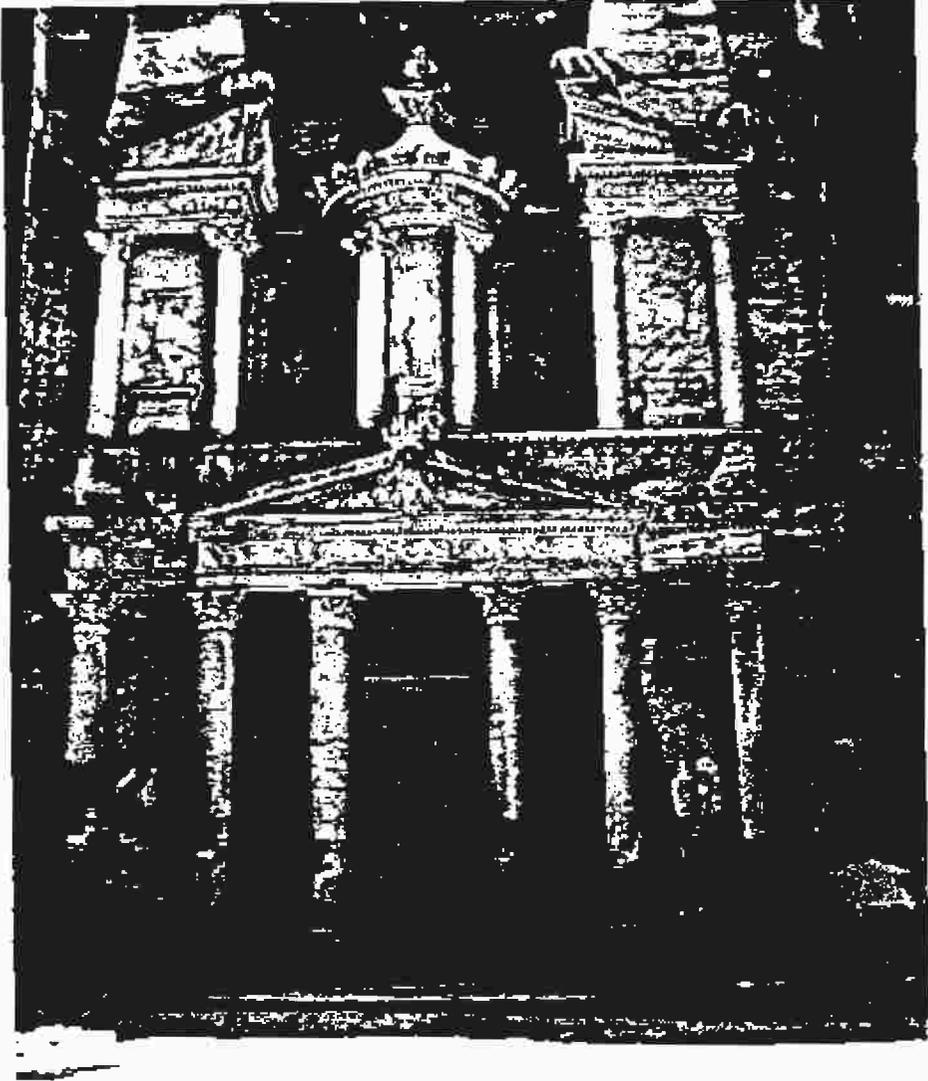
(صورة رقم ١)   الخزنة أهم المدافن النبطية في البتراء

(خارطة رقم ٢)   موقع البتراء الإستراتيجي على طرق القوافل التجارية.

(I.Browning, Petra, 1982, p.14)
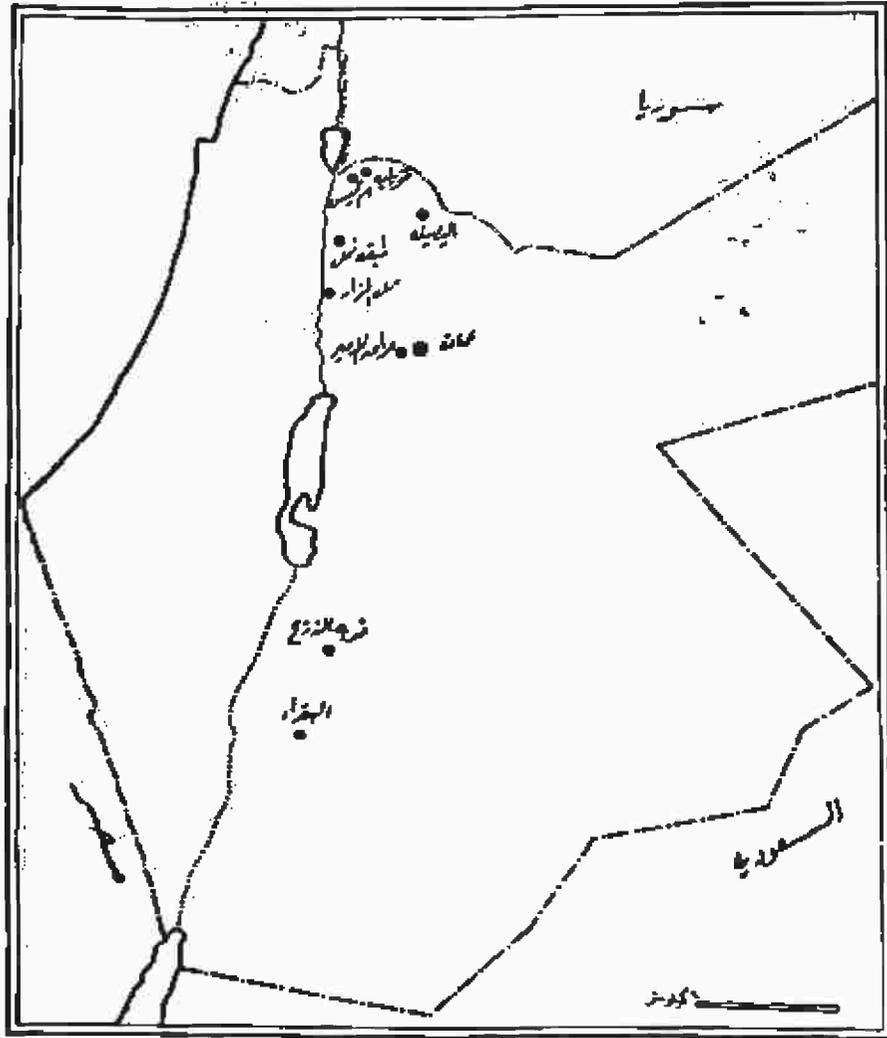
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