Rituals

Rituals can structure everyday life and be part of religious ceremonies. Rituals act in group cohesion when for e.g. the National anthem is sung in the morning; they legitimise the king or queen in the crowning ceremony or they have religious purposes e.g. in the communion. Rituals structure life, which is why they often appear at liminal phases in life (e.g. becoming an adult, or changing from being alive to being dead and buried). Rituals transpire all the time, and many we do not even notice anymore as rituals in daily life.

The central knoll encloses ca. 3.5 ha and has two possible circular alignments on the highest point on the bedrock. From there a good view is provided to the surrounding areas, almost all dolmens on the hills would have been visible from that point, or better that point would have been visible from nearly all dolmens on the surrounding hills. Other structures on the central knoll are four large horse-shoe (Fig. 4) and four rectangular structures, whose functions remain so far unclear. On the eastern slope of the central knoll are two double walls forming an entrance-like structure, while the western slope again has an entrance like structure, (Fig. 3) where two larger standing stones form a gap in a longer wall made from orthostats.

Fig. 1: The central knoll with numerous standing stones

Fig. 3: Fieldschool participants

The project

The Ritual Landscape of Murayghat project studies the area of Murayghat (Fig. 1 and 2), situated in central Jordan close to Madaba. The project consists out of two main components, the survey-landscape study and an excavation. At the same time it is also a field-school (Fig. 3) of Copenhagen University and a salvage project.

The central knoll is formed by the central knoll (Fig. 1) that is surrounded on most sides by low hills and the steep slopes towards Wadi Main on the east. The largest dolmen are on the flat ground north and east of the central knoll, while the hills to the west are covered by the remains of over 100 smaller dolmen.

Fig. 2: Map of Survey areas in Murayghat with the central knoll in the middle

Fig. 4: Horse-shoe shaped structure on central knoll

sanctuaries exists a range of other ritual structures in the countryside. This includes round structures as above Nahal Mishmar or close to Mount Nebo, but also prominent standing stones as in Dhrâ or close to Murayghat. The standing stone Hadjar al-Mansub near Murayghat is one of the largest known and shows markings that seem to give it a clear male character. An important part of these landscape features are the dolmen fields and burial grounds, which are distributed over large areas in Jordan. All dolmens studied so far have been empty, and most of them, even the still standing ones, are in a state of disorder that does not allow a secure interpretation of front or back. It is therefore very difficult to make decisive statements about the dating of the dolmen and an application for the use of OLS dating will be attempted.

Landscape

Landscape is not just a natural phenomenon, but landscape has been changed by humankind through time, making it a palimpsest of cultural effects, while it has at the same time cultural influence on the humans living in it and passing through it. We not only form the landscape around us, but we are formed by it, and the dialectics between these impacts can be studied in archaeological survey projects.

Excavations

The excavations on the northern edge of the central knoll have revealed Middle Bronze Age (Fig. 6) and to a lesser amount Early Bronze Age settlement remains. The Middle Bronze Age structures seem to be residential with their large amount of cooking pots (Fig. 7) and fire-places, but so far few in-situ floors and related walls have been excavated. The Early Bronze Age structures (Fig. 8) consist out of larger standing stones and show more similarity to the big edifices on the central knoll.

Fig. 5: "Western entrance" with people.

Fig. 6: Middle Bronze Age architecture

Fig. 7: Cooking pot drawing for museum exhibition in Madaba (Pernille H. Nielsen).

Fig. 8: Orthostat walls in Trench 3 (Early Bronze Age).

The site is instrumental in understanding the dialectic relations between landscape, ritual and human activities in the late 5th and 4th millennium BCE. The connections between the dolmens, most likely used for burials, the large structures on the top of the central knoll, and the more residential quarters between them will allow an exemplary study of the ways rituals shaped peoples' lives and the extensive changes people inflicted on their environment to "humanize" it.

Photos by S. Kerner, I. Ruben, Y. Tuwal, S. Mularczyk; Map by H. Barnes.

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