

## Excavations of the Italian Archaeological Mission in the second temple at Barāqish (2004-2005)

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**I**N ITS FOURTH excavation campaign at Barāqish (December 2004 – January 2005) the Italian Archaeological Mission in Yemen brought to light part of the so-called “Temple B”. This temple lies immediately to the north of the Temple of Nakrah (“Temple A”), which the Mission had excavated and restored in the three previous campaigns (1990, 1992, 2003)<sup>1</sup>. The excavations were carried out with a contribution from the Italian Foreign Ministry (DGPCC) and under the aegis of the *Istituto Italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente in Rome (IsIAO)*. The campaign, under the direction of the author, saw the participation of the archaeologists Romolo Loreto, Rosario Valentini, Serena Vessichelli; the epigraphist Christian J. Robin; the architect Emanuela Brunacci; and the topographer Mario Mascellani. The Yemeni authorities (GOAM) were represented by the inspectors Ṣādiq Sa‘īd ‘Uthmān, Mabkhūt Muhtamm, Mana‘ Allāh Sarī al-Naṣrī and Muḥammad Ḥajar.

The existence of Temple B had been well known for some time on account of the four large aligned pillars visible above ground and the two

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<sup>1</sup> A. de Maigret, *Gli scavi della Missione Archeologica nella città minea di Barāqish* (Conferenze ISMEO, 3), Roma, 1991; Id., “The Excavations of the Temple of Nakrah at Barāqish (Yemen)”, *Proceedings of the Seminar of Arabian Studies*, 21 (1991), pp. 159-171; *La seconda campagna di scavi della missione Archeologica Italiana a Barāqish (Yemen 1992)* (Conferenze ISMEO, 6), Roma, 1993; A. de Maigret, Ch. J. Robin, « Le temple de Nakrah à Yathill (aujourd’hui Barāqish), Yémen. Résultats des deux premières campagnes de fouilles de la Mission italienne », *Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, Comptes rendus des séances 1993*, pp. 427-496; A. de Maigret, *Barāqish, Minaean Yathill. Excavation and Restoration of the Temple of Nakrah* (YICAR Papers, 1), Ṣan‘ā’, 2004.

jambes of a large entrance doorway<sup>2</sup>. The ruins of this second Minaean temple lay (as had been the case for the nearby Temple A) beneath strata from Islamic occupation, and we had to begin by studying and removing these strata. Although of little or no interest from the point of view of monuments, they did provide indications for the stratigraphic and ceramic sequence concerning a late archaeological period in inland Yemen (ranging from approximately 1200 to 1800 AD). Little is known as yet about this period, but it is of considerable historical importance for this nation.

### *The Islamic strata*

The Islamic structures brought to light can be assigned to three periods in the context of the stratigraphy of the Barāqish site which follow each other without any clear interruption. Starting from the top we first found a level denominated Recent Islamic comprising poor dwellings in mud with small irregular rooms, many of them used to lodge sheep and camels; there was little ceramic ware here, but plentiful remains (especially in rubbish tips) of clothing and tools in everyday use made of wood, cord, leather and material. It was surprising, in such a late stratum, to find numerous documents on paper written in Arabic and some in Hebrew: dates on some of the Arabic manuscripts showed they were from the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

In both the Recent Islamic and the underlying Middle Islamic levels, the dwellings were clearly oriented in correspondence with the massive, deep-seated structures of the Minaean temple (photo A). Although still quite small, the constructions in the second level are more robust: stone courses lie at the base of mud brick walls, often faced with plaster, and stone stairs covered by mud indicate houses with two storeys. Rather than lodging animals, rooms tended to be used as storerooms, as we infer from the way the floor space was divided up by low partition walls to create compartments and recipients for cereals or other produce (photo B). It is

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<sup>2</sup> A. Fakhry, *An Archaeological Journey to Yemen*, I, II Cairo, 1951, p. 141, tav. LIV; J. Schmidt, "Bericht über die Yemen-Expedition 1977 des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts", in *Archäologische Berichte aus dem Yemen*, Band I, Mainz am Rhein, p. 125.

not possible to achieve a single precise reconstruction of the houses in this strata on account of the continuous refurbishments and modifications legible in the walls and flooring. This made it difficult to identify the subsidiary phases in this intermediate level, although these must have existed in the history of the single dwellings and, all the more so, in the individual rooms. What we can say for sure is that this Middle Islamic strata was in use over quite a long period (perhaps several centuries) and undoubtedly continuously, without interruption. Analysis of the imported ceramic ware (even though there is not much of it) will help us to be more specific about this period.

The structures dating from the underlying strata, denominated Ancient Islamic, are larger and better defined. This level is separated from the one above by a dense layer of dark ash, suggesting that this epoch had culminated in a fire. We had found the same evidence of fire during our excavations of the nearby Temple of Nakraḥ. Of particular interest are some large rooms (approximately 7 x 5m) whose thick walls (with tall stone bases surmounted by brickwork) were built on top of the external walls of both temples (on the north wall of the hypostyle hall of Temple A and the south wall of that in Temple B). Since the socles of the two temples were at different levels, the flooring of these rooms had to correspond to the level of the higher one (Temple B), and concealed a wedge structure almost 2 m high in the south wall, overlaying the wall of Temple A. The Ancient Islamic level was characterised by abundant ceramic ware featuring distinctive shapes (bowls and jars in compact clay with large button bases and painted decorations with intersecting oblique lines), which can be attributed to a period subsequent to 1200 AD when, as we know, Barāqish was occupied by the *imām* ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ḥamza.

### *The Minaean strata*

As we have seen, all the structures in the Islamic strata – including those previously excavated around Temple A – were oriented in alignment

with the underlying Minaean temples. This means that when, following a period of abandonment lasting some 1200 years, the men of 'Abd Allāh ibn Ḥamza arrived in Barāqish, the structures of Minaean Yathill must still have been clearly visible, in spite of the sand drifts accumulated by the wind. After rebuilding the city walls on top of what remained of the ancient Minaean circuit, they set about building houses for themselves wherever it was possible to exploit pre-existing Minaean structures (photo C). The tall, massive pillars of the temples constituted ideal supports around which to implant the new dwellings and (as in the case of the particularly well conserved Temple A) some large rooms were reused *in toto*, even though the original floors were encumbered with the debris of collapsed masonry. It is quite likely that the exploitation of the spacious and well built ancient structures extended to other residential and temple buildings in the city, but we will only be able to verify this when we extend the area of excavations.

The campaign of 2004-2005 got down to the major infrastructure of Temple B. Unfortunately our limited funds did not enable us to expose the whole of the large sanctuary, but we were nonetheless able to establish its original ground plan, its dimensions and state of conservation.

The uncovering of the entire entrance porch and part of the southern half of the hypostyle hall show first of all that this temple was larger than the Temple of Nakrah (Temple A): here there are six pillars in the prostyle (rather than four) measuring 6.13 m in height (as against 5.60); the sides of the hall, which is practically square, measure 13 m (as compared with approx. 11 x 12 m for Temple A); the entrance door jambs are taller and more massive; the pillars of the hypostyle hall (resting on the floor) are approx. 5.50 m in height (as against 4 m).

The ground plan is in fact quite similar to Temple A (fig. 1): here too large longitudinal plinths (L101) support the pillars of the prostyle (photo D) the hypostyle hall is once again divided into five naves by means of four rows of pillars, with three pillars to a row (photo E); here

too there are large offertory tables (for the moment we have found one, on the right just inside the entrance, particularly well conserved, with a decoration on the front featuring recumbent ibexes and the word *Dyḥ* [photo F]) surrounded by benches, which occupy some transepts in the side naves; here too the external walls are quite thick, with a double curtain of blocks which are well squared and trimmed; and once again all the visible surfaces bear the typical marginally drafted, pecked decoration.

Excavations have not yet reached the rear (eastern end) of the temple, so we do not yet know how the five naves terminated, but we can imagine that here too we shall find five small cells to hold the symbols of the divinity.

Already, however, there is a clear difference between this temple and that of Nakrah, namely the level of the flooring in the hypostyle hall. While in Temple A (and, to the best of my knowledge, in all other South Arabian temples) the floor of the hall is at the same level as the external stylobate (separated from it only by the large raised threshold supporting the entrance door jambs), here, after mounting the entrance threshold, there are six steps (M105) leading down to the floor of the hypostyle hall (photo G). In other words the internal ground level is approximately 1 m below the level of the plinths of the external stylobate. This is the case for the central nave of the hall, while the base supporting the offertory table in the righthand naves (the only ones to have been excavated to date) stands some 20 cm higher (it also supports the first pillar on the right as you enter the hall). Nonetheless one is struck by the overall sense of the hypostyle hall lying considerably lower than the surrounding ground level. For the time being, at least, we can offer no plausible explanation for this peculiar structural feature.

Another important element which distinguishes this temple is the presence of a narrow flight of steps (M104) built against the west wall of the hall and leading off the right hand side of the steps down from the entrance (photo H). This flight of steps leads steeply up towards the south

external wall. Only the first five steps survive, but its rake suggests that it led up to a stairhead in the top south-west corner of the hall which must presumably have given access to a second storey. This too would constitute another major difference vis à vis the Temple of Nakrah, although if we think of the two storeys of the Southern Arabian temple of Yeha in Ethiopia, which we excavated in 1998<sup>3</sup>, it is not without precedent. Two inscriptions came to light, one quite long (Y.04.B.B/5, running to seven lines) at the back of the steps M104 (facing into the hall), and the other longer still (Y.04.B.B/6, sixteen lines) on the south external wall of the hall (M102). In addition to the name of the god Nakrah we also find that of 'Athtar, and this second temple may in fact have been dedicated to this supreme deity. Two other long inscriptions (Y.04.B.B/8, Y.04.B.B/9) were found on blocks which were not *in situ* but formed part of the copious debris of the hypostyle hall. These documents, which are certainly of considerable significance for Minaean history, are currently being studied by Prof. Ch. J. Robin of the LESA in Paris.

It was not possible to explore the whole floor area in the selected site because some collapsed pillars and beams from the temple roof (and perhaps others supporting the first floor) as well as a number of heavy metope blocks (with the characteristic dentellate decoration) prevented us completing the excavation. This major debris can only be removed with the help of mechanical diggers.

From what we were able to discern, the temple is well conserved in the part comprising the prostyle and entrance, but less so in the hypostyle hall (just the contrary of the situation for Temple A). Of the six pillars brought to light in the southern half of the hall, four were still standing, although fractured; the other two had lost their upper sections. The south external wall is reasonably well conserved (to a height of about 2 m above the bench which runs round the bottom of the wall inside), whereas the

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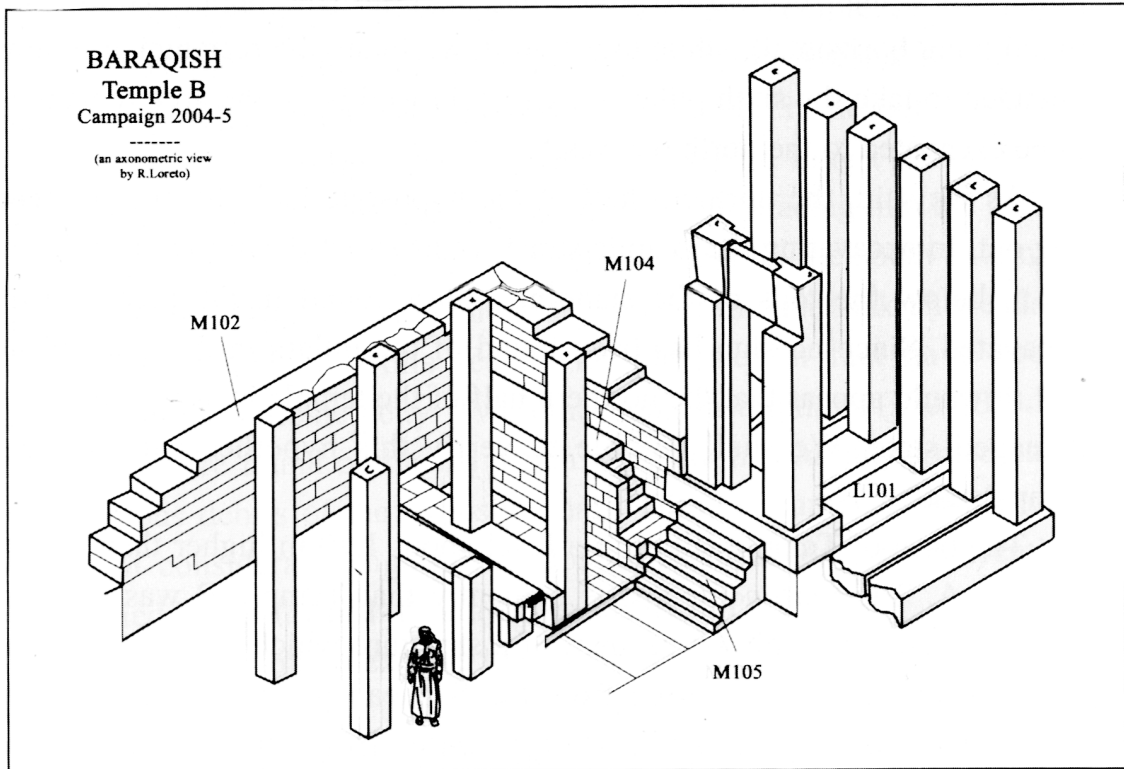
<sup>3</sup> Ch. J. Robin, A. de Maigret, « Le grand temple de Yéha (Tigray), Éthiopie, après la première campagne de fouilles de la Mission française (1998) », *Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, Comptes rendus des séances 1998*, pp. 737-798.

west wall, representing the temple façade, had been razed to the level of the entrance threshold. As for the prostyle, to the south of the four great pillars still intact and standing (although they lean to the west), a fifth pillar was found, broken off about half way up (the upper section was found lying horizontal), while to the north we found the rectangular hollow intended to take the sixth pillar, which could well be in the area remaining to be excavated to the north (or west).

As we said, the northern half of the hypostyle hall has not yet been dug out. In excavating the Islamic strata we have got down to a level about 1.5 m below the tops of the standing pillars found in the area already excavated. Since no sign has been found of the pillars in this part of the hall, it would appear that the northern half of the temple is in a particularly damaged state. We shall be able to verify this hypothesis in the next campaigns.

The base of Temple B lies at a level about 1.70 m higher than that of Temple A. The reason for this is evidently that Temple B was built on higher ground, possibly on account of a structure which stood there prior to the Minaean period (dating from the Sabaean period). Since the two Minaean temples almost certainly date from the same period (4<sup>th</sup> century BC – 1<sup>st</sup> century AD), they must have been linked by a flight of stairs or a ramp to overcome the difference in height.

Apart from a considerable quantity of ceramic ware, no objects of particular value have been found in the temple to date. All the evidence, here as in Temple A, is that the edifice was systematically pillaged prior to its radical destruction.



**Fig. 1** – Barāqish, Temple B. An axonometric view of the excavated structures.



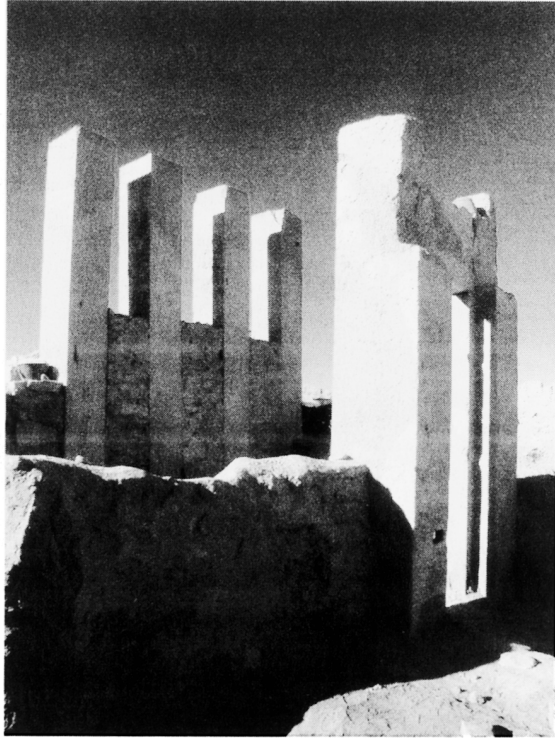


**Photo A** - Barāqish, Temple B. Dwellings in mud of the Recent and Middle Islamic periods.



**Photo B** - Barāqish, Temple B. A storeroom with compartments for cereals (Middle Islamic Period).

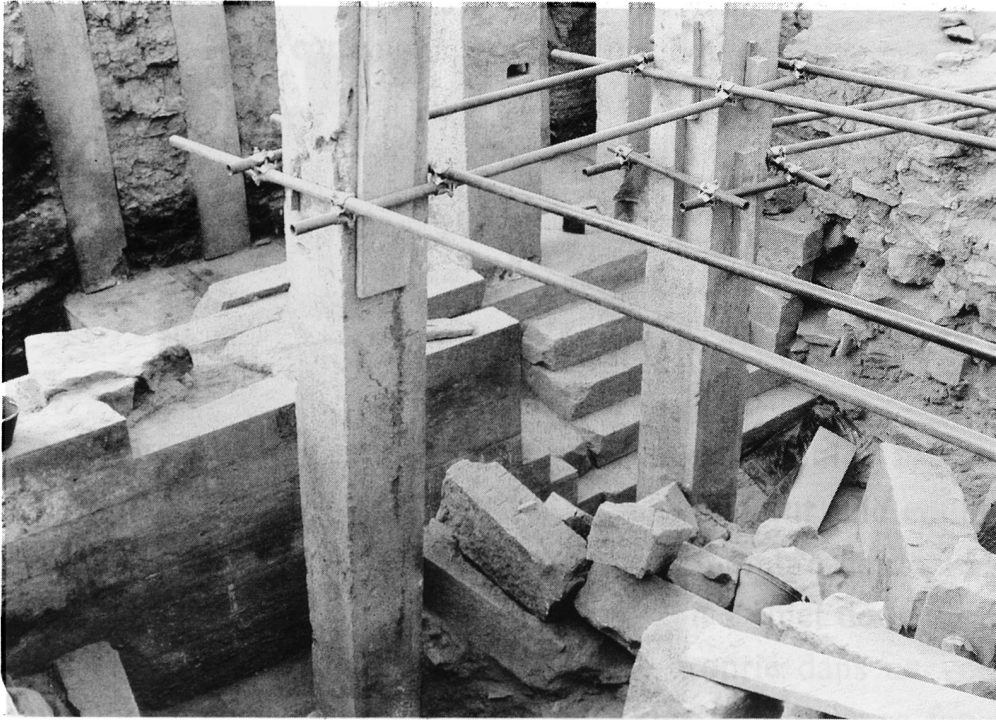
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**Photo C** - Barāqish, Temple B. The tall, massive pillars of the temple constituted ideal supports around which to implant the new dwellings in the Ancient Islamic period.



**Photo D** - Barāqish, Temple B. The longitudinal plinths (L101) supporting the pillars of the prostyle.



**Photo E** - Barāqish, Temple B. A view of the hypostyle hall from South.

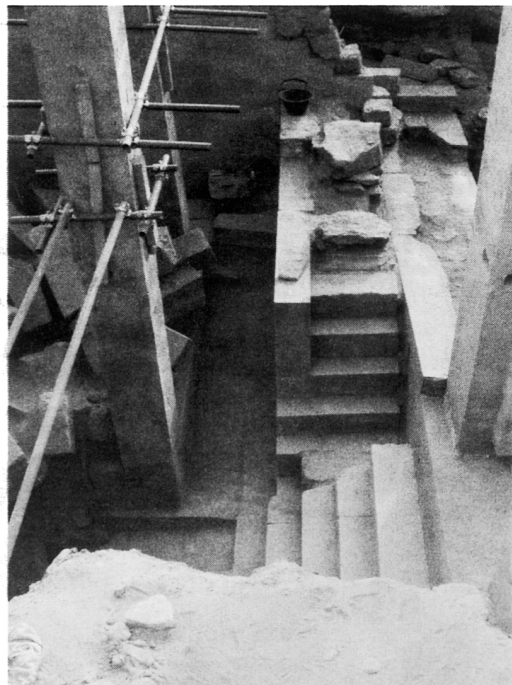


**Photo F** - Barāqish, Temple B. The offering table with a decoration on the front featuring recumbent ibexes and the word *Dy*.

Excavations of the Italian Archeological Mission



**Photo G** - Barāqish, Temple B. The staircase M105 leading down to the floor of the hypostyle hall.



**Photo H** - Barāqish, Temple B. The staircase M104 built against the west wall of the hall.