

# A petroglyph of a religious ceremony at Humayma

M. Barbara Reeves

Over the past three decades Humayma (S Jordan) has been the subject of much research, focusing on the structures and artefacts left behind by its Neolithic, Nabataean, Roman, Byzantine, and early Islamic occupants,<sup>1</sup> but the petroglyphs carved into the sandstone hills and ridges on the W side of the site have been mentioned only in passing. In 2012 and 2014 it was decided to carry out a survey of them. Of the more than 150 petroglyphs documented, most are simple depictions typical of those throughout the region: individual or grouped representations of bovids (ibex, gazelle, oryx), footprints or shoeprints, abstract symbols, and humans in the orant (half-arm raised) pose or holding weapons.<sup>2</sup> Simple narrative scenes, again typical of the region, show carnivores or mounted humans chasing prey, or groups of archers hunting.

One petroglyph stands out for its finely incised detail and complex narrative documenting the performance, location, and outcome of a person's religious offering (figs. 1-2).

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- 1 Humayma has been undergoing extensive excavation and survey since the 1980s. Major research initiatives have focused on the Roman and Byzantine fort (J. P. Oleson, "Trajan's engineers and the Roman fort at Humayma [ancient Havarra, Jordan]," in *Studies in the history and archaeology of Jordan X* [2009] 535-48; preliminary reports in *ADAJ* 39 [1995] 317-54; 43 [1999] 411-50; 47 [2003] 37-64; 52 [2008] 309-42), the Nabataean town and Roman civilian *vicus* (same preliminary reports and Reeves *et al.*, *ADAJ* 53 [2009] 229-63; 57 [2013]), several churches and several early Islamic domestic structures (J. P. Oleson and R. Schick, *Humayma Excavation Project*, vol. 2 [Boston 2013]), the Abbasid family's *qasr* and mosque (R. M. Foote, "Frescoes and carved ivory from the Abbasid family homestead at Humeima," *JRA* 12 [1999] 423-28; "From residence to revolutionary headquarters: the early Islamic *qasr* and mosque complex at al-Humayma and its 8th-century context," in P. M. Daviau *et al.* (edd.), *Crossing Jordan: North American contributions to the archaeology of Jordan* [London 2007] 457-65), the water-supply system (J. P. Oleson, *Humayma Excavation Project*, vol. 1 [Boston 2010]), funerary sites (Oleson and Schick *ibid.*), and prehistoric activity areas (D. O. Henry, "Late pleistocene environment and paleolithic adaptations in southern Jordan," in *Studies in the history and archaeology of Jordan II* [1985] 67-77; *Prehistoric cultural ecology and evolution: insights from Southern Jordan* [New York 1995]). Some inscriptions from the fringes of the site or displaced contexts have been collected and published (D. F. Graf, "The 'God' of Humayma," in Z. J. Kapera (ed.), *Intertestamental essays in honor of Józef Tadeusz Milik* [Kraków 1992] 67-76; H. Hayajneh, "Marcus Ulpius Su'aidu in einem Bruchstück einer nabatäischen Inschrift aus Süd-Jordanien," *ZDPV* 117 [2001] 171-85; G. A. Bevan and M. B. Reeves, "A new Nabataean inscription from Humayma," *J. Semitic Stud.* 55 [2010] 497-507). A detailed overview of the site's history is given in Oleson *ibid.* 2010, 57-62.
  - 2 The thousands of recorded petroglyphs in the Hisma Desert (e.g., G. J. Corbett, *Mapping the mute immortals: a locational and contextual analysis of Thamudic E/Hismaic inscriptions and rock drawings from the Wadi Hafir of southern Jordan* (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Chicago 2010); *ADAJ* 53 [2011] 233-48; "The signs that bind: identifying individuals, families and friends in Hismaic inscriptions," *Arabian Archaeology & Epigraphy* 23.2 [2012] 174-90; S. Farès, "Les gravures rupestres de Jordanie du sud et enquête sur les pratiques de chasse actuelles," in I. Sidéra, E. Vila and P. Erikson (edd.), *La chasse: pratiques sociales et symboliques* [Paris 2006] 37-44; B. Inglis, "Incisioni di piedi e clazari sulle rocce del deserto della Giordania meridionale," *Studi per l'Ecologia del Quaternario* 10 (1988) 67-92; L. Jobling, M. Bannigan and R. Morgan, "Aqaba-Ma'an survey," *AJA* 41 [1997] 500) tend to be simple and repetitive. Individual images show riders, animals, handprints, footprints, and abstract symbols. Simple narratives, both written and pictorial, typically evoke a deity, document conflict between humans, or show an individual human or animal capturing its prey. More complex narratives often depict a band of humans with their domesticated animals hunting a wild animal.