

Coordinates: 30°19′43″N 35°26′31″E﻿ / ﻿30.32861°N 35.44194°E﻿ / 30.32861; 35.44194

Petra

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Petra (Greek "πέτρα" (petra), meaning *rock*; Arabic: البتراء, *Al-Batrā* ‎) is a historic and archaeological city in the Jordanian governorate of Ma'an that has rock cut architecture and water conduits system. Established sometime around the 6th century BC as the capital city of the Nabataeans,^[2] it is a symbol of Jordan as well as its most visited tourism attraction.^[2] It lies on the slope of Mount Hor^[3] in a basin among the mountains which form the eastern flank of Arabah (Wadi Araba), the large valley running from the Dead Sea to the Gulf of Aqaba. Petra is an UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1985.

The site remained unknown to the Western world until 1812, when it was introduced by Swiss explorer Johann Ludwig Burckhardt. It was described as "a rose-red city half as old as time" in a Newdigate Prize-winning sonnet by John William Burgon. UNESCO has described it as "one of the most precious cultural properties of man's cultural heritage."^[4] Petra was chosen by the BBC as one of "the 40 places you have to see before you die".^[5]

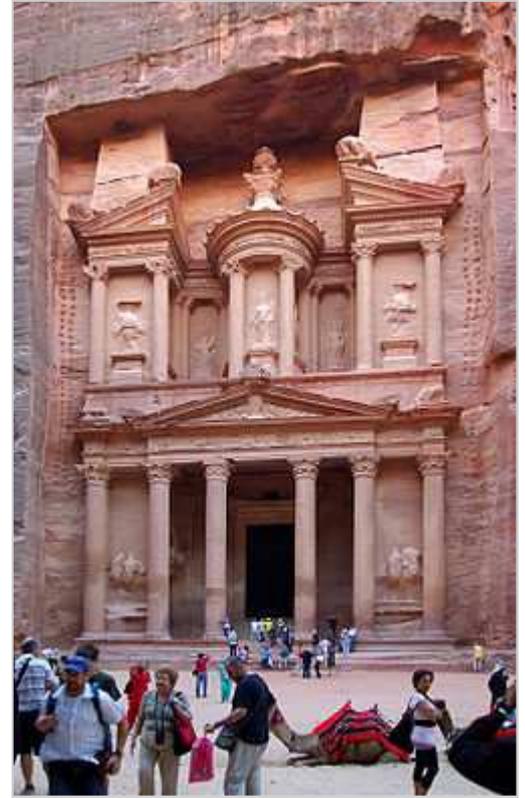
Contents

- 1 Geography
- 2 History
 - 2.1 Roman rule
 - 2.2 Religion
 - 2.3 Decline
- 3 Threats to Petra
- 4 Petra today
- 5 In popular culture
- 6 See also
- 7 Notes
- 8 References
- 9 External links

Geography

Pliny the Elder and other writers identify Petra as the capital of the Nabataeans, Aramaic-speaking Semites, and the centre of their caravan trade. Enclosed by towering rocks and watered by a perennial stream, Petra not only possessed the advantages of a fortress, but controlled the main commercial routes which passed through it to Gaza in the west, to Bosra and Damascus in the north,

Petra



The Treasury at Petra

Location:	Ma'an Governorate, Jordan
Coordinates:	30°19′43″N 35°26′31″E﻿ / ﻿30.32861°N 35.44194°E﻿ / 30.32861; 35.44194
Elevation:	810m (2,700 ft)
Built:	1200 B.C. ^[1]
	UNESCO World Heritage Site
Type:	Cultural
Criteria:	i, iii, iv
Designated:	1985 (9th session)
Reference #:	326
	(http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/326)
State Party:	 Jordan
Region:	Arab States

to Aqaba and Leuce Come on the Red Sea, and across the desert to the Persian Gulf.



The end of the Siq, with its dramatic view of Al Khazneh ("The Treasury")

Excavations have demonstrated that it was the ability of the Nabataeans to control the water supply that led to the rise of the desert city, creating an artificial oasis. The area is visited by flash floods and archaeological evidence demonstrates the Nabataeans controlled these floods by the use of dams, cisterns and water conduits. These

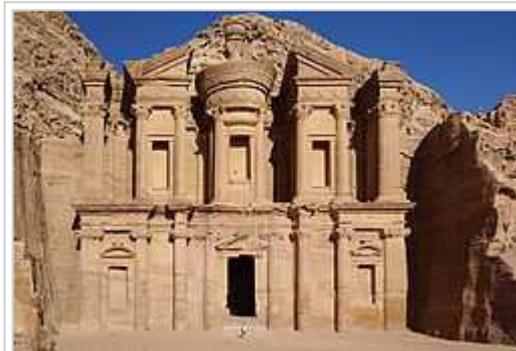
innovations stored water for prolonged periods of drought, and enabled the city to prosper from its sale.^{[6][7]}

Although in ancient times Petra might have been approached from the south via Saudi Arabia on a track leading around Jabal Haroun ("Aaron's Mountain"), across the plain of Petra, or possibly from the high plateau to the north, most modern visitors approach the site from the east. The impressive eastern entrance leads steeply down through a dark, narrow gorge (in places only 3–4 m (9.8–13 ft) wide) called the *Siq* ("the shaft"), a natural geological feature formed from a deep split in the sandstone rocks and serving as a waterway flowing into Wadi Musa. At the end of the narrow gorge stands Petra's most elaborate ruin, Al Khazneh (popularly known as "the Treasury"), hewn into the sandstone cliff.

A little further from the Treasury, at the foot of the mountain called *en-Nejr*, is a massive theatre, so placed as to bring the greatest number of

tombs within view. At the point where the valley opens out into the plain, the site of the city is revealed with striking effect. The amphitheatre has been cut into the hillside and into several of the tombs during its construction. Rectangular gaps in the seating are still visible. Almost enclosing it on three sides are rose-coloured mountain walls, divided into groups by deep

fissures, and lined with knobs cut from the rock in the form of towers.



El Deir ("The Monastery")



Location of Petra in Jordan



The Theatre

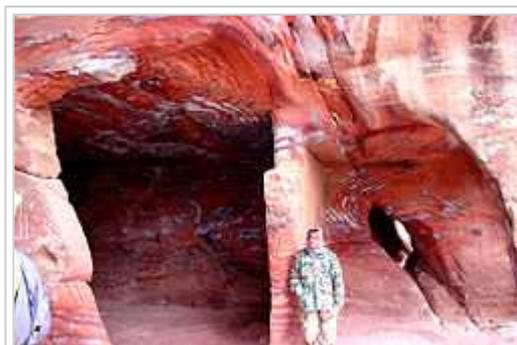


The narrow passage (Siq) that leads to Petra

History

Evidence suggests that settlements had begun in and around Petra in the eighteenth dynasty of Egypt (1550-1292 BCE). It is listed in Egyptian campaign accounts and the Amarna letters as Pel, Sela or Seir. Though the city was founded relatively late, a sanctuary existed there since very ancient times. Stations 19 through 26 of the stations list of

Exodus are places associated with Petra.^[8] This part of the country was Biblically assigned to the Horites, the predecessors of the Edomites.^[9] The habits of the original natives may have influenced the Nabataean custom of burying the dead and offering worship in half-excavated caves. Although Petra is usually identified with Sela which means a *rock*, the Biblical references^[10] refer to it as "the cleft in the rock", referring to its entrance. 2 Kings xiv. 7 seems to be more specific. In the parallel passage, however, Sela is understood to mean simply "the rock" (2 Chr. xxv. 12, see LXX).



Petra is known as the Rose-Red City for the colour of the rocks in which Petra is carved

On the authority of Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews* iv. 7, 1~ 4, 7) Eusebius and Jerome (*Onom. sacr.* 286, 71. 145, 9; 228, 55. 287, 94) assert that **Rekem** was the native name and *Rekem* appears in the Dead Sea scrolls^[11] as a prominent Edom site most closely describing Petra and associated with Mount Seir. But in the Aramaic versions *Rekem* is the name of Kadesh, implying that Josephus may have confused the two places. Sometimes the Aramaic versions give the form *Rekem-Geya* which recalls the name of the village El-ji, southeast of Petra.^[citation needed] The Semitic name of the city, if not Sela, remains unknown. The passage in Diodorus Siculus (xix. 94–97) which describes the expeditions which Antigonos sent against the Nabataeans in 312 BCE is understood to throw some light upon the history of Petra, but the "petra" referred to as a natural fortress and place of refuge cannot be a proper name and the description implies that the town was not yet in existence.



The Rekem Inscription in 1976

The only place in Petra where the name "Rekem" occurs was in the rock wall of the Wadi Musa opposite the entrance to the Siq. About twenty years ago the Jordanians built a bridge over the wadi and this inscription was buried beneath tons of concrete.^[12]

More satisfactory evidence of the date of the earliest Nabataean settlement may be obtained from an examination of the tombs. Two types have been distinguished: the Nabataean and the Greco-Roman. The Nabataean type starts from the simple pylon-tomb with a door set in a tower crowned by a parapet ornament, in imitation of the front of a dwelling-house. Then, after passing through various stages, the full Nabataean type is reached, retaining all the native features and at the same time exhibiting characteristics which are partly Egyptian and partly

Greek. Of this type there exist close parallels in the tomb-towers at el-I~ejr in north Arabia, which bear long Nabataean inscriptions and supply a date for the corresponding monuments at Petra. Then comes a series of tombfronts which terminate in a semicircular arch, a feature derived from north Syria. Finally come the elaborate façades copied from the front of a Roman temple; however, all traces of native style have vanished. The exact dates of the stages in this development cannot be fixed. Strangely, few inscriptions of any length have been found at Petra, perhaps because they have perished with the stucco or cement which was used upon many of the buildings. The simple pylon-tombs which belong to the pre-Hellenic age serve as evidence for the earliest period. It is not known how far back in this stage the Nabataean settlement goes, but it does not go back farther than the 6th century BCE.

A period follows in which the dominant civilization combines Greek, Egyptian and Syrian elements, clearly pointing to the age of the Ptolemies. Towards the close of the 2nd century BCE, when the Ptolemaic and Seleucid kingdoms were equally depressed, the Nabataean kingdom came to the front. Under Aretas III Philhellene, (c.85–60 BCE), the royal coins begin. The theatre was probably excavated at that time, and Petra must have assumed the aspect of a Hellenistic city. In the reign of Aretas IV Philopatris, (9 BCE–40 CE), the fine tombs of the el-I~ejr [?] type may be dated, and perhaps also the great High-place.

Roman rule

In 106 CE, when Cornelius Palma was governor of Syria, that part of Arabia under the rule of Petra was absorbed into the Roman Empire as part of Arabia Petraea, becoming capital. The native dynasty came to an end. But the city continued to flourish. A century later, in the time of Alexander Severus, when the city was at the height of its splendor, the issue of coinage comes to an end. There is no more building of sumptuous tombs, owing apparently to some sudden catastrophe, such as an invasion by the neo-Persian power under the Sassanid Empire. Meanwhile, as Palmyra (fl. 130–270) grew in importance and attracted the Arabian trade away from Petra, the latter declined. It seems, however, to have lingered on as a religious centre. A Roman road was constructed at the site. Epiphanius of Salamis (c.315–403) writes that in his time a feast was held there on December 25 in honor of the virgin Khaabou (Chaabou) and her offspring Dushara (*Haer.* 51).^[*citation needed*]

Religion

The Nabataeans worshipped the Arab gods and goddesses of the pre-Islamic times as well as few of their deified kings. One, Obodas I, was deified after his death. Dushara was the main male god accompanied by his female trinity: Al-‘Uzzá, Allat and Manāt. Many statues carved in the rock depict these gods and goddesses.

The Monastery, Petra's largest monument, dates from the 1st century BCE. It was dedicated to Obodas I and is believed to be the symposium of Obodas the god. This information is inscribed on the ruins of the Monastery (the name is the translation of the Arabic "Ad-Deir").

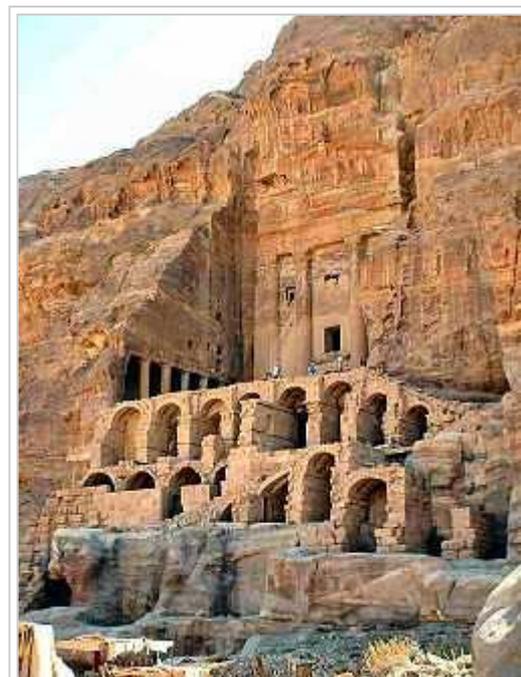
Christianity found its way to Petra in the 4th century CE, nearly 500 years after the establishment of Petra as a trade center. Athanasius mentions a bishop of Petra (Anchioch. 10) named Asterius. At least one of the tombs (the "tomb with the urn"?) was used as a church. An inscription in red paint records its consecration "in the time of the most holy bishop Jason" (447). After the Islamic conquest of 629–632 Christianity in Petra, as of most of Arabia, gave way to Islam. During the First Crusade Petra was occupied by Baldwin I of the Kingdom of Jerusalem and formed the second fief of the barony of Al Karak (in the lordship of Oultrejordain) with the title *Château de la Vallée de Moyse* or Sela. It remained in the hands of the Franks until 1189. It is still a titular see of the Catholic Church.^[13]

According to Arab tradition, Petra is the spot where Moses struck a rock with his staff and water came forth, and where Moses' brother, Aaron, is buried, at Mount Hor, known today as Jabal Haroun or Mount Aaron. The Wadi Musa or "Wadi of Moses" is the Arab name for the narrow valley at the head of which Petra is sited. A mountaintop shrine of Moses' sister Miriam was still shown to pilgrims at the time of Jerome in the 4th century, but its location has not been identified since.^[14]

Decline

Petra declined rapidly under Roman rule, in large part due to the revision of sea-based trade routes. In 363 an earthquake destroyed many buildings, and crippled the vital water management system.^[15] The ruins of Petra were an object of curiosity in the Middle Ages and were visited by Sultan Baibars of Egypt towards the end of the 13th century. The first European to describe them was Johann Ludwig Burckhardt in 1812.

Because the structures weakened with age, many of the tombs became vulnerable to thieves, and many treasures were stolen.



Urn Tomb

Threats to Petra

The site suffers from a host of threats, including collapse of ancient structures, erosion due to flooding and improper rainwater drainage, weathering from salt upwelling, improper restoration of ancient structures, and unsustainable tourism.^[16] The latter has increased substantially ever since the site received widespread media coverage in 2007 during the controversial New Seven Wonders of the World Internet and cell phone campaign, started by a private corporation.^[17]

Petra today

On December 6, 1985, Petra was designated a World Heritage Site.

In 2006 the design of a Visitor Centre began. *The Jordan Times* reported in December 2006 that 59,000 people visited in the two months October and November 2006, 25% fewer than the same period in the previous year.^[18]

In popular culture

Petra was the main topic in John William Burgon's Poem *Petra*. Referring to it as the inaccessible city which he had heard described but had never seen. The Poem was awarded the Newdigate Prize in 1845 :

“ It seems no work of Man's creative hand,
 by labour wrought as wavering fancy planned;
 But from the rock as if by magic grown,
 eternal, silent, beautiful, alone!
 Not virgin-white like that old Doric shrine,
 where erst Athena held her rites divine;
 Not saintly-grey, like many a minster fane,
 that crowns the hill and consecrates the plain;
 But rose-red as if the blush of dawn,
 that first beheld them were not yet withdrawn;
 The hues of youth upon a brow of woe,
 which Man deemed old two thousand years ago,
 match me such marvel save in Eastern clime,
 a rose-red city half as old as time.

”



El Deir ("The Monastery") in 1839, by David Roberts.



The Petra Visitors Center in Wadi Musa, the closest town to the historic site



Official advertisement poster of the Jordan Tourism Board calling to cast a vote for Petra in the poll for the so-called "New Seven Wonders of the World".

The site is featured in films such as: *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, *Arabian Nights*, *Passion in the Desert*, *Mortal Kombat: Annihilation*, *Sinbad and the Eye of the Tiger*, the Sisters of Mercy music video "Dominion", and *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen*. It was recreated for the video games *Spy Hunter (2001)*, *King's Quest V*, *Lego Indiana Jones* and *Sonic Unleashed* and appeared in the novels *Left Behind*, *Appointment with Death*, *The Eagle in the Sand* and *The Red Sea Sharks*, the nineteenth book in *The Adventures of Tintin* series. It featured prominently in the Marcus Didius Falco mystery novel *Last Act in Palmyra*.

See also

- Ancient Towns in Saudi Arabia
- List of colossal sculpture in situ

Notes

- ↑ [1] (<http://www.kinghusein.gov.jo/tourism6d.html>)
- ↑ ^{*a*} ^{*b*} Major Attractions: Petra (<http://www.visitjordan.com/Default.aspx?Tabid=63>) , visitjordan.com
- ↑ Mish, Frederick C., Editor in Chief. "Petra." *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*. 9th ed. Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster Inc., 1985. ISBN 0-87779-508-8
- ↑ UNESCO advisory body evaluation (http://whc.unesco.org/archive/advisory_body_evaluation/326.pdf)
- ↑ Davey, Steve. "Unforgettable Places To See Before You Die" (http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/bbcworldwide/worldwidestories/pressreleases/2003/12_december/places_to_see.shtml) BBC, 12 December 2003.
- ↑ Petra: Water Works (<http://nabataea.net/waterw.html>)
- ↑ Geotimes — June 2004 — Petra: An Eroding Ancient City (http://www.agiweb.org/geotimes/june04/feature_petra.html)
- ↑
 - 25. Mithcah - Nu. 33:28-29 associated with Petra on the borders of Moab and Edom near Petra.
 - 26. Hashmonah - Nu. 33:29-30 Ha Shmona Kiryat Shmona South
 - 27. Moseroth - Nu. 33:30-31 described as the place where Aaron died at the foot of Mt Hor (Petra)
 - 28. Bene-Jaakan - Nu. 33:31-32 the wells of Jaakan Near Mt Hor (Petra)
 - 29. Petra - Nu. 33:32-33 Siq The cleft of the mountain, the entrance to Petra
- ↑ Genesis xiv. 6, xxxvi. 20–30; Deut. ii. 12.
- ↑ Judges i. 36; Isaiah xvi. i, xlii. 11; Obad. 3.
- ↑ 4Q462
- ↑ Iain Browning, Petra, Chatto & Windus, 1974. p. 108. On page 109 there is a line drawing of the inscription, but the photograph is my own and the observation concerning the burial is also mine, based on some fifteen visits to Petra over the last 30 years.
- ↑ "Petra" ([http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Catholic_Encyclopedia_\(1913\)/Petra](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Catholic_Encyclopedia_(1913)/Petra)) . *Catholic Encyclopedia*. New York: Robert Appleton Company. 1913. [http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Catholic_Encyclopedia_\(1913\)/Petra](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Catholic_Encyclopedia_(1913)/Petra).
- ↑ Sacred Sites: Petra (http://www.sacredsites.com/middle_east/jordan/petra_ruins.htm)
- ↑ Glueck, Grace (2003-10-17). "ART REVIEW; Rose-Red City Carved From the Rock" (<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9D03E3DF143EF934A25753C1A9659C8B63>) . *The New York Times*. <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9D03E3DF143EF934A25753C1A9659C8B63>. Retrieved 2010-05-22.
- ↑ Icomos.org (<http://www.international.icomos.org/risk/2004/jordan2004.pdf>) , Heritage at Risk 2004/2005: Petra
- ↑ "Heritage Conservation Grips Jordan's Petra Amid Booming Tourism" (http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2007-11/03/content_7006318.htm) . Xinhua. November 3, 2007. http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2007-11/03/content_7006318.htm.
- ↑ 31,926 tourists visit Petra last month (<http://www.jordanembassyus.org/12152006002.htm>)

References

- Bedal, Leigh-Ann (2004). *The Petra Pool-Complex: A Hellenistic Paradeisos in the Nabataean Capital*. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press. ISBN 1593331207.

- Harty, Rosemary. "The Bedouin Tribes of Petra Photographs: 1986–2003" (<http://www.digitaljournalist.org/issue0607/petra.html>) . <http://www.digitaljournalist.org/issue0607/petra.html>. Retrieved 2008-07-17.
- Hill, John E. (2004). *The Peoples of the West from the Weilue 魏 隗 by Yu Huan 郗 郗 : A Third Century Chinese Account Composed between 239 and 265 CE* (<http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/texts/weilue/weilue.html>) . <http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/texts/weilue/weilue.html>. "Draft annotated English translation where Petra is referred to as the Kingdom of Sifu."
- Reid, Sara Karz (2006). *The Small Temple*. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press. ISBN 1593333390. "Reid explores the nature of the small temple at Petra and concludes it is from the Roman era."
- Nelson Glueck (1959). *Rivers in the Desert*. HUC
- *This article incorporates text from the Encyclopædia Britannica, Eleventh Edition, a publication now in the public domain.*

External links

- [PetraNationalTrust.org](http://petranationaltrust.org/UI/ShowContent.aspx?ContentId=29) (<http://petranationaltrust.org/UI/ShowContent.aspx?ContentId=29>) , Preservation Projects Petra National Trust
- [Smartedaleel.com](http://www.smartedaleel.com/allaboutjordan/interactive-jordan/79-interactive-map-of-petra.html) (<http://www.smartedaleel.com/allaboutjordan/interactive-jordan/79-interactive-map-of-petra.html>) , Interactive map of Old Petra
- [Bib-arch.org](http://www.bib-arch.org/e-features/petra.asp) (<http://www.bib-arch.org/e-features/petra.asp>) , "Solving the Enigma of Petra and the Nabataeans", Biblical Archaeology Review
- [Opencontext.org](http://opencontext.org/projects/A5DDBEA2-B3C8-43F9-8151-33343CBDC857) (<http://opencontext.org/projects/A5DDBEA2-B3C8-43F9-8151-33343CBDC857>) , "Petra Great Temple Excavations (Archaeological Data)", Open Context Publication of Archaeological Data from the 1993-2006 Brown University Excavations at the Great Temple of Petra, Jordan

Retrieved from "<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Petra>"

Categories: Arabic architecture | Archaeological sites in Jordan | Subterranea | Cities along the Silk Road | Former populated places in Southwest Asia | Nabataean sites in Jordan | Petra | Protected areas established in 1985 | Tourism in Jordan | World Heritage Sites in Jordan

- This page was last modified on 8 June 2010 at 23:35.
- Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License; additional terms may apply. See Terms of Use for details.
 - Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization.
- [Privacy policy](#)
- [About Wikipedia](#)
- [Disclaimers](#)