

## Petra: The Ad-Deir Monument and Plateau Project

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Fig. 1. The façade of the Ad-Deir Monument, 2013: width, 46.77m/153ft; height, 48.3m/158ft. (Photo by AMPP/C. Finlayson.)

The Ad-Deir Monument (the “Monastery”) is one of the most aesthetically important and largest late Hellenistic-to Roman-era Nabataean rock-cut façades within the Petra National Archaeological Park of Jordan (Fig. 1). In antiquity, the Nabataeans of Petra surrounded this monument with sophisticated water catchment structures that demonstrate an incredible knowledge of the local topography with relation to the control and exploitation of renewable seasonal flood-water resources. In 2013, the Ad-Deir Monument and Plateau Project (AMPP) was charged by the Jordanian Department of Antiquities and the Petra Park Authority with the task of preserving the Ad-Deir Monument via the archaeological excavation, study, and restoration of the Nabataean structures originally built to preserve the Ad-Deir complex from seasonal erosion (see Jenkins et al. 2016).

All archaeological work in 2020 was cancelled due to COVID-19; however Brigham Young University allowed a small professional staff (without students) to renew work at Ad-Deir in 2021. There were two major foci for this season, which included the completion of the clearances of Eastern Cistern B (Fig. 2) and renewed efforts to continue clearances and restoration of the Great Circle of Ad-Deir, a giant water-catchment facility, 60 m in diameter, that included a massive dam, rock-cut walls and entrance ramp, and a pre-existing Nabataean quarry (Fig. 3).





Fig. 2. Eastern cistern B and the Bedul and Amareen clearance crew at the end of the 2021 season. (Photo by AMPP/C. Finlayson.)

After five seasons of excavation, Eastern Cistern B was completely cleared of all erosion fill in 2021, revealing a finely plastered structure capable of holding up to 500 cubic meters of water when filled to capacity (Fig. 2). The analysis of pottery obtained from this cistern indicated that it was in use from at least the early 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE through the late Nabataean period (post 106 CE). Given the probable rock-cut symposium room above the cistern with an associated cliff inscription mentioning symposia to the deified Nabataean king Obodas (probably Obodas I, c. 96–85 BCE), it was not surprising that the pottery recovered from this cistern did not reflect a preponderance of water-carrying vessels such as amphorae, but rather Nabataean fine dining wares and so-called cooking pots (for the Obodas inscription above Eastern Cistern B, see Zayadine and Farajat 1991). Apparently, after a ritual dinner was held in the rock-cut room above the cistern, the vessels were simply dropped into the water below.

Continued work on the Great Circle was also pushed forward in 2021. Fully one half of the Great Circle is now cleared and studied (Fig. 3). This work has revealed that the Great Circle was damaged in the 31 BCE earthquake mentioned by Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews* 15.2), indicating that it had been built before this time and was subsequently utilized until the annexation of Nabataea by Rome in 106 CE, when Nabataean control of the large-scale water systems of Ad-Deir seem to have been abandoned due to the loss of a centralized government with royal links to the site. Recovered artifact assemblages indicate the intensified usage of the plateau during the reign of Aretas IV and his wars with Judea.



Fig. 3. The Great Circle of Ad-Deir at the beginning of the 2021 excavation season. (Photo by AMPP/C. Finlayson.)

Over 900 ancient coins have been recovered by the AMPP, with 88 percent minted by this king. The inclusion of multiple mint series on Ad-Deir may indicate that Aretas IV stored his coinage here, given the plateau's strategic advantages over the more vulnerable lower city during times of war. Other coins retrieved from both Eastern Cistern B and the Great Circle indicate that the strategic advantages of the Ad-Deir plateau were again utilized during the Byzantine era under Emperor Constantius II during his wars with Persia.

### References

- Jenkins, Carri P. (exec. prod.), Julie Walker (dir., writ., prod.), and Brian K. Wilcox (dir. phot.). 2016. *Journey to Petra: Preserving the Ad-Deir Monument*. Brigham Young University YouTube channel, 28 January 2016. < [youtube.com/watch?v=YfdHueotE20](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YfdHueotE20) >.
- Zayadine, F. and S. Farajat. 1991. "Excavations and Clearance at Petra and Beida," *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 35: 275-311.