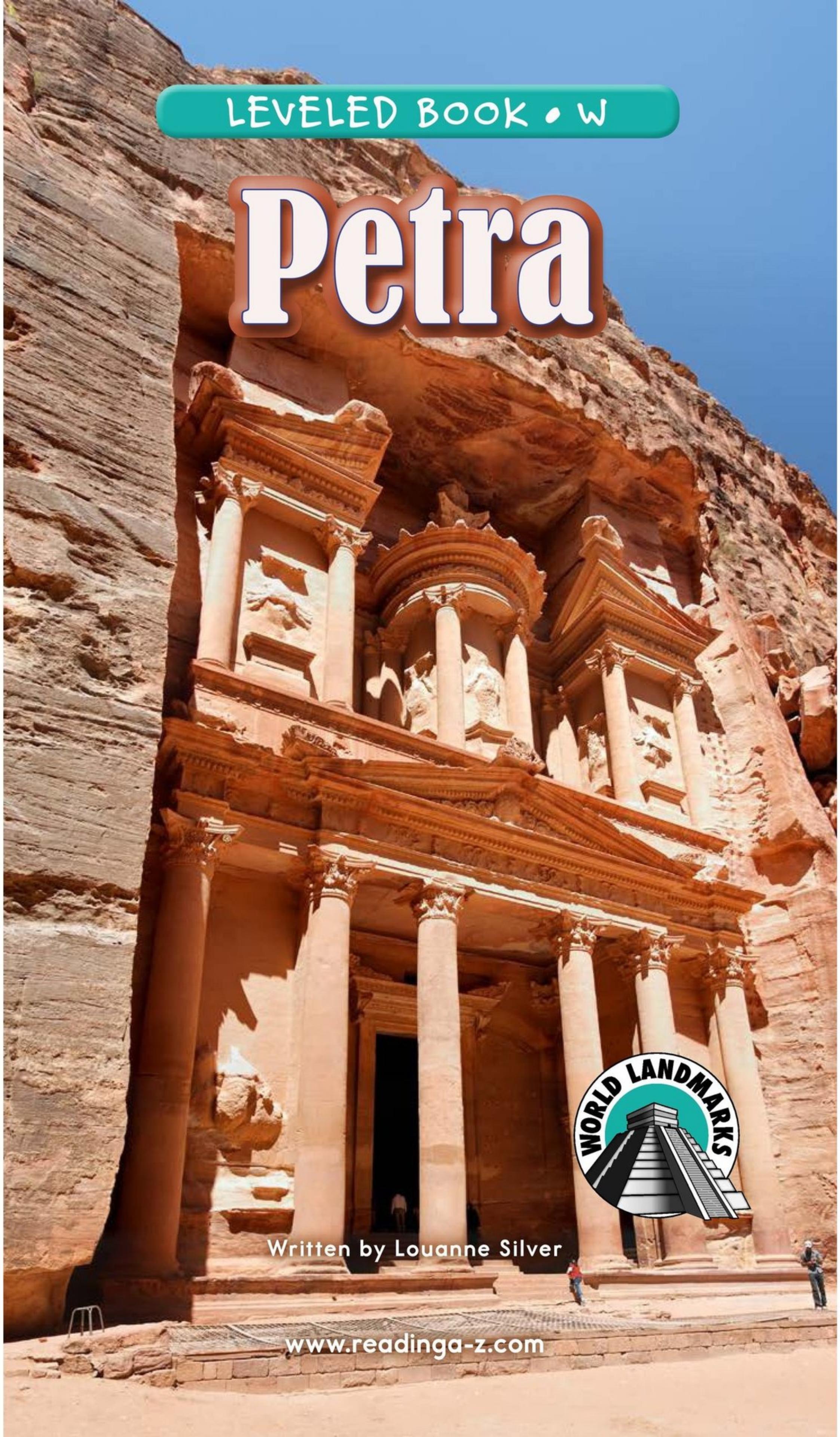


LEVELED Book • W

Petra



Written by Louanne Silver





Petra

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Focus Question

What features of Petra helped it become a thriving city?

Words to Know

antiquities
aqueducts
archaeological
architectural
civic
conservation

decline
facades
nomadic
reservoirs
scaffolding
solstice

Front cover: Elaborate carvings adorn the entrance to the Treasury.

Title page: The steep canyon walls of the Siq form a dramatic entryway into the ancient city.

Page 3: A mosaic from the floor of the ancient Christian church shows a donkey.

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World Landmarks
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The Treasury is the first structure seen by visitors who pass through the Siq.

A Dazzling Adventure

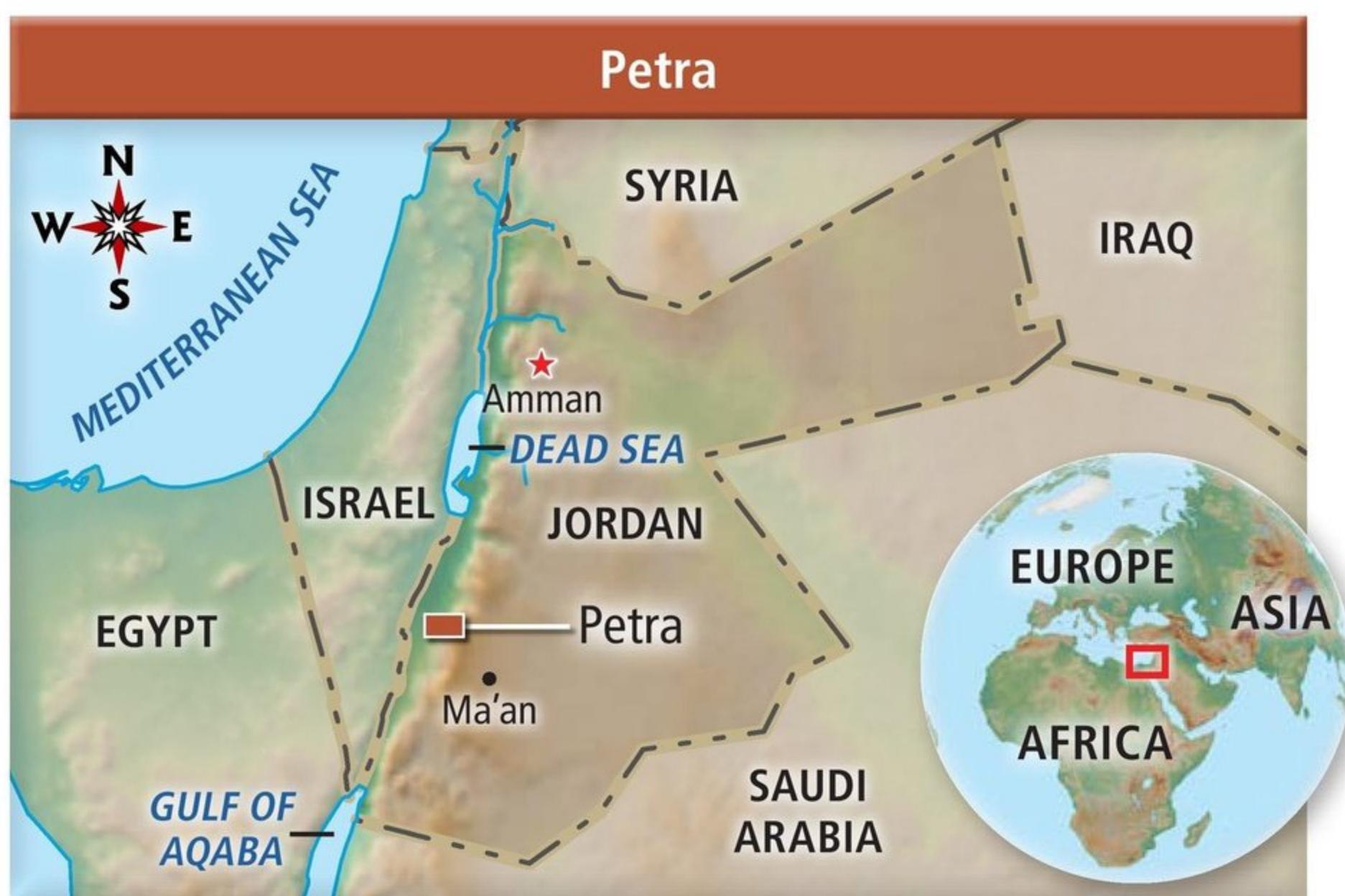
You've agreed to go on an amazing adventure. You and your host fly to a small city in southwestern Jordan, in the Middle East. After your plane lands, you board a bus and travel one and a half hours through an area with stunning red cliffs and canyons. You arrive at a visitor's center and walk a short distance to the entrance to a canyon. This is the Siq (SEEK), a 1.2-kilometer (0.75 mi.) narrow passageway that leads to your destination.

As you walk through the Siq, you're dazzled by the red rock walls up to 80 meters (262 ft.) high. Nearing the end, you get a glimpse of an enormous carved building. Your jaw drops as you gaze at it in wonder. Your host says with an excited grin, "Welcome to Petra!"

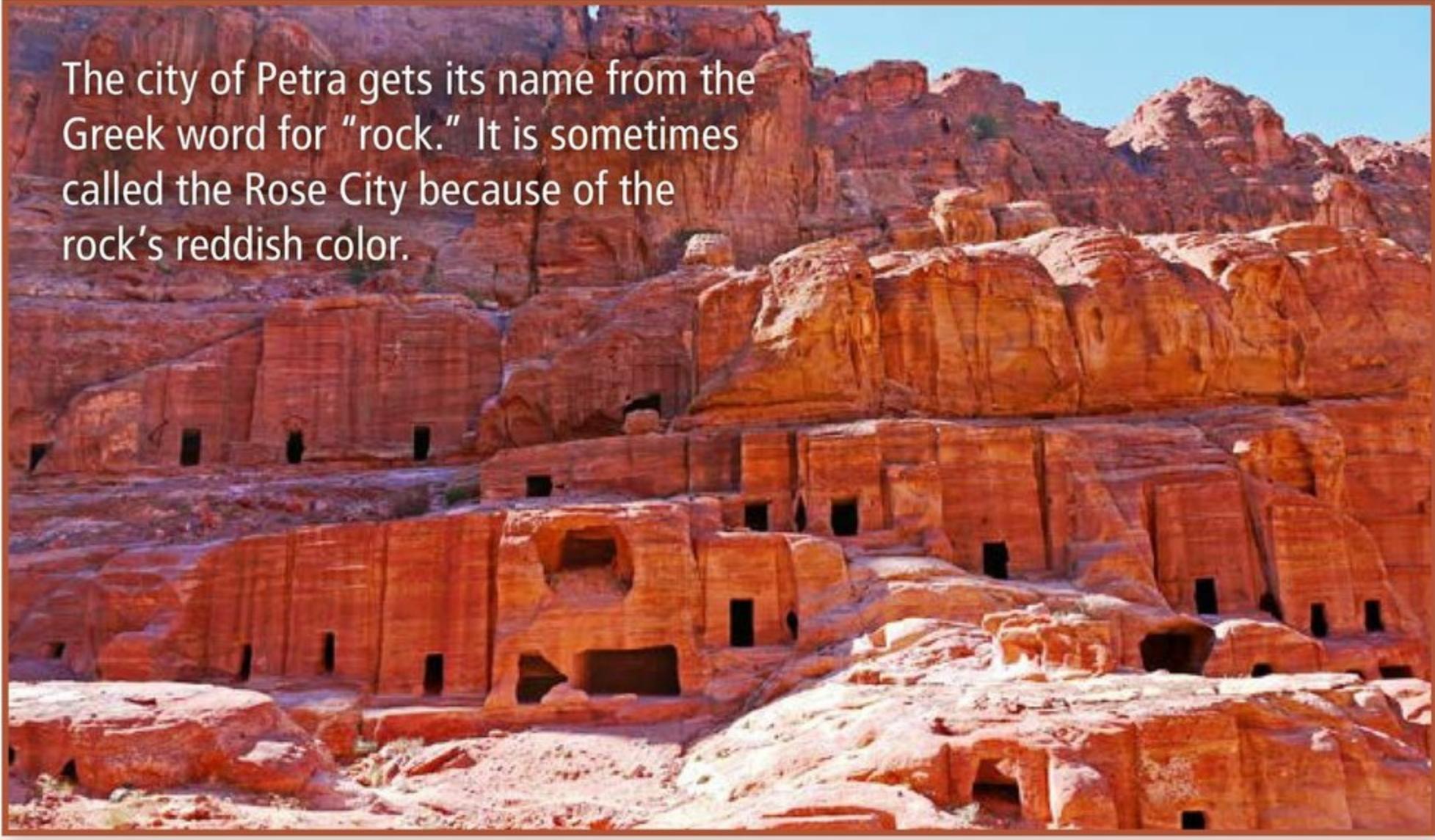
Desert Jewel

Petra is a two-thousand-year-old rock city in a valley between the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba, a northern arm of the Red Sea. The city is about 185 kilometers (115 mi.) southwest of Amman, Jordan's capital. Petra is located on ancient trade routes between the Middle East, Asia, and Africa.

Petra is surrounded by a dramatic landscape of red sandstone in one of Earth's driest deserts. The Siq, which is just 3 meters (9.8 ft.) wide in some places, is the main way to reach the city. The nearest year-round water supply is about 8 kilometers (5 mi.) away. A dry riverbed just north of Petra's center is subject to flash flooding from time to time.



The city of Petra gets its name from the Greek word for "rock." It is sometimes called the Rose City because of the rock's reddish color.



The Rose City

The city of Petra spans 264 square kilometers (102 sq. mi.). The city center measures roughly 6 square kilometers (2.3 sq. mi.). Petra contains some freestanding structures, but it is best known for its hundreds of rock-cut tombs, some of which are decorated with sacred writings. Other structures include **civic** buildings, temples, and houses. Many of Petra's structures are over 30 meters (100 ft.) tall.

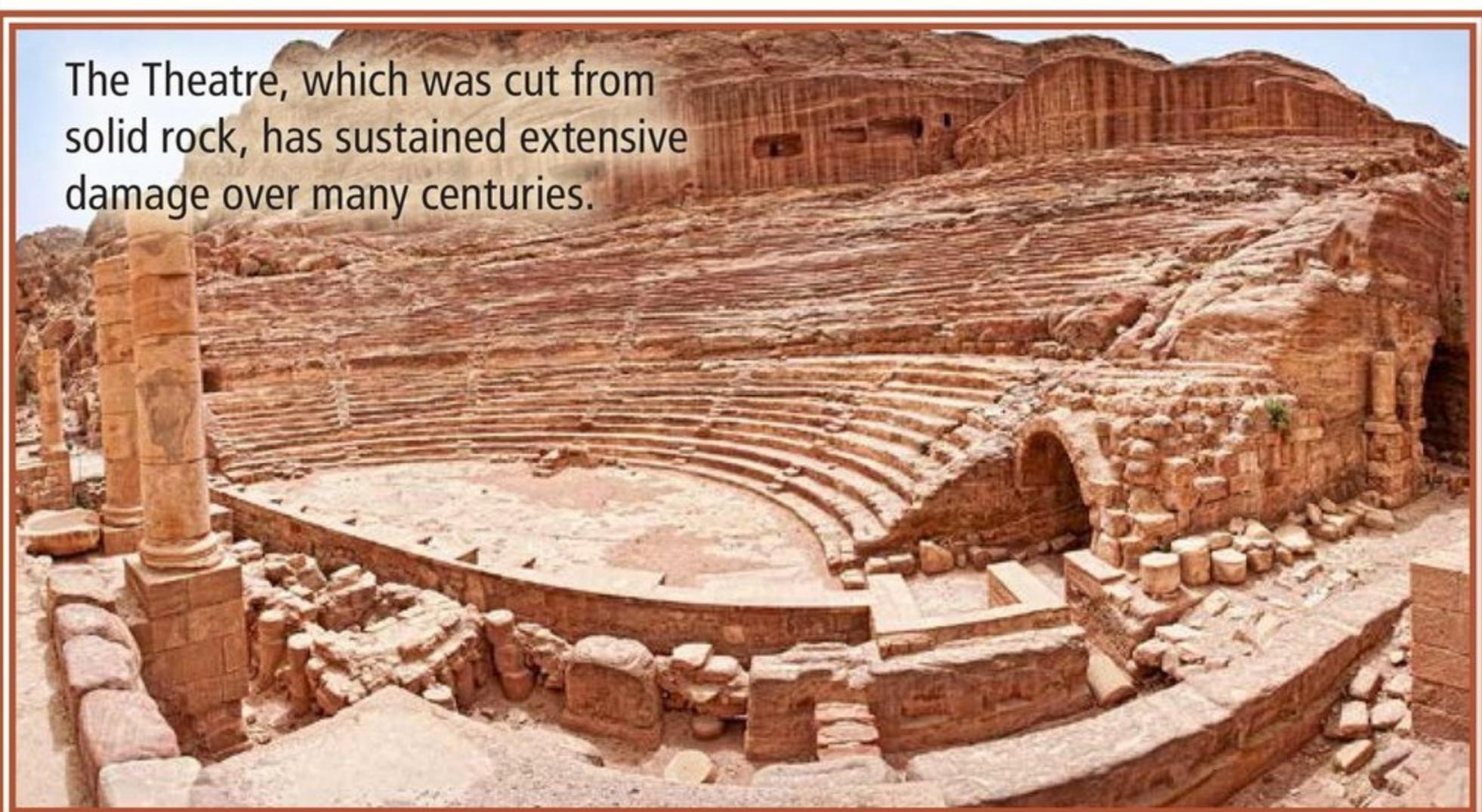
Petra also features a system of water management that was highly advanced for its time. Dams, channels, **aqueducts**, cisterns, **reservoirs**, and a tunnel were used to collect, store, control, and distribute water. These water structures made it possible for Petra's residents to thrive in the desert. At its peak, the city supported at least twenty thousand people.

The Treasury (*al-Khazneh* in Arabic) is Petra's most famous monument and the first one visitors see when entering the city. The Street of Facades, which leads into the city center, is lined by rock-cut tombs. Next, visitors come upon the Theatre, which could hold four thousand people, and the Royal Tombs, where kings were buried.

The Colonnaded Street, which runs through the city center, leads to Petra Museum, which contains more than six hundred artifacts. From the museum, energetic visitors can hike up about eight hundred rock steps to reach the Monastery (*al-Deir*), one of Petra's largest monuments.

In 1993, Petra was protected as an **archaeological park** managed by Jordan's Ministry of Tourism and **Antiquities**. The park includes ancient trade roads surrounding the city.

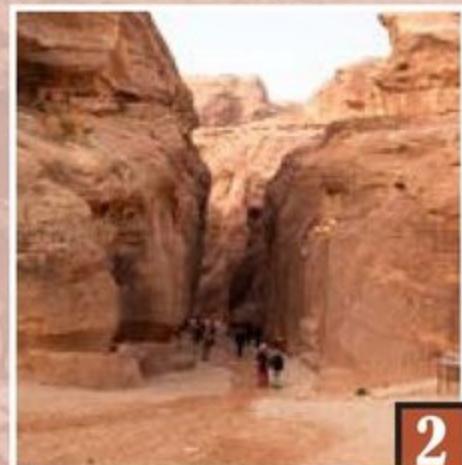
The Theatre, which was cut from solid rock, has sustained extensive damage over many centuries.



A Journey Through Petra



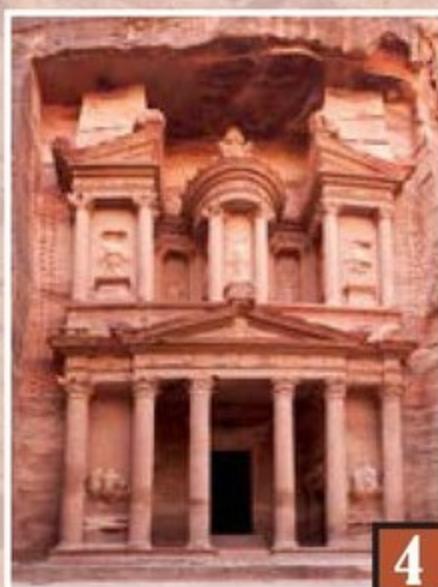
Visitor Centre



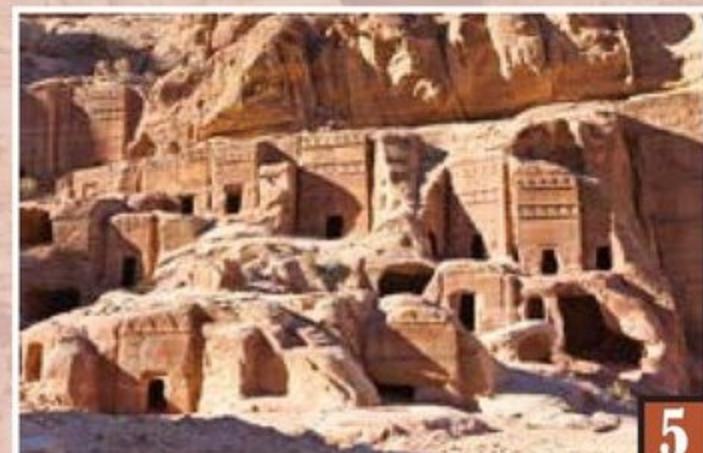
Entrance to the Siq



Path through the Siq



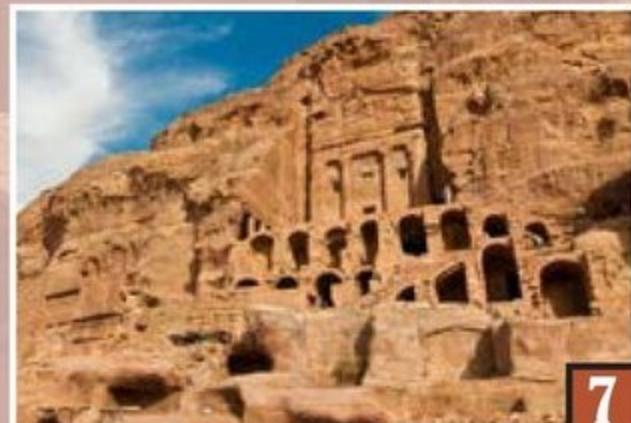
Treasury



Street of Facades



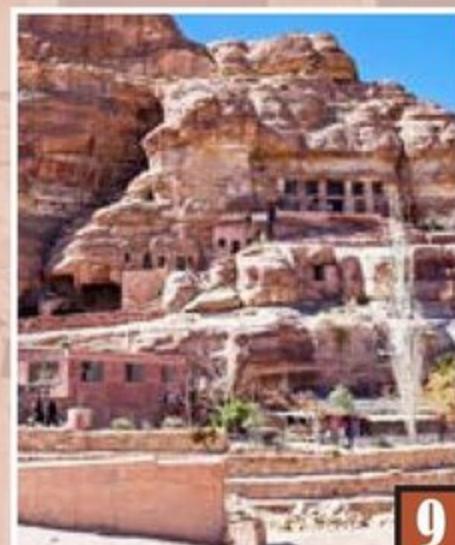
Theatre



Royal Tombs



Colonnaded Street

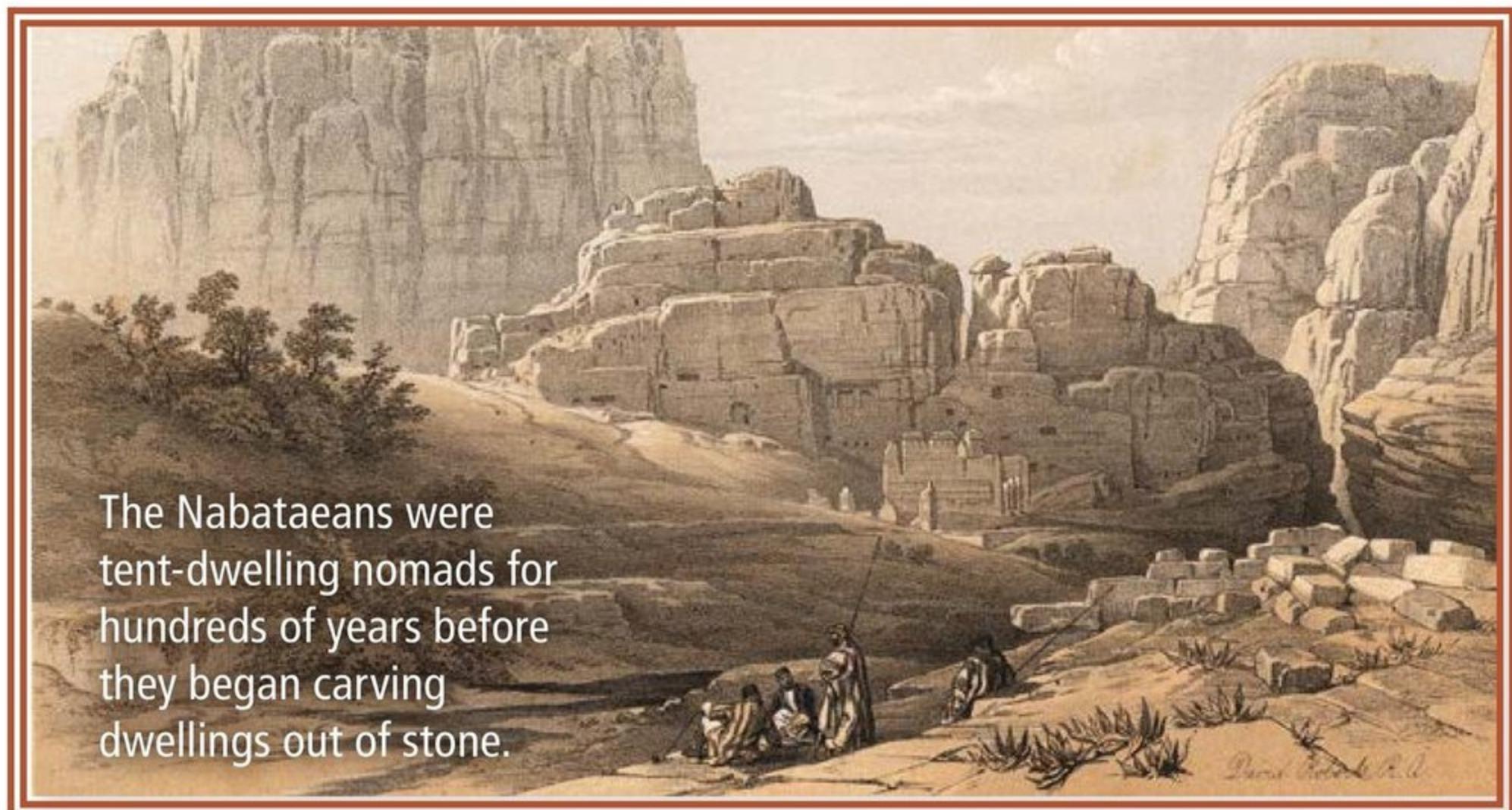


Petra Museum



Monastery

Walking east to west from the Visitor Centre to the Monastery takes about twenty minutes at a normal pace. Most visitors take much longer, though, as they stop to examine each new location.



The Nabataeans were tent-dwelling nomads for hundreds of years before they began carving dwellings out of stone.

A Center of Trade

Petra was founded by the Nabataeans (nab-uh-TEE-uns), **nomadic** Arabian herders of camels, goats, and sheep. Their importance in the ancient world grew during the first millennium BCE. They slowly became successful traders who gained control of trade routes connecting parts of the Middle East with Asia and Africa. The Nabataeans provided water and shelter to traders transporting incense, spices, and silks across the desert. They also charged fees to foreigners for passing through their land.

In time, the Nabataean traders became wealthy, built Petra, and settled down. Petra, their capital city, is thought to have been founded around 300 BCE and flourished starting in the first century BCE. The city became a cultural center as well as a center for people, goods, and money.

While Petra was thriving, the Roman Empire was expanding eastward into the Middle East. Centered in ancient Rome (Italy), the Roman Empire grew over several centuries to include all the lands surrounding the Mediterranean Sea. In 106 CE, the Romans peacefully took control of Petra. Life in Petra continued much as it had earlier. However, Roman rule influenced the city in numerous ways, including **architectural** design and new roads lined with columns. The Romans ruled Petra for three hundred years before moving the center of their trading activity north and changing much of it to water routes. As a result, Petra became less important as a trade center.



The design of the Colonnaded Street shows Roman influence in its use of columns. It has been damaged by floods over the centuries.

In 330 CE, Roman emperor Constantine I, who was a Christian, moved the Roman Empire's capital from Rome to Byzantium (now Istanbul) with the goal of spreading Christianity. Over time, Petra's residents became Christians, and their city reflected the change. Petra Church was built around 450 and remodeled in 500–550.

A huge earthquake in 363 CE damaged much of Petra's water-management system and nearly half the city. That event was likely an important cause of Petra's **decline**. Another large earthquake occurred in 551. Arabs took over the region in the early 600s. Petra's last residents left the city by the end of that century.

After Petra's decline, it was only known to Bedouins, Arab nomads who lived in the area, until the Crusades (1095–1291). During that time, European Christian countries invaded the area to try to take control of Jerusalem and the surrounding land. (In the end, they were unsuccessful.) After the Crusades, Petra was unknown to Europeans until the early nineteenth century. During that time, a Swiss explorer named Johann Ludwig Burckhardt heard about the ancient stone city and set out to find it. His reports of a brief trip there in 1812 paved the way for other outsiders to visit and study Petra.

Building Petra

Petra's structures can be divided into freestanding structures and rock-cut monuments. The freestanding structures were built from the bottom up, while the rock-cut monuments were carved from the top down. This fact is confirmed by the city's unfinished monuments, which are carved only on top.

No one is certain exactly how the Nabataeans carved the rock-cut monuments, which are Petra's most remarkable structures. Scholars assume they didn't use wooden **scaffolding** since few trees grow in the desert around Petra. One theory is that they removed large blocks of sandstone level by level. That would have left huge steps that carvers could stand on as they worked.

A second theory is that strong rods placed into the rock supported a wooden board that carvers stood on while working. After completing a level, they would have placed pins lower in the rock face and then moved the board. Scientists continue to search for clues in hopes of learning more about construction methods at Petra.

In addition to monuments, many stairways, water channels, and other features were also hand-carved into the natural shapes of the area's cliffs and canyons.



The unfinished monuments have played an important role in helping scientists understand carving methods at Petra.

Nabataean architecture is a mix of many different styles. It reflects the region's cultural influences, including those of Mesopotamia, Greece, Rome, India, and Egypt.

Visiting Petra

Petra is Jordan's most popular tourist attraction. Over four hundred thousand visitors made the trip in 2015. Travelers buy tickets at the Visitor Centre and enter through the Siq by horse cart, on foot, or on a horse, donkey, or camel. It's possible to see Petra in two days, but several days are better.

Petra's soft sandstone is vulnerable to wind and water erosion as well as damage from salt carried in on wind from the Red Sea. The city is also threatened by the high number of tourists. Touching, sitting, and walking on structures all cause their surfaces to wear down. In 1985, the Rose City became a UNESCO World Heritage Site, which ensures its protection and **conservation**.



Hundreds of artifacts are on display in Petra Museum, but many others have been lost to thieves over the centuries.



At sunset on the winter solstice, sunlight illuminates the Monastery's central podium.

Sun and Water

Not much is known about the Nabataeans, but two things are certain. First, they worshipped the Sun. We know this because on the winter **solstice** and at certain other times of the year, the Sun shines on or lines up with 80 percent of Petra's main structures.

Second, the Nabataeans were incredibly inventive in bringing water to the desert. More parts of their water-management system are being found all the time. Radar recently located a network of underground water channels. Scientists also found fountains and once-lush gardens. Continuing research will no doubt reveal more about how these ancient people lived—and thrived—in their majestic city of rock.

Glossary

antiquities (<i>n.</i>)	objects or buildings from ancient times (p. 7)
aqueducts (<i>n.</i>)	artificial channels that carry water from one place to another (p. 6)
archaeological (<i>adj.</i>)	of or relating to the study of the remains of ancient cultures (p. 7)
architectural (<i>adj.</i>)	of or relating to the design and construction of buildings (p. 10)
civic (<i>adj.</i>)	of or relating to a city, citizenship, or community activities (p. 6)
conservation (<i>n.</i>)	the protection and preservation of historical or cultural items, structures, or locations (p. 14)
decline (<i>n.</i>)	a steady drop in amount, quality, value, or strength (p. 11)
facades (<i>n.</i>)	the fronts, or faces, of buildings (p. 7)
nomadic (<i>adj.</i>)	moving from place to place without a permanent home (p. 9)
reservoirs (<i>n.</i>)	large tanks or lakes used for collecting and storing water for human consumption or agricultural use (p. 6)
scaffolding (<i>n.</i>)	a system of temporary platforms used to support workers during building, repairing, or decorating a structure (p. 12)
solstice (<i>n.</i>)	either of the two times of the year when the Sun is farthest from the equator (p. 15)

Petra

A Reading A-Z Level W Leveled Book

Word Count: 1,393

Connections

Writing

Research to learn more about what caused Petra's decline. Write an essay outlining the factors and how they impacted the city.

Social Studies

Pretend you are about to lead a group on a tour of Petra. Create a script that you will use as you guide tourists from the Visitor Centre to the Monastery. Include at least one fact about each location.

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