

# Petra

A Reading A-Z Level Z1 Leveled Book  
Word Count: 1,714

LEVELED BOOK • Z<sup>1</sup>

# Petra

## 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

Discuss different UNESCO World Heritage Sites with your class. Choose one to research. Then discuss with your class how the sites compare to Petra.

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Written by Kira Freed

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# Petra

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## Focus Question

What features of Petra helped it become a thriving city?

## Words to Know

antiquities	mosaics
aqueducts	nomads
archaeological	scaffolding
architectural	sedentary
facades	solstice
infrastructure	topography

Front cover: Visitors gather outside the Treasury in the ancient city of Petra, Jordan.

Title page: Visitors wind their way through the steep canyon walls of the Siq.

Page 3: A mosaic from the floor of the ancient Christian church shows a spotted giraffe that resembles a camel. Historians believe the mosaic is meant to be a giraffe but was created by a person who had never seen one.

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## Correlation

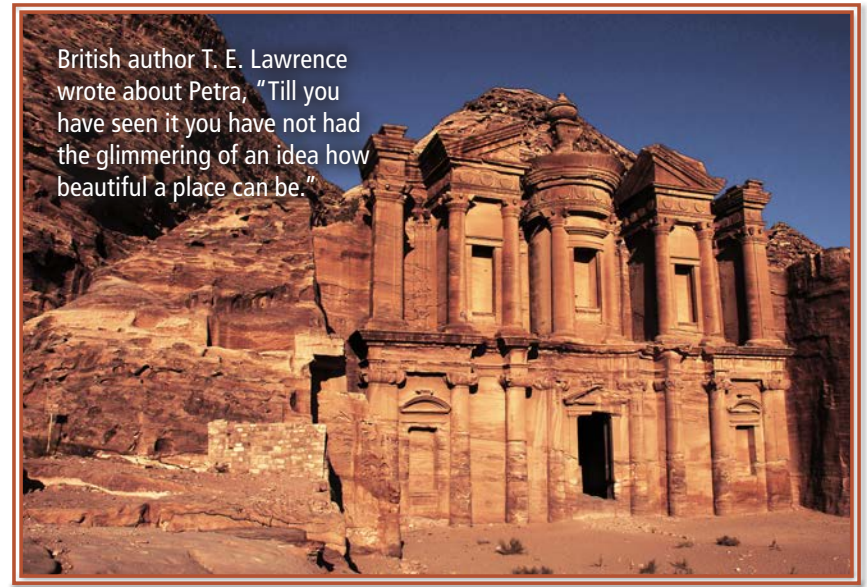
### LEVEL Z1

Fountas & Pinnell	W-X
Reading Recovery	N/A
DRA	60



## Table of Contents

Hidden City .....	4
Desert Treasure .....	5
The Rose City .....	6
A Bustling Trade Center .....	10
Building Petra .....	14
Visiting Petra .....	17
More to Discover .....	19
Glossary .....	20



British author T. E. Lawrence wrote about Petra, "Till you have seen it you have not had the glimmering of an idea how beautiful a place can be."

## Hidden City

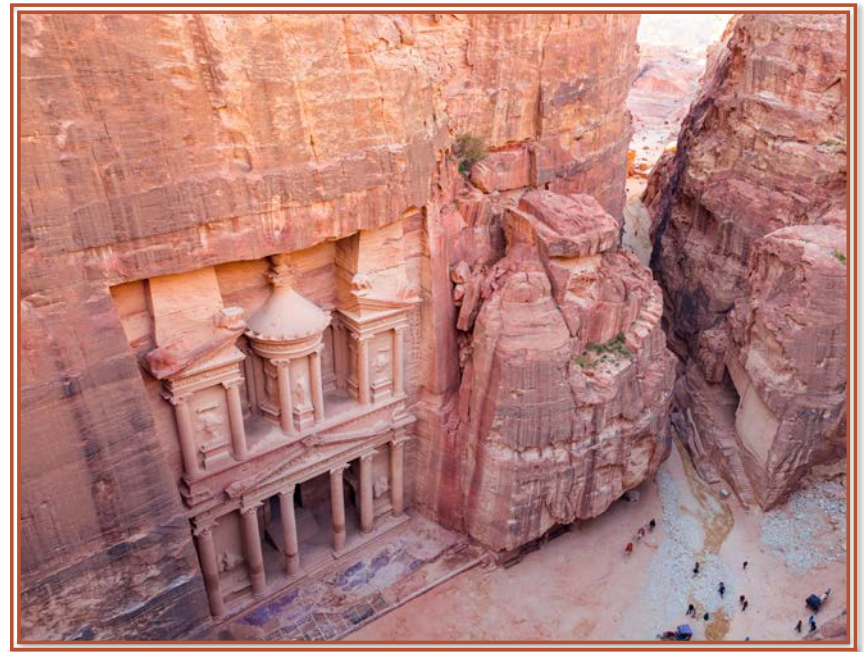
In the early 1800s, Swiss explorer Johann Ludwig Burckhardt became fascinated after hearing about a hidden city in the Middle East. Carved out of red sandstone cliffs streaked with gray and black, the city was in a narrow mountain valley in a remote part of Jordan and was familiar only to the Bedouin, Arab **nomads** who lived in the area. Disguised as an Arab for his own safety, since the area had periodic conflicts with neighbors, Burckhardt arranged to be taken to the mysterious city. He was rewarded for his challenging journey in 1812 after navigating a narrow canyon and entering the secluded valley. Burckhardt became the first European since the Crusades (1095–1291) to gaze upon the striking stone city of Petra.



## Desert Treasure

Petra is in southwestern Jordan, in a valley between the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba, a northern extension of the Red Sea. The ancient city is about 185 kilometers (115 mi.) southwest of Amman, Jordan's capital, on what used to be important trade routes between the Middle East, Asia, and Africa.

Petra is located in one of Earth's driest deserts and is surrounded by dramatic red sandstone cliffs and gorges. The Siq (SEEK), a canyon 1.2 kilometers (0.75 mi.) long and up to 80 meters (262 ft.) high, leads to Petra from the east and is the city's main access. The nearest year-round water supply is Ain Musa ("Moses's Spring"), about 8 kilometers (5 mi.) away. A dry riverbed nearby is subject to occasional flash flooding.



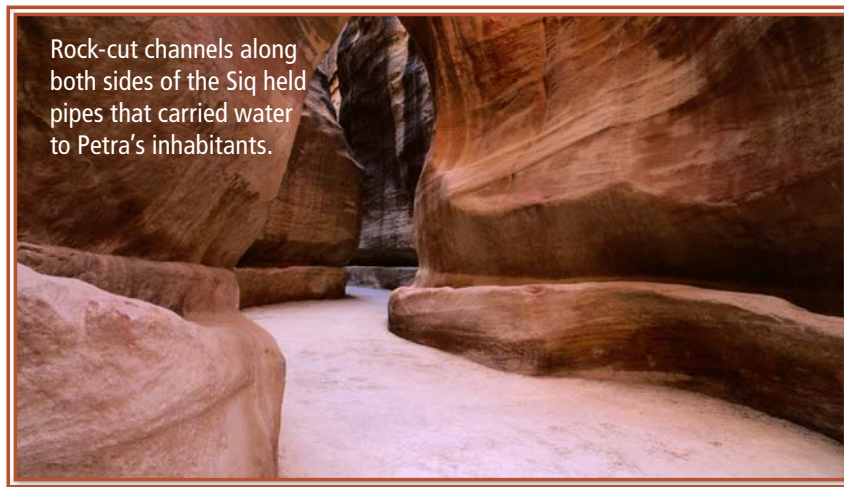
The city of Petra gets its name from the Greek word for "rock." Its nickname—the Rose City—comes from the color of the rock.

## The Rose City

Petra spans 264 square kilometers (102 sq. mi.). The city center along the Colonnaded Street measures approximately 6 square kilometers (2.3 sq. mi.). Although the stone city is mainly carved out of sandstone cliffs, some construction was also involved. Among Petra's features are hundreds of tombs, many adorned with sacred writings, as well as civic buildings associated with the city's former function as an influential trade center. Many of Petra's structures, which also include temples, monuments, altars, and houses, are over 30 meters (100 ft.) tall.

Another significant aspect of Petra's **infrastructure** is an extensive system of water management. The city's dams, channels, **aqueducts**, cisterns, reservoirs, and tunnels are all evidence of highly advanced technology for the time for collecting, storing, controlling, and distributing water. The water-management system, which included a dam at the beginning of the Siq to keep floodwaters from flowing through the canyon and reaching Petra, allowed Petra's inhabitants to thrive in a barren area. The technology is particularly impressive because the city supported at least twenty thousand people at its peak.

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



The most notable structures in Petra's city center include the following:

- The Treasury (*al-Khazneh* in Arabic) is Petra's most famous monument and the first one visitors see when they emerge from the Siq.



- The Street of **Facades**, which leads into the city center, is lined by tall tombs with large facades as well as some smaller tombs.
- The Theatre, which was cut from solid rock, has sustained extensive damage.
- The Royal Tombs, some of which are very ornate, are where kings were buried.
- The Colonnaded Street runs through the center of the city.
- Petra Museum, founded in 1994, contains more than six hundred artifacts that trace Petra's history from various eras.
- The Monastery (*al-Deir*) is among Petra's largest monuments.



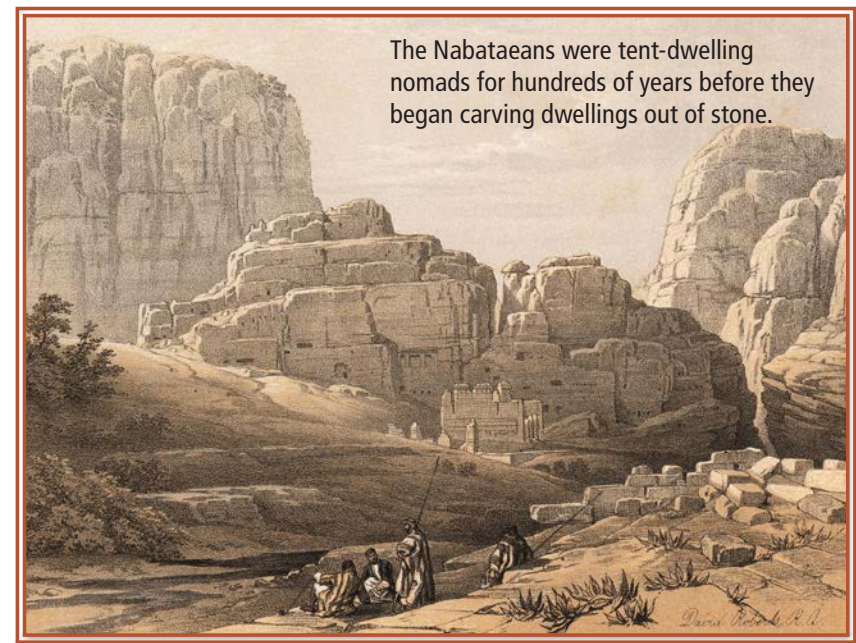
## A Journey Through Petra



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.

## A Bustling Trade Center

The Petra area has been occupied since at least 7000 BCE. The rock city was founded by the Nabataeans (nab-uh-TEE-uns), a nomadic Arabian tribe of camel, goat, and sheep herders whose stature in the ancient world grew during the first millennium BCE. They slowly became successful traders who gained control of trade routes that linked various parts of the Middle East with Asia and Africa. Trading included incense from Arabia, spices from India, and silks from China. The Nabataeans provided water and shelter to traders transporting goods across the desert and charged tolls to foreigners.





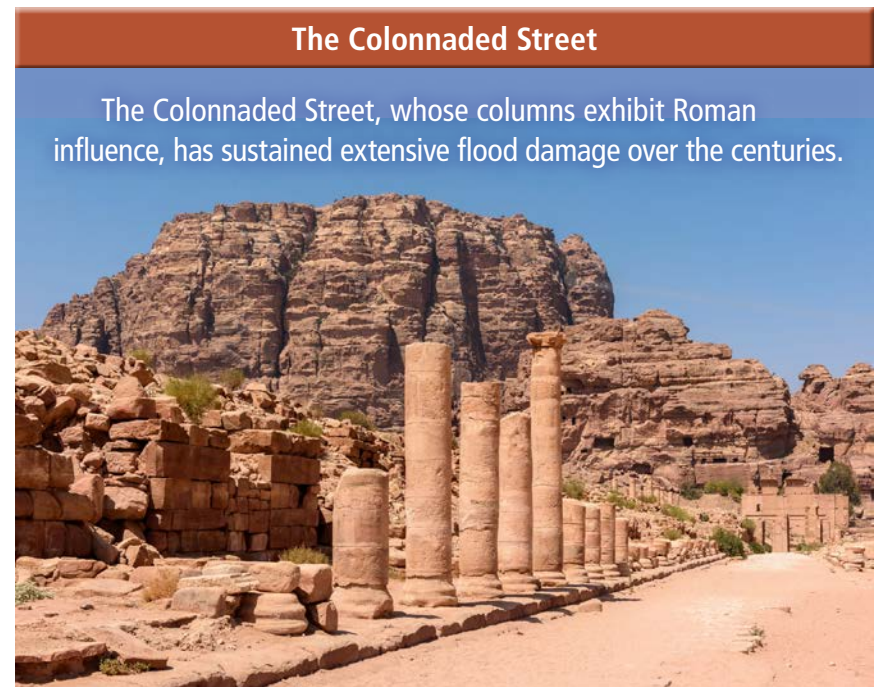


Over time, the Nabataean traders grew wealthy, built Petra, and settled down, although no one knows why they abandoned their nomadic lifestyle and became **sedentary**. Petra, their capital city, which they called Raqmu, is thought to have been founded around 300 BCE and flourished starting in the first century BCE. In addition to becoming a hub for people, goods, and money, the city also became a cultural center. At its peak, the Nabataean empire grew to include parts of modern-day Jordan, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Israel.

Not much is known about the Nabataeans apart from the fact that they worshipped the Sun. On the winter **solstice** and at certain other times of the year, the Sun illuminates or aligns with 80 percent of Petra's main structures.

While Petra was thriving, the Roman Empire was expanding eastward into the Middle East. In 106 CE, the Romans peacefully took control of Petra. Evidence suggests that life in Petra continued much as it had previously. 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 focus of their trading north and converting much of it to water routes. Those changes caused Petra to become less important as a trade center.





The mosaics on the floor of the church depict many kinds of animals as well as figures representing the seasons, ocean, Earth, and wisdom.

In 330 CE, Roman emperor Constantine I, a Christian, moved the Roman Empire's capital from Rome to Byzantium (later Constantinople, now Istanbul) with the goal of spreading Christianity. Petra's inhabitants slowly adopted Christianity, and the change was reflected in their city. Petra Church was built around 450 and remodeled in 500–550, and large **mosaics** were installed. During that time, some tombs were converted to churches.

An enormous earthquake in 363 CE damaged much of Petra's water-management system as well as nearly half the city. The earthquake was likely a significant cause of Petra's decline. Another large earthquake occurred in 551. Arabs took over the region in the early 600s. By the end of that century, Petra's last residents had left the city.

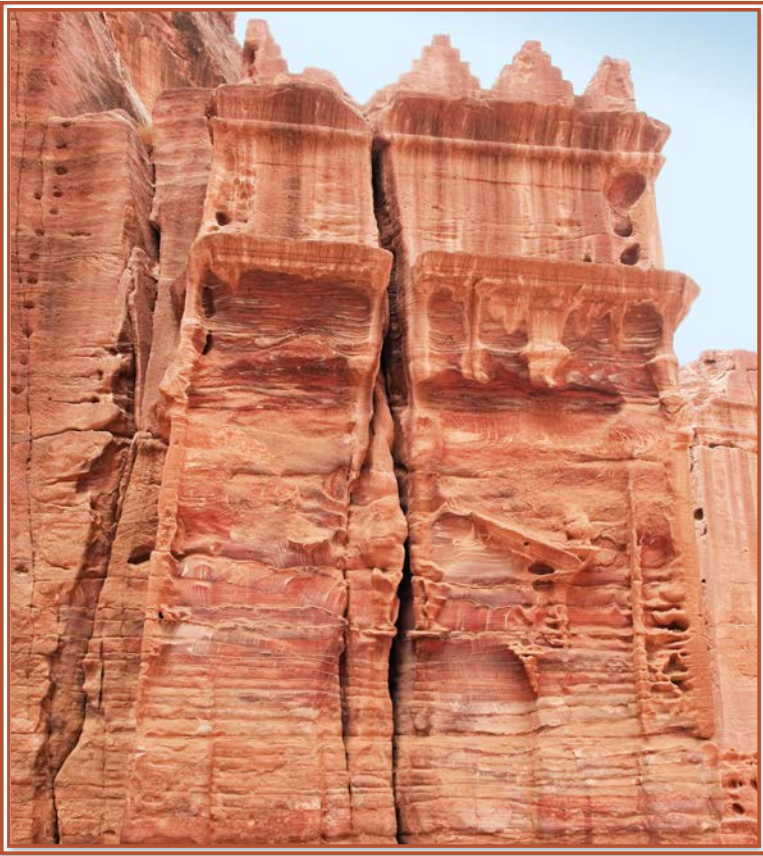
## Building Petra

Petra's structures can be divided into two main types: freestanding structures and rock-cut monuments. Each type had its own set of construction challenges, but the rock-cut monuments, which were carved into Petra's cliffs, no doubt presented the greater challenge and yielded by far the more impressive results. These architectural masterpieces were remarkable not only for their sheer size—the towering Monastery is 45 meters (148 ft.) tall—but also for their striking beauty and elaborate designs.

Freestanding structures were constructed from the bottom up, while the opposite was true of rock-cut monuments. The top-down approach to carving monuments is confirmed by the city's unfinished monuments, which are carved only on top.

Because of Petra's **topography** and geology, sandstone was the only abundant raw material for constructing buildings. No one is certain exactly how the Nabataeans carved the rock-cut monuments, although the shortage of trees in the area rules out the possibility of a plentiful supply of wood for **scaffolding**.



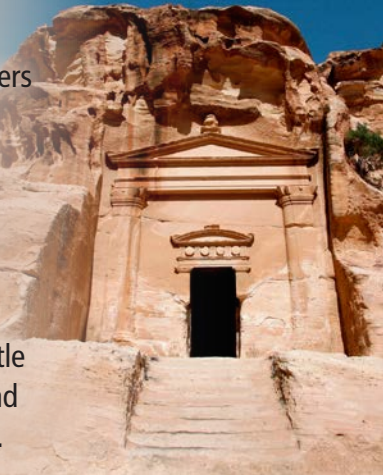


The unfinished monuments have played an important role in helping scientists understand carving methods at Petra.

One theory is that they removed large blocks of sandstone one level at a time, leaving a huge step and providing rock for constructing the freestanding structures. Carvers presumably would have used the rock step as a platform on which to stand as they worked on the highest level. Once that level was completed, removing another layer of raw material would have given carvers access to a lower level.

## Little Petra

Little Petra is a smaller archaeological site located 8 kilometers (5 mi.) north of Petra. Like Petra, it can only be entered by traveling through a narrow canyon and was created by Nabataeans who carved the buildings directly into the sandstone rocks. Many historians believe ancient traders stayed in Little Petra when they visited its larger and more famous neighbor to the south.



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

Tools used by the Nabataeans included picks, chisels, mallets, and hammers. The use of claw chisels, which have teeth, could explain the coarse diagonal lines that are visible in many places in Petra's stonework.

Many stairways, water channels, and other features were also hand-carved into the natural shapes of the area's cliffs and canyons.

## Visiting Petra

Petra is Jordan's most popular tourist attraction. Over four hundred thousand visitors made the trip in 2015. The Rose City gained a great deal of publicity in 2007 when it was recognized as one of the New Seven Wonders of the World. Petra was also included on *Smithsonian* magazine's 2008 list of "28 Places to See Before You Die."

Travelers buy tickets at the Visitor Centre and enter through the Siq by horse cart, on foot, or on a horse, donkey, or camel, as no motorized vehicles are allowed in the ancient city. People mainly explore Petra on their own, starting with the Treasury and moving on to tombs, the museum, and other sights.



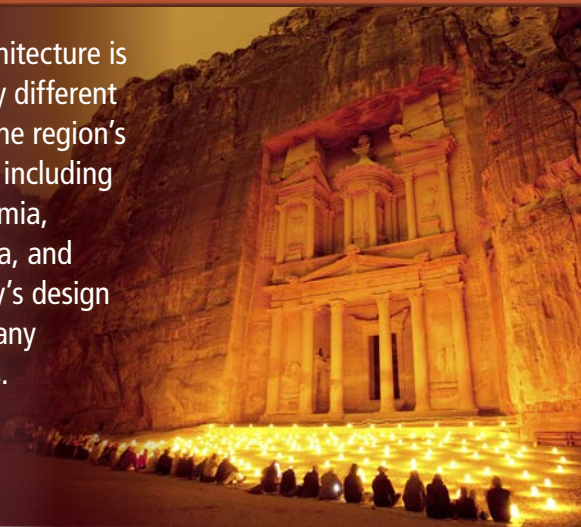
Hundreds of artifacts are on display in Petra Museum, but many others have been lost to thieves over the centuries.

It's possible to see Petra in two days, but locals say five days are ideal. They advise tourists to be prepared to walk a lot, wear sturdy shoes, and bring sunblock, sunglasses, a hat, and a camera. Water is another necessity, as the desert can get extremely hot in summer.

Petra is vulnerable to wind and water erosion as well as weathering caused by salt carried by wind from the Red Sea. The salt can enter small pores in the stone and then crystallize, causing damage. Tourists wear down surfaces by touching, sitting, and walking on structures. In 1985, the Rose City was awarded the status of a UNESCO World Heritage Site, which ensures its protection and conservation.

## Petra's Architecture

Nabataean architecture is a synthesis of many different styles that reflect the region's cultural influences, including those of Mesopotamia, Greece, Rome, India, and Egypt. The Treasury's design elements reflect many different influences.

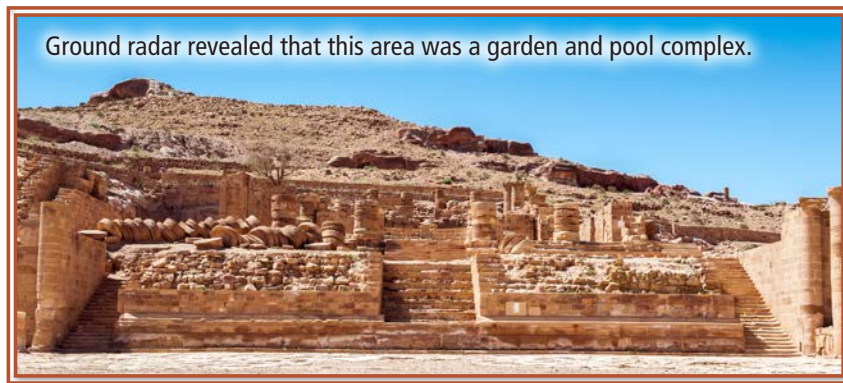




## More to Discover

Petra is among the world's greatest archaeological sites. Researchers estimate that at least 90 percent of Petra has not yet been excavated. New discoveries are being made all the time, many thanks to state-of-the-art technology. Satellite imagery and photos taken by aerial drones recently helped archaeologists find a huge open platform likely used for public or other ceremonies, and ground-penetrating radar located a network of water channels under the Great Temple's courtyard. Other recent discoveries have included fountains and once-lush gardens.

More than two thousand years after the Rose City was carved out of solid rock, Petra's construction and use continue to capture the imagination and curiosity of people around the world. This remarkable ancient city still holds many secrets about how the Nabataeans transformed a barren desert into a magnificent urban oasis.



Ground radar revealed that this area was a garden and pool complex.

## Glossary

<b>antiquities</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	objects or buildings from ancient times (p. 7)
<b>aqueducts</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	artificial channels that carry water from one place to another (p. 7)
<b>archaeological</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	of or relating to the study of the remains of ancient cultures (p. 7)
<b>architectural</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	of or relating to the design and construction of buildings (p. 12)
<b>facades</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the fronts, or faces, of buildings (p. 8)
<b>infrastructure</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the system of public structures and facilities that a region depends on to function, such as roads and utilities (p. 7)
<b>mosaics</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	pictures made from tiny colored bits such as paper, tile, or beads (p. 13)
<b>nomads</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	people who move from place to place with no permanent homes (p. 4)
<b>scaffolding</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a system of temporary platforms used to support workers during building, repairing, or decorating a structure (p. 14)
<b>sedentary</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	staying or settling permanently in one area; not migratory (p. 11)
<b>solstice</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	either of the two times of the year when the Sun is farthest from the equator (p. 11)
<b>topography</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the surface, shape, and features of a land area (p. 14)