

PRELIMINARY REPORT OF THE 1981 PETRA EXCAVATIONS

by
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Introduction

The 1981 Petra Excavations were carried out at el-Katuteh area (Fig. 1), south-east of Qasr el-Bint and at the foot of Umm el-Bayyarah, by the University of Jordan with the cooperation of the Department of Antiquities under the direction of the author. Excavations began on 4 May and ended on 5 July 1981.

The aims of the excavations were the following:

(a) To obtain, as far as possible, clearly stratified data in order to establish the sequence of the site's different habitations and to correlate the different phases in the three opened areas; (b) to collect information related to the Nabataean progress in the field of hydrology; and, (c) to assemble an idea of the Nabataeans' ordinary houses and social life. Therefore, the excavation site selected was far from visible temples, except for some remains of one or two coarses above the top soil and a few scattered ashlar blocks of different sizes.

Three areas were opened (B, C, D) and one area (A) left for future investigation (Fig. 2).

Area B

Nineteen squares were opened in area B (Fig. 2). They varied in depth from 0.25 to 1.10 m. above a paved terrace. Each square consisted of six to eight different loci, except for squares 14 and 16 which consisted of twenty-two and eighteen loci respectively.

The terrace pavement is in good condition except for some destroyed patches. This terrace is in the same orientation as Qasr el-Bint and is almost square (15.00 x 15.00 m.). The slabs used for paving the terrace are comparatively thin (0.04-0.11

m. in thickness) and well-dressed with smooth surfaces. They were carefully arranged over a foundation which consists of irregular slab fragments.

The paved terrace is supported by a podium which includes a net of channels. Three channels were found: Channel A is the largest, and runs along the same orientation as the paved terrace (Fig. 3). This channel was investigated in its northern part. Unfortunately, unstratified deposits were found in channel A which consists merely of rubble mixed with silt and accompanied by very few unpainted Nabataean pottery sherds. The real depth of this channel is not obvious; the observable depth is about 3.20 m. in the northern part and about 1.50 m. in the southern part. This channel has uneven natural sandstone sides, and its width varies from 0.90 m. in the upper part to about 2.20 m. below. A defined groove specially cut, on each side of the upper part of this channel, served to support a vaulted roof which would have run the whole length of the channel. The vault diameter is 0.90 m., which includes a keystone surrounded by three coarses on either side.

Channel B is located at the east side of channel A and is connected at a right angle (Fig. 3). This channel is smaller in size than channel A. No investigation has been made in this channel. The present depth from the upper surface of the accumulated deposit to the upper level of the pavement is about 2.20 m. This channel has uneven natural sandstone sides varying in width from 0.80 m. in the upper part to about 1.80 m. below. The channel is covered in a manner similar to channel A; the diameter of the vault is 0.90 m. but consists of eight coarses separated in the middle by a thin keystone. The vault is carried by a defined ridge cut specially on each side of the upper part of the channel. A Byzantine

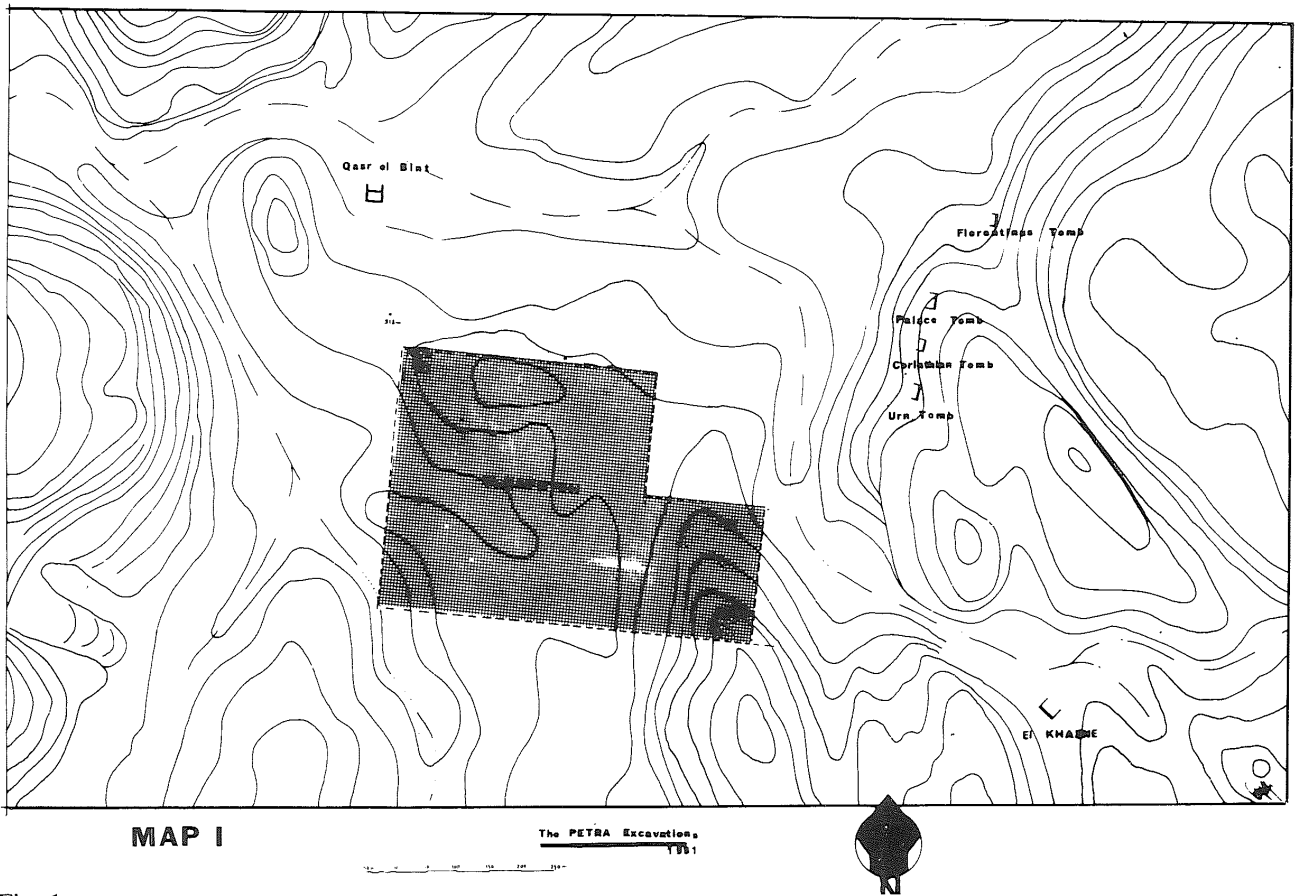


Fig. 1

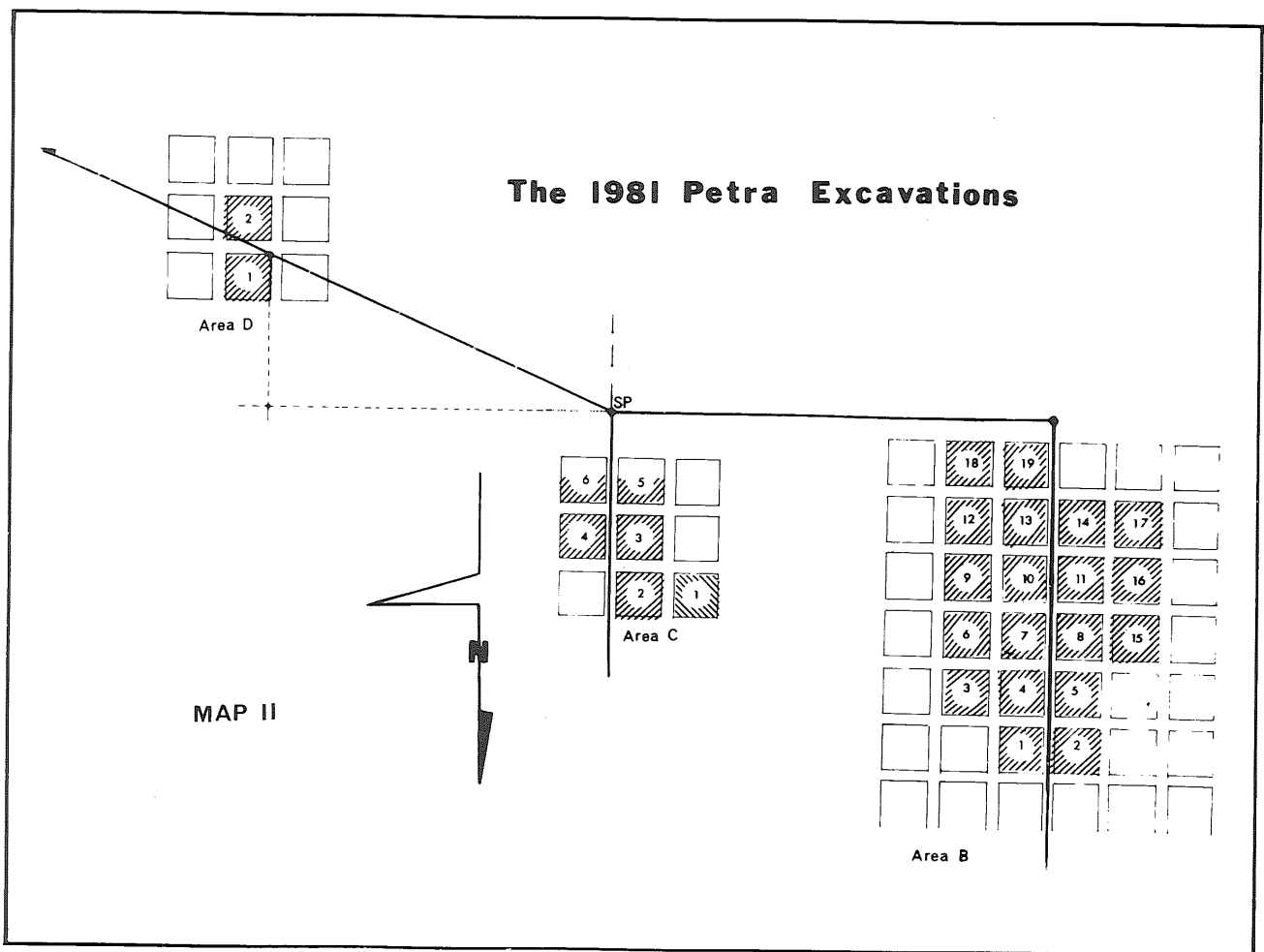


Fig. 2

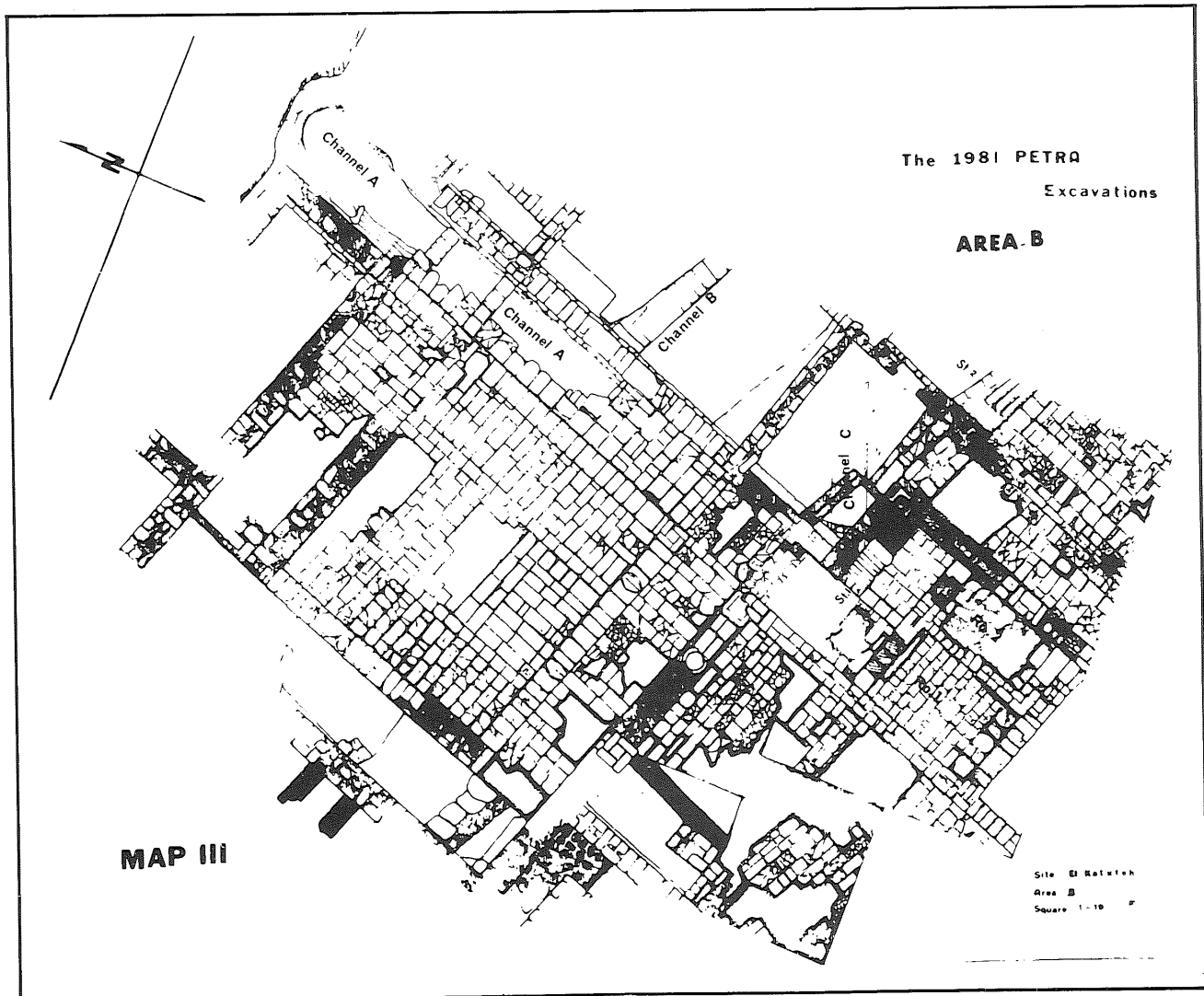


Fig. 3

follis of Justinian I (527-565 A.D.) and seven column drums, all in good condition, were found in the channel. The diameter of the drums is uniformly 0.64 m. No solid explanation can be found for the occurrence of such scattered drums in channel B, but it seems likely that they were merely hidden for later use. This probably happened just during or after the second and the third quarters of the sixth century A.D. which represents Phase V. During this period some architectural activities occurred in this area. Many Nabataean drums and ashlar blocks of different sizes were re-used in building walls and partitions above the paved terrace.

Channel C is a channel with vertical sides, located east of channel A and is connected at an angle of about 45 degrees (Fig. 3). The internal surfaces of this channel are covered with notches made using a mallet and chisel. The excavated length of the channel is about 2.5 m. The

height is about 1.00-1.10 m. only. The width is regular at about 1.15 m. There are no similar ridges to those occurring in channels A and B to carry a vault. Most probably this channel was covered with large and thick regular sandstone slabs.

The process of sealing the top of channels A and B was as follows: the top of the vaults was covered with a layer of rubble about 0.35 m. in thickness. Next, the mason laid down irregular slab fragments above the rubble which functioned as the foundation for the regular pavement. Finally, the surface was sealed with thin regular slabs of different sizes and with a thickness varying from 0.04-.07 m. The thickness from the inner edge of the vault to the top of the regular pavement is about 0.90 m.

Regarding the function of the three channels, and whether they had been used as subterranean chambers for storing goods or merely represent reservoirs, one

may offer the following:

- (a) The occurrence of open basins cut in the top rock. A good example can be seen at the east side of channel A. This basin's dimensions are 1.00 x 2.22 m. with a draining spout of 0.06 m. in diameter at the southwest corner of the basin. This spout connects the basin with channel B.
- (b) A small channel (0.35 x 1.20 m.) was found at the bottom of the southwest corner of the large paved terrace. It is most probable that this channel intended to distribute the collected water in channels A, B and C to some parts of Petra. This channel is covered with four large irregular sandstone slabs, about 0.14 m. thick.
- (c) The three channels are comparatively narrow, partially filled with accumulated rubble and a thick layer of silt.
- (d) No natural light and air would seem to be available to these channels. Therefore, the second proposal seems to be more acceptable.

An architectural complex adjacent to the southern side of the paved terrace (Fig. 3) was partially discovered during the 1981 Petra excavations. It consists of the following:

- (a) Room 1 which is rectangular (2.50 x 4.50 m.) and has two doors; the first is to the north, 1.35 m. wide. It has well dressed jambs which open outward. The second door is to the south, opposite the first one, 1.70 m. wide with jambs opening inward. The floor is regularly paved with thin sandstone slabs. The level of the floor is lower than the terrace pavement by about 0.25 m. The surrounding walls stand about 1.40 m. high and mainly consist of six courses built from well dressed sandstone blocks of irregular sizes. The majority of these blocks are dressed with diagonal groovings, enclosed by a 0.02 m. smoothed margin.

- (b) Room 2 (1.95 x 3.50 m.) is located to the east of Room 1, but with no connecting access. It has one entrance, 1.15 m. wide, in the north wall. The jambs of this door are carefully dressed and open inward. The floor pavement of this room is in bad condition and is almost destroyed. The walls' thickness is almost the same, 0.70 m.

Two staircases connect the paved ter-

race with another level (1.30 m. high) of pavement which is located to the east of the architectural complex:

- (a) Staircase 1 is in good condition (Fig. 3) and consists of six steps. The width of the staircase is 1.20 m. The height of the steps varies from 0.20 to 0.28 m. and the width is about 0.19 to 0.20 m. only.

- (b) Staircase 2 is located in the southeast corner of the excavated area (Fig. 3). This staircase is wider (1.60 m.), but is damaged except for two-thirds of the second step which is still *in situ*.

The remains of the base foundation, column base and square plinth are *in situ* and in the same alignment. They are located between the paved terrace and the adjacent architectural complex. They probably represent the main entrance for the paved terrace. The base foundation represents the west corner of the entrance and consists of four rectangular well-dressed sandstone blocks (0.27 x 0.65 m.) surrounding a square stone (0.35 x 0.35 m.) The second bearing is a column base which was intended to receive a column of 0.64 m. in diameter. The third bearing is a square plinth (0.90 m. x 0.90 m.) and the fourth bearing does not occur in its proper place. The distances between the mentioned bearings from east to west are 1.40 m. and 3.60 m. respectively.

It is probable that the paved terrace represents a *temenos* enclosure and that the adjacent architectural complex was intended for the service of the enclosure.

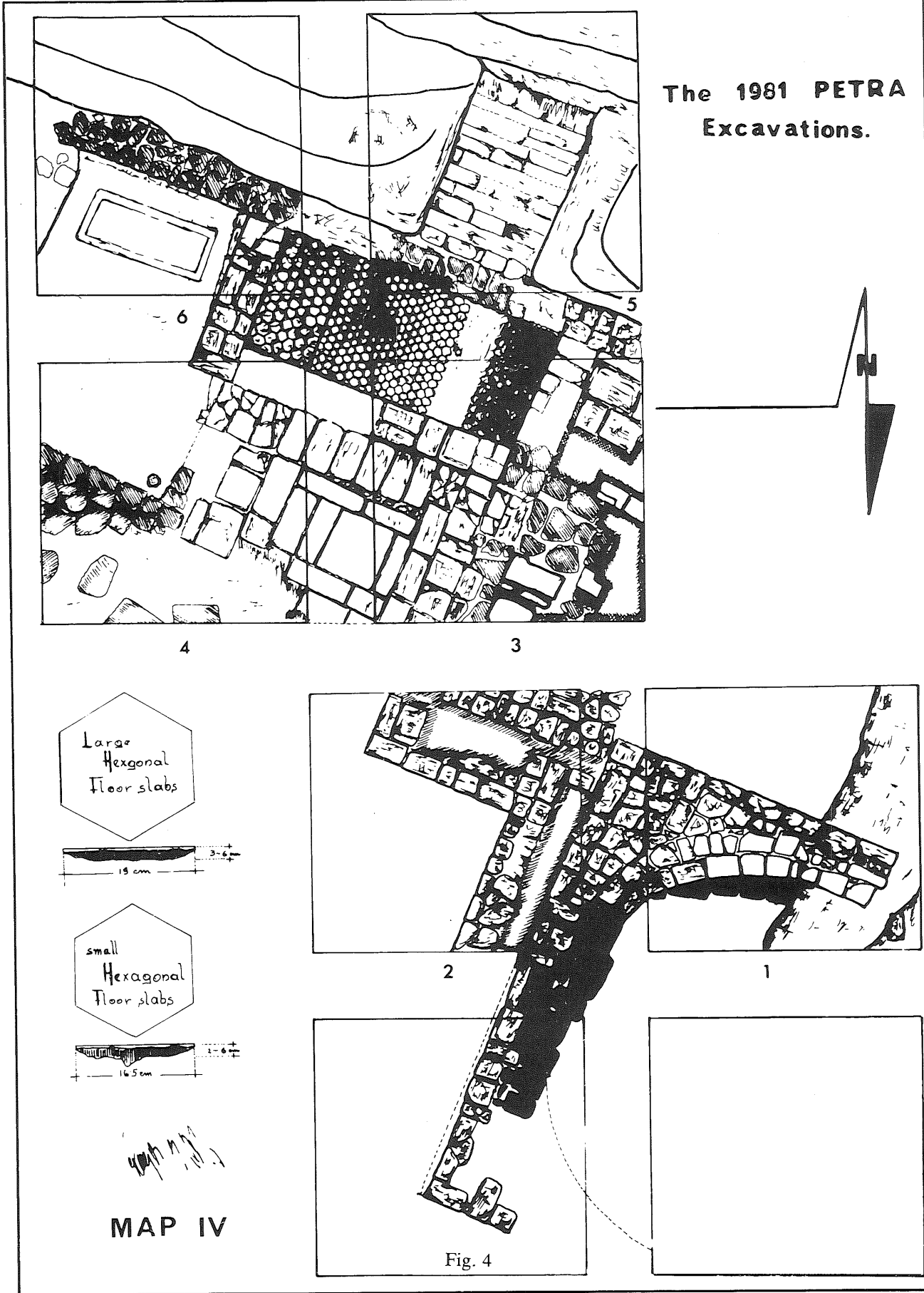
The earliest dating evidence is a Nabataean coin of Aretas IV and his second wife Shaqilat II (A.D. 18-40). This coin was found in the foundation trench of the west wall of the podium which carries the paved terrace described above.

Area C

Six squares were opened (Figs. 2, 4). The most interesting and prominent architectural finds in this area are the apse in squares 1 and 2, and the paved area with the small hexagonal slabs in squares 3-6:

1. The apse: Squares 1 and 2 in area C revealed an apse of a church (Fig. 4) which is related to Phase V. The diameter of this

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MAP IV

Fig. 4

apse is 6.00 m., with a north-west orientation. An interesting architectural feature should be noted in the ashlar blocks of the apse. Each stone was formerly a quarter of

a Nabataean capital which was decorated with floral motifs. The apse consists now of only two coarses. The lower coarse has ten quarters of Nabataean capitals (0.38 x 0.38

m.) and the three quarters in the upper coarse are of the same dimensions. Decoration on the rounded sides of the quarters was faced by the stone mason and the plain flattened surfaces are external. One might think that the mason intended to hide the beautiful decorative elements in order to conceal any evidence of an earlier pagan worship which would be in conflict with Christian belief. One Byzantine coin of the tenth year of the reign of Justin II (A.D. 574) and two Byzantine lamp sherds were found in the foundation trench of the apse. The apse corresponds to loci 1-3 in areas B and D which are assigned to Phase V.

2. A paved area with small hexagonal slabs was discovered in squares 3-6. This beautiful pavement belongs to Phase Ia, Locus 24, which is dated by a coin of Aretas IV before his appearance with his second wife Shaqilat II (9 B.C.-A.D. 18). The length of this pavement is 4.15 m. with an east-west orientation. The width is approximately 1.70 m. This rectangular pavement contains two different types of hexagonal slabs which are divided by a straight border joint. The first type covered 1.70 x 0.90 m. and is located to the east. The measurement of this type of hexagonal slabs is around 0.19 m. The second type is located to the west, covering 1.70 x 3.20 m. The hexagonal slab of the second type is approximately 16.5 cm. The only parallel to this kind of slab was found in the vicinity of a Nabataean temple at Wadi Rumm. A staircase connects with this pavement at right angles on the south side of the pavement (Fig. 4). The width of the staircase is about 1.80 m. and consists of eleven steps leading to the top of a naked sandstone rock. This staircase is almost completely damaged except for the remains of some parts of steps which are still *in situ*. The staircase belongs to Phase Ia and was closed by some ashlar blocks, drums and dark brown mortar during the second and the third quarters of the sixth century A.D. This wall was found at a height of about 1.20 m.

A small basin was found under the

balk which divided squares 3 and 4. The dimensions of the basin are 0.85 x 0.85 m. and 0.30 m. in depth. The four internal sides and the floor are coated with a thick dark greyish mortar. It is most likely that this basin was used to hold water for some ritual purposes and I believe that there is a direct relation between the basin, the paved area with hexagonal slabs and the staircase which leads to the naked high rocks. It is probable that religious ceremonies used to take place in this place.

Area D

Two squares were opened (Fig. 2), in Area D. The majority of the intact and semi-intact objects were found in these two squares. A dwelling room was found (2.25 x 4.45 m.) with a north-south orientation. The thickness of the walls is almost the same (0.70 m.). The walls are built from irregular sandstone blocks fixed with a brownish mortar. The majority of the blocks are dressed with the typically Nabataean diagonal grooving, and some other blocks are dressed with notches. Two entrances were found in this room. The first is in the east wall, about 0.55 m. far from the southeast corner. The width of this entrance is only 0.60 m. It has well-dressed jambs which open inward. The second entrance is in the north wall and is about 0.35 m. from the northwest corner, with jambs opening inward. The floor of this room is covered with a thick layer of light greyish mortar which includes some small fragments of limestone and sandstone of less than 2 cm³. The dating of this room is fixed by two coins of Aretas IV before his appearance with his second wife Shaqilat II (9 B.C.-A.D. 18). Therefore, this dwelling room corresponds in date to the rectangular paved area with hexagonal slabs, and both are assigned to Phase Ia which represents the earliest habitation found in the 1981 Petra excavations.

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