

## The Ridge Church in Petra

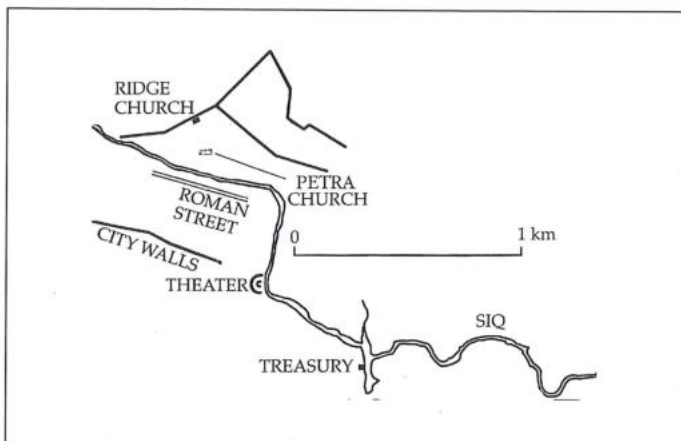
The Byzantine church is located approximately 160 m NNW of the church uncovered by ACOR during excavations in 1992-94 (FIG. 1). For ease of reference that church, the one with the spectacular mosaics and where the Petra Papyri were found, is referred to here as the 'Petra Church'. This second church has been dubbed the 'Ridge Church' because of its location.

The Ridge Church is located at the northwestern edge of the Byzantine-era city and is just inside the city walls which run along the ridge overlooking Wādī Abū 'Ullayqa. Its location on a sandstone ridge, which rises to 924 m, has subjected the structure to severe erosion (FIG. 2). Most of the stones of the walls and the other architectural elements have been washed down the slopes around the structure. It may have been described by A. Musil in the early part of the century. He described two churches in the general vicinity (1907: 105-6, 108, Fig. 76), but matching his descriptions to either of the two known churches is difficult. According to Robert Schick (in press), the Ridge Church may have been identified in December of 1916 by Theodor Wiegand (Wiegand, Bachmann, and Watzinger 1921:33). The structure definitely appears on A. Kammerer's map (Carte III) of 1929 (FIG. 3). It was noticed

again by Thomas Dailey and Pierre M. Bikai on January 2, 1994, and they encouraged documenting it before it deteriorated further. It was partially cleared during excavations over six days in October of 1994 and one day in April of 1995.<sup>1</sup> Five probes were made and features uncovered as well as those visible on the surface were documented. There was only ca. 20 cm of fill over the floor. This consisted of sandy rubble directly on the floor.

The building measures 18.1 m in length and 13.5 m in width (FIG. 4). It is oriented ca. 35° north of true east. To the west is a 2.6 m deep portico which, in the area excavated, is approached from the west by two steps. The church has a nave and two aisles. The aisles are separated from the nave by stylobates which once carried five columns on each side and, thus, the church was six intercolumniations long. At the eastern and western ends, there were pilasters. What appear to be the remnants of the foundations of these are found at the eastern ends of the colonnades and the foundation of the north-east pilaster was also found. On the slope to the south of the church a pilaster capital with vine tendril decoration was located. Its size corresponds to the foundations located.

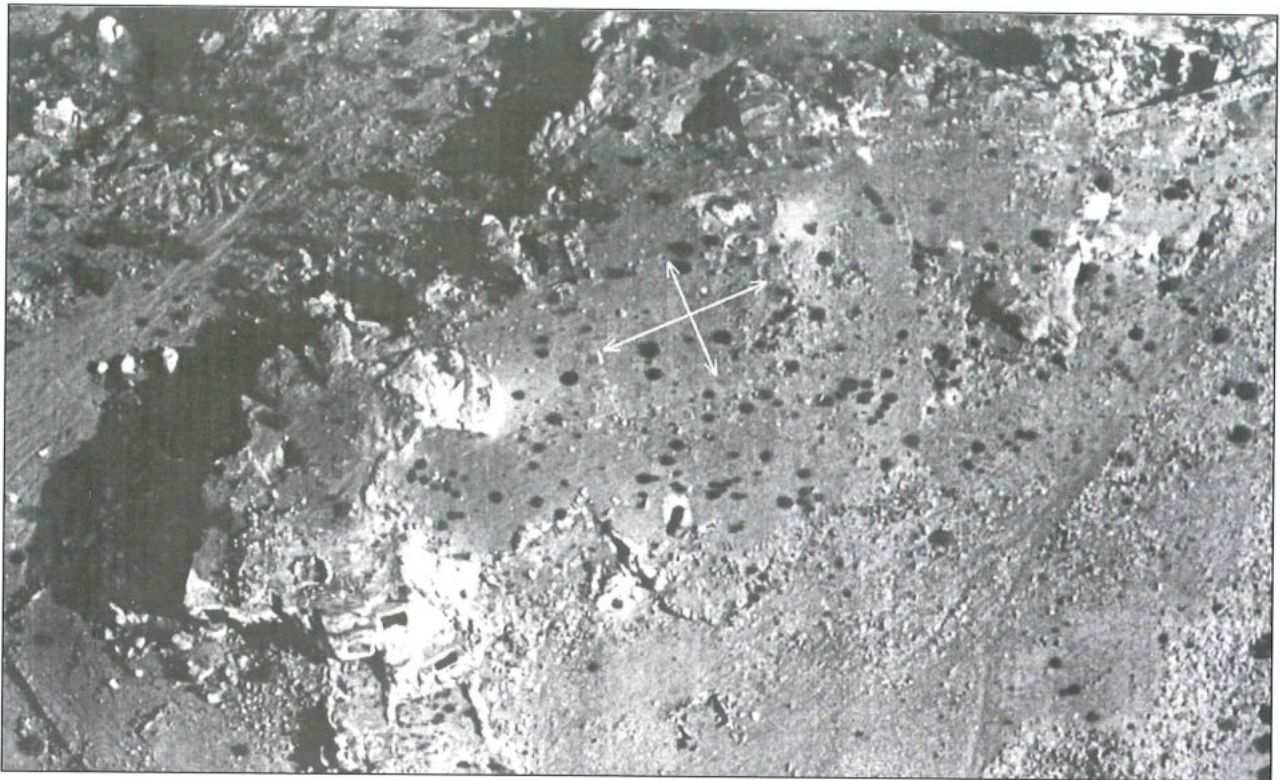
The colonnades do not line up with the apse walls. Architect Chrysanthos Kanellopoulos noted that this was an unusual feature in the Petra Church and cites (1995) the following parallels: "The nonalignment of the colonnades to the apse's outer walls occurs in three examples from Ostrakine (Oren in Tsafirir 1993: 306-8); the church in Dora-Dor (Dauphin in Tsafirir 1993: 92); the church in Maresha (Kloner in Tsafirir 1993: 262); the church in the Roman fortress, Khirbat al-Samrā' (Piccirillo 1993: 309, Fig. 615); the west church in Burj Heidar (Tchalenko 1990: 242.1; pl. 18:36); the north church in Sugane (Tchalenko 1990: 247.16; pl. 62:114); the church in Kafr Nabo (Tchalenko 1990: 247.18); the church in Gerade (Tchalenko 1990: 250.29); and a church in Yatta (Bagatti 1983: 94, Fig. 13). In all these examples, the colonnades end at a wall."



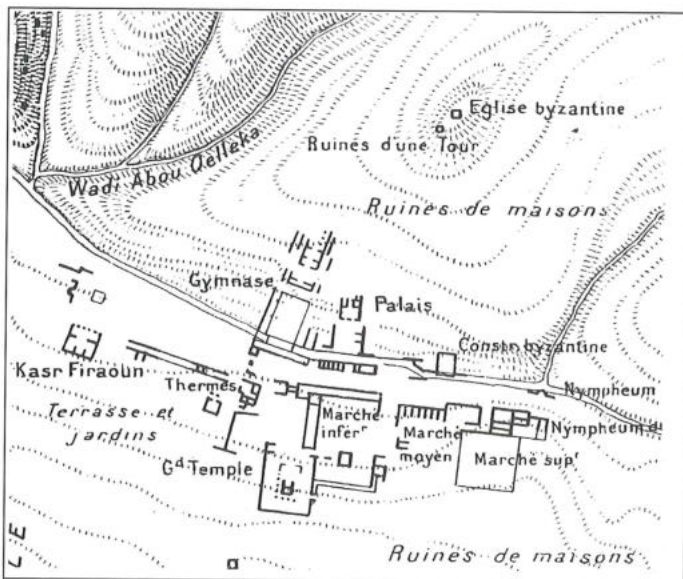
1. Map of Petra showing the location of the Ridge Church.

<sup>1</sup> Excavations at the church were directed by Patricia M. Bikai of ACOR with the assistance of Virginia Egan. Other participants were Karen Asfour, H.E. the Ambassador of Switzerland Gian Frederico Pedotti, Maria Pedotti, Maroussia Zimmermann, Elaina Coyne and Don McCrea. ACOR appreci-

ates the assistance given by Faisal Qudah, then the Acting Director-General of the Department of Antiquities, and by Suleiman Farajat, the Department of Antiquities representative at Petra.



2. Detail of an aerial view of the ridge, May 26, 1993, (by J. Wilson Myers and Eleanor Myers). The white lines show the location of the Ridge Church.



3. A. Kammerer 1929: detail of Carte No. III.

The column bases of the southern side have apparently all been removed. On the northern side, two columns bases are *in situ* in the church and a third one is displaced but near its probable original location. The three bases are of different styles and were apparently reused from Nabataean/Roman buildings. The diameter at the top of one of these (Base 1) was approximately 69 cm, while the other (Base 2) was 60.5 cm (see FIG. 4) A third *in situ* base (the northeasternmost one) is surrounded by con-

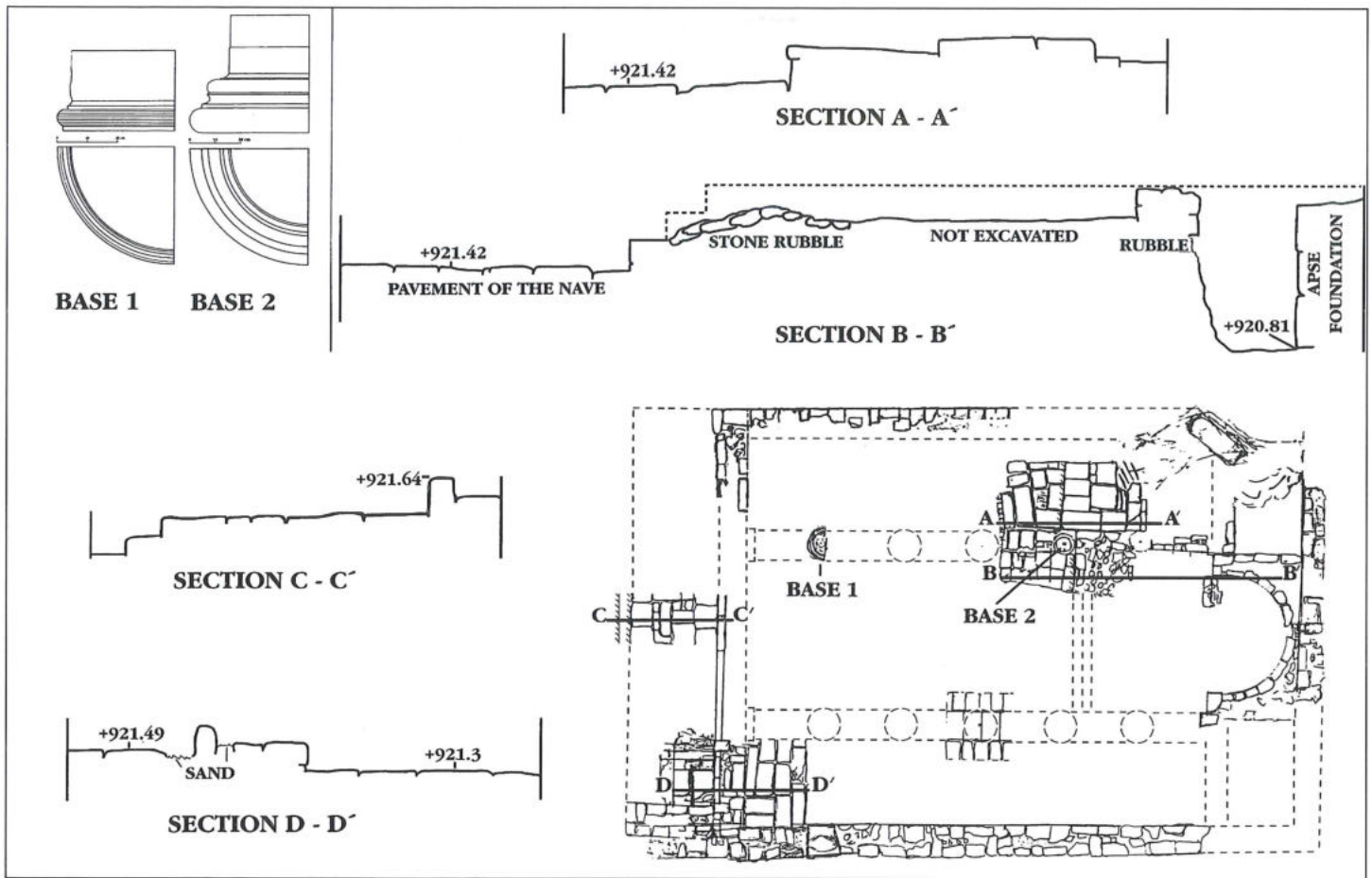
struction and was not documented. A fragment of the volute of a capital, also Roman/Nabataean, was also found. The nave and the two aisles are paved with sandstone blocks which are in a good state of preservation. At the eastern end of the northern aisle is a raised platform of sandstone blocks. The platform is 4.2 m deep and leads to a rectangular room which measures 2.1 m in depth and is 3.2 m wide. This area was apparently raised above the level of the rest of the aisle floor because of the level of bedrock at the north-east corner of the church. The equivalent section of the southern part of the church has been completely eroded.

At the eastern end of the nave is a raised platform or chancel which was once reached by two steps. Only remnants now remain of the steps. The chancel is 3.5 m deep and 5 m wide, while the apse is 2.4 m deep and 3.5 m wide. The chancel and apse floors were eroded but quantities of mosaic fragments found at the site indicate that they were originally paved with a mosaic consisting mainly of large white limestone tesserae. Set into this there was a colored mosaic, but only fragments of that were recovered. There is also evidence (in the form of small displaced stone and glass tesserae) that there were once wall mosaics in this church. Wall mosaics made from very similar glass tesserae were found in the Petra Church.

From an architectural point of view, the church is of standard Byzantine construction. It is a mono-apsidal basilica with two rectangular pastophoria. There is no evidence that the pastophoria were later converted to apses.

**Bibliography**

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4. Plan of, and sections through, the Ridge Church, and Bases 1 and 2 (by Pierre M. Bikai, Patricia M. Bikai, and Virginia Egan).

There were some constraints at the site because of the location on the ridge and because of bedrock so the architect may have had to accommodate the building to those realities. It is also possible that the proper was a preexisting building and that the apse and pastophoria were added. There is a notable difference in construction visible in the foundation of the apse; its stones are very well cut by comparison to the rest of the walls. Thus the wall whose foundations are now visible to the west of the pastophoria may have been the original eastern wall of a prior building. One clear adjustment that the architect made was in the width of the aisles. While the width of the northern aisle is 3.15 m, the southern aisle is 2.85 m. What would have been expected is a width of 2.875 m, a quarter of the width and the southern aisle is correct. The northern aisle apparently had to be accommodated to the presence of bedrock higher than the desired floor level, so it was widened, thus depriving the nave of some of its desired width of 5.75 m; it is actually 5.5 m wide.

It was noted that there was a narthex to the west. There was apparently an entrance to this at its southern end. In the area excavated to the west of the narthex, two steps leading down were found. This is not what would be expected as the ground begins to rise at that point and goes up to the top of the ridge which is ca. 2.5 m above

the floor level of the church. The steps must lead down to some feature, perhaps a cave, below the high point of the ridge. There is a second cave at the site, in the bedrock under the northern pastophoria and a third cave to the south of the structure.

Because of the eroded condition of the building, very little was recovered that can aid in dating it. On the basis of the mosaic fragments and the general form, it is preliminarily dated to the fifth - sixth centuries AD. The pottery found in the fill above the floor included everything from first century AD Nabataean wares through modern ceramics. The presence of the Nabataean pottery is actually a mystery. In another location, one might posit that it was washed down on to the Byzantine floor from above. Here there is essentially no 'above' to speak of, so it is possible that the Nabataean wares came to be in the church through the activities of more modern inhabitants. The other finds included a few iron nails, and marble fragments which may have once belonged to chancel screens, altars, or other such furnishings, but they are very fragmentary.

This church may mark the north-west corner of the Byzantine city. The other limits of Byzantine construction in Petra are not known but evidence appears to indicate that Petra as a Byzantine city was smaller than it had been in prior eras.