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Issues at World Heritage Sites: Petra Case Study

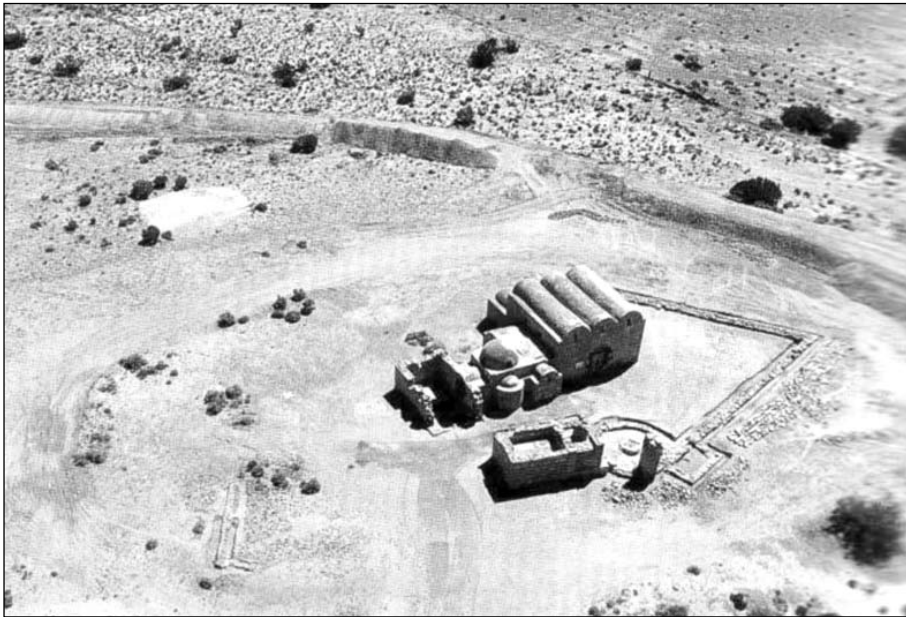
As a non-governmental and non-profit organisation established in 1989, the Petra National Trust (PNT) is one of the organisations responsible for the preservation of the cultural and natural heritage of Petra. PNT does not set policy but works with policy makers in the Jordanian government and other NGOs to achieve its objectives.

Petra is one of three sites in Jordan on the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites. Although surrounded by oil producing countries, Jordan itself has no oil and is therefore forced to look carefully at its other resources and maximise their use in order to sustain development. Tourism has emerged as a key economic driver with antiquities forming the primary component thereof. With the surge of tourism in Jordan, the government is now reviewing its policy for archaeological heritage management to enable it to become the major contributor to the growth and development of the tourism sector and, indeed, the national economy. Until recently, the management of all archaeological sites fell under the jurisdiction of the Department of Antiquities. The Ministry of Tourism is now re-examining its role and that of the Department of Antiquities, and has divided these roles into two groupings: (1) tourism management and services, largely operated by public / private partnerships and (2) archaeological management and research, carried out by the Department of Antiquities. The former gives precedence to tourism-oriented management and the latter to management with conservation at its core. In Jordan the tendency has been to favour the former. How to divide these roles and who is ultimately responsible, is the key question. With a history of lack of co-ordination and observance of each other's roles, the protection / sustainability of this non-renewable resource is being placed at a very serious risk. Those heritage sites labelled as "tourism sites"

will now be managed by the Ministry of Tourism, at the helm of a government company composed of public and private sector stakeholders.

Two of the three Jordanian World Heritage Sites, Quşayr 'Amra (FIG. 1) and Umm ar-Raşāş (FIG. 2), fall under this new jurisdiction and will be managed by the Ministry of Tourism. Petra is the exception to this new ruling, as it was felt that the site was too large, too complex and too fragile to bring into the fold at this stage. Having said that, the new bye-laws for the Petra Archaeological Park have been amended by the tourism authorities to allow for a similar style of management. The Ministry of Tourism has been assisted in its reorganisation of site management by the USAID-funded programmes known as "AMIR", which developed the National Tourism Strategy between 2004 and 2010, and "SIYAHHA" (the Arabic word for tourism), which will implement it. In 2004, the government endorsed the National Tourism Strategy, which made archaeological tourism its mainstay, leaving other types of tourism for later consideration. This was done in the absence of a national strategy for the management and preservation of Jordan's archaeological heritage and herein lies the issue of which organisation should be entrusted with the management of our archaeological heritage: Tourism or Antiquities? The Petra National Trust was minimally involved in these deliberations and was not part of the decision-making process at any of its stages.

Whether at Petra or at other World Heritage Sites, the basic components of site management are similar in essence, but vary according to the size of the site, its location, the proximity of the local community, level of visitation and level of infrastructure and services required. Quşayr 'Amra was placed on the UNESCO list of World Heritage sites in 1985.



1. Qusayr 'Amra.



2. Umm ar-Raṣāṣ.

It is located in the Azraq Region, approximately 75 kilometres east of 'Ammān. Only the foundations of the fortress are preserved, but the Qusayr itself with its three-nave reception hall, al-Ḥammām and extraordinary mural decorations (FIG. 3) still exist. Qusayr 'Amra is the best-preserved palatial architectural complex of the Umayyad period and a unique artistic achievement but, to date, it does not have a management and conservation plan. Visitors are left to circulate freely and can take photographs without consideration on the impact of such activities on the site and its paintings. There have been several conservation interventions by the Department of Antiquities and non-Jordanian restoration



3. Mural paintings at Qusayr 'Amra.

projects that have proven to be problematic over the years. Additionally, the Quşayr does not have a nearby local community benefiting from the returns of tourism and, as such, a key factor in site management is removed from the equation.

Umm ar-Raşāş, which was added to the UNESCO list in 2004, is located near the Kings' Highway, 30 kilometres south-east of Mādabā. It has archaeological remains from the Roman, Byzantine and early Muslim periods (late third to ninth centuries AD) (FIG. 4). The site has several churches, some with well-preserved mosaic floors; particularly noteworthy is the mosaic floor of the Church of Saint Stephen with its representation of towns in the region (FIG. 5) the square tower is probably the only architectural legacy of the stylite monks, ascetics who spent time in isolation atop a column or tower. A management plan is in the process of being developed, which will hopefully be endorsed by the government on completion. There is a small community in the vicinity of the site and my understanding is that various income-generation projects are in the pipeline. I will not go into details regarding the management issues at either Quşayr 'Amra or Umm ar-Raşāş, suffice it to say that in essence they are similar to those in my case study of Petra.

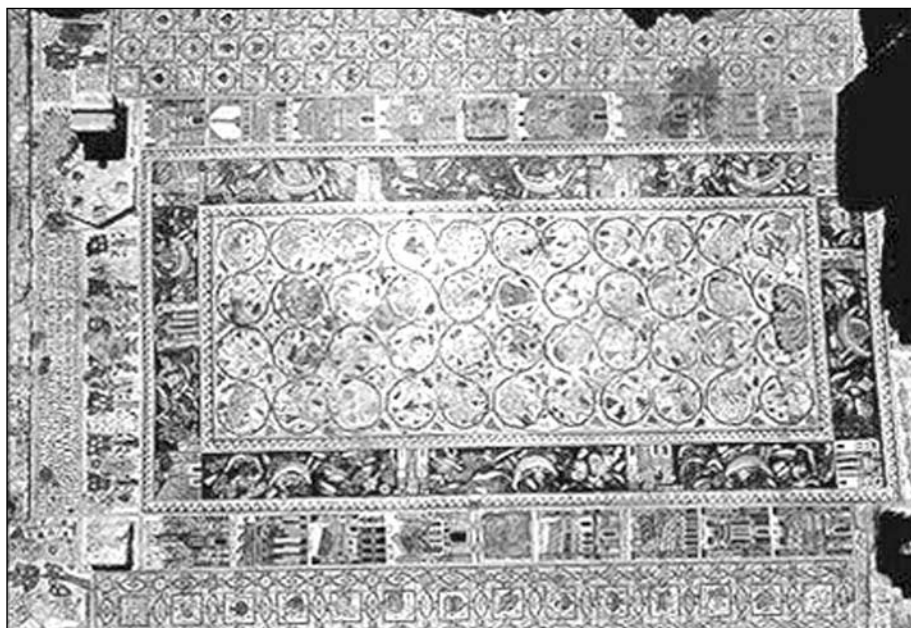
Petra was made a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1985, being listed as a "cultural site". This included the "spine", where the visible archaeology is concentrated (FIG. 6). In 1993, the Jordanian government declared an area of 264 square kilometres — including the "spine" — a National

Park, but fell short of incorporating this area within the World Heritage listing and did not provide for a buffer zone. Despite the fact that no development was allowed within the Park, construction continued (FIG. 7) and we now face major problems of construction and urban encroachment within and outside the Park.

The Petra National Park is surrounded by six main urban centres, which form part of the Petra Region and have a total population of around 25,000. Two of these centres are gateways to the Petra Archaeological Park and have a direct impact on it. Much of the land surrounding the Park comes under tribal / customary law, meaning that the tribes consider this land to be their territory. This, as well as privately owned land, is now changing hands in quick succession as a result of land speculation aimed at benefiting from the surge in tourism. The government is likewise allocating major plots of land to various government departments and universities (FIG. 8), all of which are all in visually sensitive locations that directly impact upon the site.

There are obviously numerous stakeholders who have an interest in the region, including:

1. Local communities.
2. Government, including the Department of Antiquities, Ministry of Tourism, Petra Regional Authority, Land Department, Public Security Department and other local authorities.
3. Jordanian and international archaeological missions.
4. Tour operators, investors in tourism, hotel own-



4. Church of Saint Stephen mosaic.



5. The Stylite Tower.

ers and souvenir vendors.

5. Tourists.

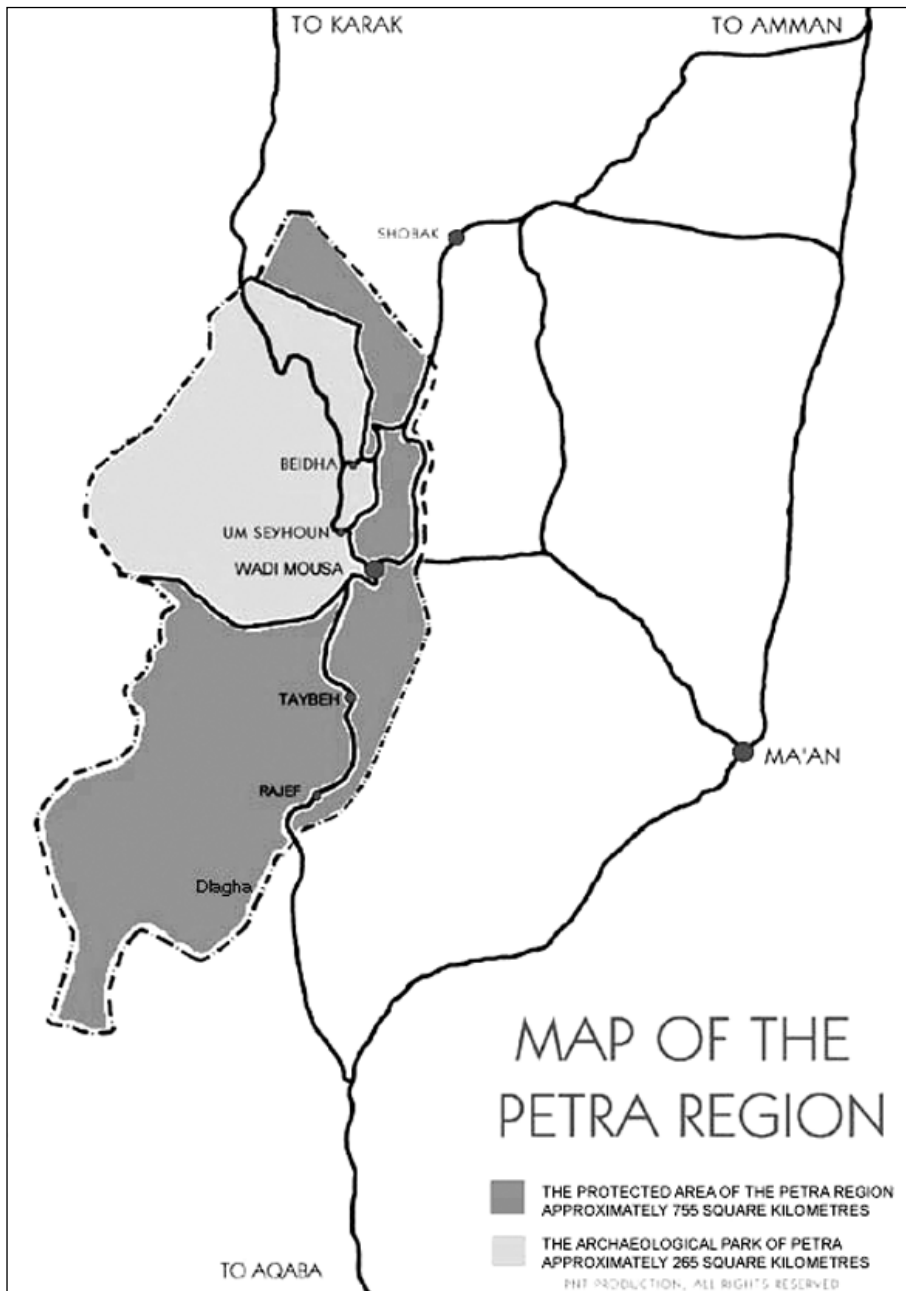
6. NGOs working on the socio-economic development of the Petra Region. Petra National Trust, with its mission to protect and preserve.

The differing and often incompatible interests of these groups need to be managed in order to avoid open friction between them, whilst at the same time maintaining the significance and integrity of the site.

Petra's significance was first defined by UNESCO in 1994, despite have been declared a World Heritage Site as long ago as 1985. UNESCO listed the values of the Park under four main headings (FIG. 9); on four occasions between 1996 and

2002 it has been placed on the World Monuments Fund's watch list of 100 Most Endangered Sites.

Well before this time, in 1968, the US National Park Services (NPS) were invited to prepare a master plan for Petra, to guide the use, development, interpretation and protection of the Park. Many of the issues identified in the 1968 NPS plan have now intensified, notably the population explosion. In the absence of zoning and land-use plans until 1996, uncontrolled construction has visibly encroached on the area. The 1968 NPS plan described Wādī Mūsā thus: "At the present time a drive through the village of Wādī Mūsā constitutes an important bonus for Petra visitors. A view of this unusually



6. Petra Region.

attractive terraced and well watered oasis and its village life is a scene of Jordan which should be kept". This landscape is now obscured by construction. Furthermore, tourism increased from 31,800 visitors in 1966 to 360,000 visitors in 2006. Not too long ago, there was only one large hotel overlooking the Park. Now there are four hotels on the scenic Taybah — Wādī Mūsā road, directly overlooking Petra and an-Nabī Hārūn. They were licensed with profit in mind without regard for their negative visual impact on the site, nor for their location in the rainfall catchment area above the line

of natural springs. Inevitably, with the increase of tourism, came the spread of unregulated commercial activities inside and outside the Park. This too has had a negative impact on both its cultural and natural values (FIG. 10).

In response to the impact of growth, the government has invited international institutions to prepare management plans for Petra on no less than four occasions.

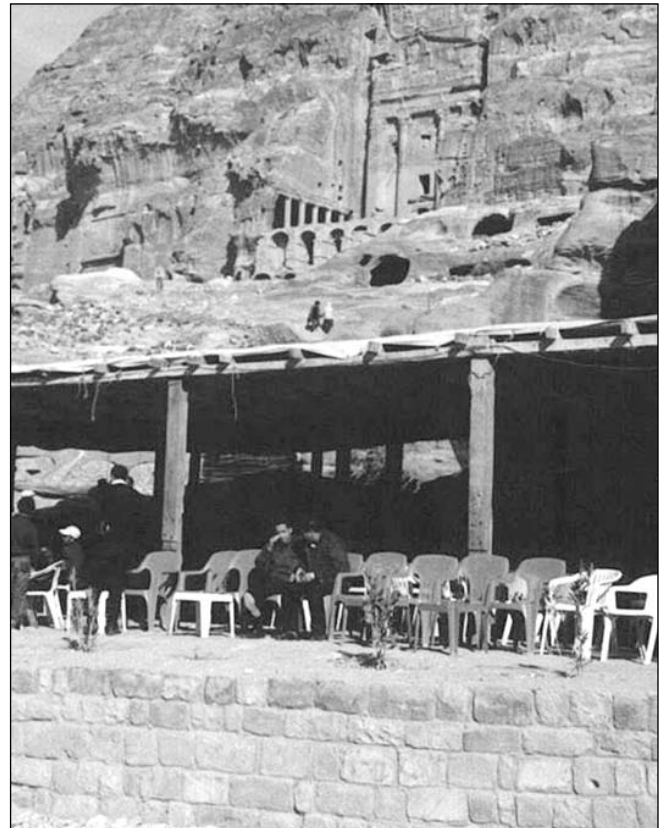
1. 1968 US National Park Services "Master Plan for the Protection and Use of the Petra National Park".



7. Construction within the Archaeological Park: Nabataean Restaurant.



8. Al-Hussein University.



10. Concessionaire shops and restaurants obstructing view of monuments.

Values of Petra

- **Conserves representative samples of the nation and the world's cultural heritage;**
- **Conserves valuable natural assets;**
- **Encompasses socio-anthropological values;**
- **Provides economic values.**

9. Petra values.

2. 1994 UNESCO "Petra National Park Management Plan".
3. 1996 US / ICOMOS "Management Analysis and Recommendations for the Petra World Heritage Site".
4. 2000 US National Park Services "Operational

Plan".

There is no institutional recollection of the procedures that were followed in the first three plans. Although these included some Jordanian participation, it is clear that there was no systematic stakeholder participation in the identification of the values, major issues and — subsequently — in the formulation or implementation of the recommendations they made. Regretfully, to a greater or lesser extent, this approach has continued to the present day.

The first two studies analysed the management structure at a time when the Ministry of Tourism managed Petra from their headquarters in 'Ammān. Whereas the Ministry of Tourism was responsible for issuing development licenses, the Department of Antiquities was responsible for the management of the archaeological heritage. With limited staff and poor co-ordination, the management of the entire area continues to be ineffective and most problems, then and now, are a result of this unhappy situation. On the basis of their findings, the NPS and later UNESCO emphasised the need to create an independent single authority that would manage

and co-ordinate all aspects of Park management. The outcome was the Petra Regional Authority (PRA). It was given a mandate to manage an area of 755 square kilometres, including the 264 square kilometre protected area of the Park that remained the responsibility of the Department of Antiquities. The articles of PRA law concentrate mainly on municipal planning. However, in executing these responsibilities, there has been a widespread lack of awareness of the impact that development in the buffer area has on the Park itself (FIG. 11). The issue is, again, a lack of co-ordination between the key government stakeholders and herein lies one of the underlying problems hindering efficient management of the Park. There are still several organisations operating, often independently and frequently with overlapping responsibilities, each with its own direct line of authority leading back to 'Ammān. There is a need to "revisit" all of the objectives of all these organisations, both governmental and non-governmental, and to align their roles within the management system.

It needs to be emphasised that the concept of establishing protected areas to manage cultural heritage sites is still in its infancy in Jordan. As early as 1996, USAID prepared a study entitled "Jordan Parks Policy Project" which acknowledged the need to improve the management of protected areas. It identified the important park policy issues by providing recommendations for a protected area policy and an integrated management system. It investigated several options, but fell short of recommending a specific organisational structure. Had this study been followed up, today Jordan would have had a national strategy for the management of archaeological heritage, and the issues mentioned



11. Al-Hussein University.

earlier in this paper would not have arisen as a result of its absence. Subsequently, three different models have been implemented in Petra, Wādī Ramm and the Baptism site, but none have been evaluated and all need to be examined further before the newer models that we are now witnessing are introduced.

The third set of plans was prepared by a site management team from US / ICOMOS in 1996, which also conducted a carrying capacity study. The fourth plan, submitted in 2000, differs from its predecessors in that it constitutes a major step towards the establishment of comprehensive management procedures. However, a number of crucial pre-requisites, essential to the long-term feasibility of the the plan, were not addressed. Once again, it was prepared by a group of specialists from the US / NPS and did not include any local participation until after its submission to the government. Difficult as it may be to co-ordinate, experience with management plan preparation over the past 39 years has taught us that participation of key local stakeholders is essential if the plan is ever to be accepted, let alone implemented.

In conclusion, site management has now been a concern for almost 40 years. In the 1960s, tourism was minimal, being restricted to the most adventurous and hardest of souls. That policy makers were aware of the wider economic importance of the site, as the region became more accessible, is clearly demonstrated by the number of studies conducted and the projects that resulted from them. There is a basic consensus between the four above-mentioned plans regarding the type of management structures and interventions needed for Petra. However, approaches to the implementation of these plans has been fragmented over the years. Instead of adopting a holistic approach to site management and preservation, sub-projects were selected for implementation, which has led to the imbalance we witness today. Petra, like the other World Heritage Sites in Jordan, is the product of innumerable accumulated layers of historical heritage and neglect. These need to be managed and presented in a manner that does not result in further decline because of a lack of coordination between stakeholders and an excessive focus on economic gain. Consolidation of efforts which emphasise the values that set Petra and the other World Heritage Sites apart, using an integrated approach with the participation of all those concerned, will be the quickest and most effective way to achieve the desired result.

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