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Archaeological Field School in Petra, Jordan

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Archaeological Field School in Petra, Jordan

Authors

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Archaeological Field School in Petra, Jordan



The Fieldschool

This archaeological fieldschool was a four week six credit course that centered on the tools and techniques employed in discovering the history and material culture of ancient Jordan during the Roman, Byzantine and Islamic periods and introduced students to the historical geography of the region. The course consisted of fieldwork, lectures, and field trips. The methods and techniques used by archaeologists to reconstruct ancient cultures and history were examined through participation in the excavations at Petra.

The 2011 excavation team at the Petra Garden and Pool Complex consisted of a multi-disciplinary, international team of archaeologists and specialists, such as surveyors, pottery specialists and archaeobotanists whose goal was to gain a better understanding of the role the monumental Garden and Pool complex played in the capital city in terms of propaganda and urban design.

Under the site direction of Dr. Leigh-Ann Bedal (The Behrend College, Penn State, Erie) and the fieldschool direction of Dr. Jennifer Ramsay (The College at Brockport, SUNY) 22 student (nine from SUNY Brockport) and staff members joined 16 local Bedouin workers to excavate six days a week for four weeks.



The 2011 Excavation Team

Archaeological Skills

Through our fieldschool experience we learned how to:

- Excavate and identify architecture
- Identify different types of stratigraphy
- Identify, excavate and catalogue artifacts from a Hellenistic, Nabataean and Roman site
- Survey and record elevation data
- Apply techniques of environmental archaeology (sampling, retrieval, identification of plant remains, faunal remains, etc.)
- Analyze and date ceramics

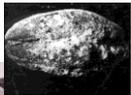
Cultural Skills

- To work with and live in the local Bedouin community
- To gain an appreciation for another culture
- To participate in local cultural events

Material Culture

Much of the material culture uncovered within the Pool and Garden complex ranged in context and date from the Nabataean and Roman Periods through to the Islamic period. Some of the artifact types discovered were:

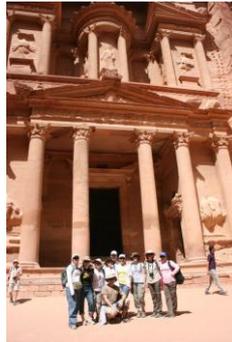
- Ceramics such as:
 - Nabataean Fine Ware (and Coarse Ware)
 - Crusader Ware
 - Ceramic Oil Lamps
 - African Red-Slip Pottery (Imported)
 - Coinage (Roman and Islamic)
 - Glass Shards (Roman and Islamic)
 - Fragments of Animal Bones
 - Botanical Remains (Seeds and Charcoal)
 - Architectural Elements



By Stefanie D'Erasmus, Paige Doerner, Katherine Drake, Geoffrey Hedges, Madelyn Padalino and Kaleigh Smith



Jennifer Starr points out evidence of recent architecture that has been uncovered



Brockport students and Dr. Ramsay at the Treasury in Petra



Madelyn Padalino takes elevations on site

Petra is an historical and archaeological city in Jordan that is famous for its rock cut architecture and water conduit systems. Petra was the impressive capital of the Nabataean kingdom from around the 3rd century BC. The kingdom was annexed by the Roman Empire in AD 106 and the Romans continued to expand the city. The ruins remained hidden to most of the world until the Swiss explorer, Johann Ludwig Burchard rediscovered the city in 1812. The first excavations in Petra took place in 1929. Petra was made a UNESCO world heritage site in 1985 and was chosen as one of the new Seven Wonders of the World in 2007.

The Petra Garden and Pool complex is located in the center of Petra. The excavation is currently focused on a large pool with a central pavilion adjacent to a large garden. The Pool and Garden complex was originally believed to be the 'Lower Market'. It was first identified as a marketplace by a German expedition in 1921. In 1998 a two month survey and excavation was conducted in order to determine the function of the site. With the discovery of the large pool in 1998 it was determined that the site was in fact not a market but formal garden. The pool measure 43 meters long by 23 meters wide with a depth of 2.5 meters. A large pavilion sits in the middle of the pool.



View looking south across the Roman road at the Garden and Pool Complex



Reconstruction of the garden and pool complex by Chrysanthos Kanellopoulos

Archaeological Excavation Documentation

During this field school we gained hands on experience learning how important it is to properly analyze, interpret and document all of the information from the excavation. Documentation is essential to every archaeological site in order to understand what has been done in the past, what is being done in the present, and indicates what will need to be done in the future. Documentation also allows us to learn what methods are useful and if other methods/technologies should be incorporated in the future.

For Example:

- By using the Munsell Color Chart we learned how to compare the soil of each locus, which may indicate past environmental processes (eg. 5YR 6/4 light reddish brown).
- Locus Forms are records in the field for each individual locus (layer of soil or sediment), we describe each locus with the locus type, the area surrounding it, what is found in it, elevations, measurements, and drawings.
- Artifact Forms are used to catalog and analyze the artifacts by documenting where it was found, information we learned from it, and a scale drawing.
- Daily Cataloging Form record all artifacts and soil samples that were taken by labeling them according to what they are, where they were found, and when they were taken (eg. A bone will be labeled as B-100).
- All of the students learned how to write in an on site excavation journal which describes in intricate detail the daily activities of the site.
- Pottery Forms were filled out after students washed pottery with water and brushes. The pottery was then analyzed by the team ceramicist and used as a dating method, and for cultural interpretation.
- Photography- Before a locus may be excavated it must be photographed because it serves as evidence for the site, once it is excavated it will no longer exist.
- Scale drawing – used to document architecture stratigraphy of each trench.



Artifact Photograph



Site forms

Comments on our Experience

"I learned that no matter what, you should always be open to new experiences because otherwise you run the risk of missing out on a lot of cool things." - Kaleigh Smith (Brockport - Anth Major)

"What struck me as most interesting and different from home was the clash between past and present that was everywhere. Several times I would see men in business clothes, riding down the street on a camel while texting. One guy was on a laptop while he was riding on a donkey." - Paige Doerner (Brockport - Anth Major)

"The pace of life is very different. People in Jordan are generally much more relaxed in their daily life than we are in the US. - Katherine Drake (Brockport - Anth Major)

"I learned that the media is ignorant about some issues in the Middle East. Rather than being scary and hostile I found it to be beautiful and very welcoming".-Kaleigh Smith (Brockport-Anth Major)



Katherine Drake, Kaleigh Smith and Stefanie D'Erasmus



Paige Doerner



Geoffrey Hedges