

Year long celebrations on 200th anniversary of Petra's re-discovery

ITM London

Nabataeans



Petra is often referred to as a place that everybody must visit at least once in their lifetime. The 200th year anniversary of Petra's rediscovery falls on August 22nd 2012 offering a perfect opportunity to follow in Burchardt's footsteps.

After spending several years learning Arabic and studying the tenets of Islam, Johann Ludwig Burckhardt, who passed himself off as a Muslim from India, set out on his journey under the auspices of the London-based "Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior parts of Africa".

En route to Cairo, through the area of what is now Jordan, his fluent

Arabic enabled him to understand stories of a wondrous ancient city hidden away amongst impenetrable mountains. However, he needed a plausible excuse to gain access to the city without arousing any suspicion as to his real intentions. By claiming he wished to make a sacrifice at the tomb of the Prophet Aaron which was nearby, he gained entry to the forgotten city of Petra.





Momumental
arch

One can imagine the impression the ruins made upon him, for he was fully able to appreciate the importance of his discovery and correctly identify the city as ancient Petra. In spite of the fact that he was obliged to conceal his interest and excitement from his guides, Burckhardt recorded what he had seen, and his account, published in 1822 was to excite great interest in Europe and inspire a long line of travelers to visit the site.

The original construction of Petra dates back well over 2,000 years,

though Petra enjoyed its golden age of prosperity under the Nabateans from the 1st century BC to the 1st century AD. New trade routes established during the later Roman and Byzantine periods led to the city's decline and near abandonment by the 8th century.

Tradition says Aaron, the brother of Moses, died in Jordan and was buried in Petra at Mount Hor, now called Jabal Harun in Arabic (Mount Aaron). A Byzantine church and later an Islamic shrine/tomb of

Aaron was built on the summit of the mountain which today attracts pilgrims. Aaron was the first High Priest of the Bible. Petra may have also been the last staging post of the three kings who took gifts to the baby Jesus in Bethlehem. King Aretas (Cor. 11:32) was a Nabatean king who ruled Petra at the time of Jesus.

By the 12th century, Petra had been conquered by Muslim armies

and faded from western awareness. But rumors of an ancient “lost” city persisted for about six centuries – until 200 years ago in 1812 when Burckhardt – “rediscovered” the magnificent city and western explorers began to return. In 2007, it was named one of the New Seven Wonders of the World.

The approach through a kilometer long, cool, and gloom chasm a





long narrow gorge whose steeply rising sides all but obliterate the sun, provides a dramatic contrast with the magic to come. Suddenly the gorge opens into a natural square dominated by Petra's most famous monument, the treasury whose intricately carved facade glows in the dazzling sun.

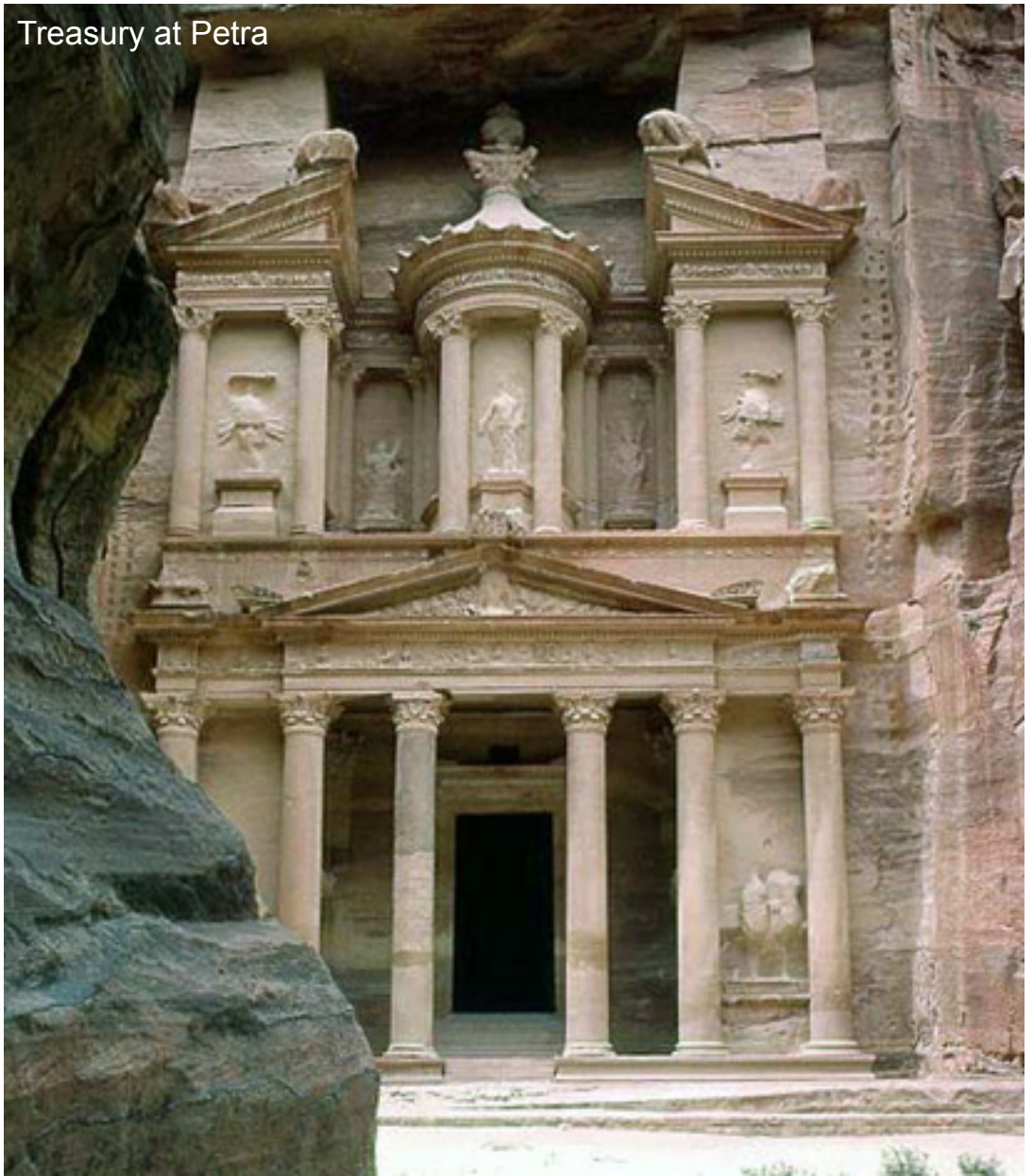
More facades beckon the visitor on until the ancient city gradually unfolds, one monument leading to the next for kilometer after kilometer. The sheer size of the city and the quality of beautifully

carved facades is staggering and leads one to reflect on the creativity and industry of the Nabataeans who made Petra their capital.

The Petra basin boasts over 800 individual monuments, including buildings, tombs, baths, funerary halls, temples, arched gateways, and colonnaded streets, that were mostly carved from the kaleidoscopic sandstone by the technical and artistic genius of its inhabitants.

Petra can be enjoyed on many

Treasury at Petra



levels. It's a favorite with adventure and natural beauty. A comprehensive tour of Petra requires days – it's a big place. Most visitors stay a day or two.