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*The Abandonment of Petra. Remains of the Invisible: Post-Byzantine Archaeology of Petra's North Ridge*

The complex, rich Nabataean and Roman ruins of Petra have captured the interest of archaeologists and explorers for almost 200 years. Many researchers assumed that occupation after the destructive A.D. 363 earthquake was minimal, but excavations of ecclesiastical structures on Petra's North Ridge and the on-going translation of a group of papyri indicate that Petra contained a sizeable, active Byzantine period community. Scholars are now turning attention to the fate of Petra and its inhabitants after the city's late 6th – early 7th century A.D. decline. At the beginning of the 7th century, the region experienced a substantial political, religious, and cultural shift from Byzantine to Islamic rule. Scholars have suggested that because Petra was not mentioned at all in the conquest literature, it was of no importance at this time. This suggestion appears to be correct, although Petra still contained a limited number of residents during the 7th – 8th century A.D. based on our excavations in the North Ridge area of the Petra basin. During that period, Petra's remaining population utilized the abandoned ecclesiastical structures for domestic activities such as cooking, food preparation, and storage. The residents also sought out raw materials such as marble, glass, and metals from the public buildings and the nearby Nabataean tombs, and, in the case of glass, processed the materials for trade. Intensive occupation of these structures ended with a large earthquake in A.D. 748/9, which brought down at least some of the columns in the Blue Chapel and Petra Church, as well as walls in many of the structures. This earthquake was followed by a second event that brought down more of the structures on the North Ridge. An ephemeral human presence in the area after the mid-8th century A.D. is indicated by modifications to the atriums of the Blue Chapel Complex and Petra Church and some agricultural activity at the top of the ridge's southern slope. The sequence of these activities is not clear. Another series of small retaining/terrace walls postdates the above evidence, indicating an almost constant, but transient, human presence on the North Ridge from the 8th century on.

Who were the individuals left in Petra? The late 6th-8th century residents may have been descendants of Petra's Byzantine period inhabitants, who decided to stay for political or economic reasons after the city's infrastructure collapsed; alternately, they may have moved in from outside of the Petra city center. Eventually, after the 8th century

earthquake, these individuals moved on to other areas of Petra or out of the site altogether. The North Ridge was then utilized for very limited activities. This minor presence continued to the 19th century, when historical evidence indicates that the Bedul Bedouin were living within Petra.

Interestingly, if one had to rely on the evidence from Petra's city center, one would be hard pressed to know that the Crusaders were well established in the area. Conversely, the city center that the Crusaders saw was not very different from the Petra that Burkhardt re-discovered for the west in 1812. It was a city of collapsed buildings filled with sand and rubble interspersed with a few small structures used by an apparently transient population.

