

ABSTRACT

During a two-month field season in the summer of 1998, a survey and excavation was conducted in the “Lower Market”, a large unbuilt area adjoining the Great Temple at the heart of the ancient city of Petra (Jordan). The primary goal of the Petra Lower Market Survey, was to investigate the area of the site traditionally designated as the “Lower Market” in order to determine its function, historical development, and its relationship to the other monuments in the city’s civic center. Its central location, monumental scale and labor-intensive construction suggest that this area was part of the ceremonial, economic and political center of the city, and therefore must have been of some importance to the structure and organization of the city during the Classical Nabataean (1st c. BCE -1st c. CE) and Roman periods (2nd – 4th c. CE). Excavations focused mainly on the southern half of the “Lower Market” where substantial architectural features were visible on the surface. The excavations revealed the remains of a monumental pool-complex with island-pavilion and an elaborate hydraulic system irrigating a large earthen terrace. The identification of a pool-complex at Petra prompts a re-examination of the long-held interpretation of the city. It is argued here that in its first phase (end of the 1st c. BCE), the Pool-Complex functioned as a royal *paradeisos*, part of a large palace complex that included the Great Temple. Around the time of Roman annexation in 106 CE, Petra was transformed from a ceremonial center into a civic center. The Great Temple was converted into a theatron (*bouleuterion*) and the Pool-Complex now functioned as a fashionable public park. The Petra Pool-Complex played an important role in the socio-political life of Petra during the Nabataean and Roman periods. The mere presence of a *paradeidos* in Petra symbolized the Nabataean king’s power and helped to legitimize his place among contemporary rulers who utilized architectural programs, gardens, and water display as political metaphor. The *paradeisos* is an example

of a gratuitous display of conspicuous consumption, a symbol of the flourishing status of Petra during its Classical era.