Fig. 74. Facade of the ad-Deir Monument, Petra, with the 2017 final erosion clearances of about one-half of the Great Circle in the foreground. The façade dimensions of the ad-Deir Monument are: 46.77 m wide by 48.3 m high. The Great Circle is almost exactly 60 m in diameter—a massive water pool in the desert acting as both a quarry and catch pool to protect the monument (photo by AMPP / C. Finlayson).

PETRA: AD-DEIR MONUMENT AND PLATEAU PROJECT

Cynthia Finlayson
Brigham Young University

Beginning in 2013, The Ad-Deir Monument & Plateau Project (AMPP) was tasked by the Jordanian Department of Antiquities and the Conservation Office of the Petra Archaeological Park to address the seasonal erosion negatively impacting the ad-Deir Monument on the ad-Deir Plateau. Subsequent UAV/drone imagery combined with a GPS Pedestrian survey of the entire plateau with MEGA form documentation enabled a triaged listing of the Nabataean structures that should be initially targeted for excavation and restoration. As part of this plan, three major Nabataean structures were identified for excavation, study, and restoration in order to revitalize their original roles as water control and catchment systems built by Nabataean engineers to protect the ad-Deir Monument complex. These included the northwest Temenos Slot Access Region to the ad-Deir Monument Courtyard, the Eastern Cisterns just to the northwest of the monument, and the Great Circle, a giant pool 60 m in diameter that protected the monument from the slopes running to the west of the building's massive façade (Fig. 74).

Test excavations were initiated in 2014 to confirm those project targets. Excavation and restoration efforts continued from 2015 through 2016 including the clearance of all debris from the upper story of the monument itself. A geological report regarding the condition of the façade of the monument was also completed in 2016 by a team of geologists from BYU and the Czech Republic

Fig. 75. Closing levels in 2017 of Eastern Cistern B, which has a holding capacity estimated to be over 480 cubic meters. Its lower strata contain one of the largest collections of Nabataean pottery from a sealed context ever discovered in Petra, including many whole and partially complete vessels (photo by AMPP / B. Allardice).

who are specialized in sandstone. Additionally, isotope studies of the water seepage on the northwest cliff and lower wall of the Monument were undertaken. This study indicated that the water source is a spring inside the mountain from which the Monument was carved, and not from the modern-era Bedouin dam (built over a Nabataean structure) in Wadi Fatumah just to the northwest of the ad-Deir Monument itself.

The surprise event of the 2016 summer excavation season was the discovery of a massive cache of pottery dating from the 1st century B.C. to the Late Nabataean era at the bottom of Cistern B that apparently had been sealed by a cliff collapse during a probable earthquake event (Fig. 75). This may be one of the largest collections of Nabataean pottery and pottery fragments from a sealed context ever discovered in Petra and may also prove important to more firmly contextualize Nabataean coarse wares. Additionally, the Temenos Slot Region continued to produce one of the largest recoveries of Nabataean coins from archaeological contexts ever retrieved from within Petra—just over 500 coins by the end of 2017. Eighty-nine percent of these coins are from the mints of Aretas IV (9 B.C.–A.D. 40) and inclusive of his die series except for those coins produced with images of his mother. While it is often common to have 80 percent of all coins retrieved from excavations in Petra be those of this active Nabataean king, the presence of multiples of his die batches, the range of dates of these series, as well as recovered bronze slag fragments, possibly indicate that the ad-Deir Plateau was utilized by Aretas IV as a strategically secure storage area for his treasury during his wars with Judea. A few examples of the coinage of Aretas IV's successors were also retrieved in the 2016 and 2017 AMPP seasons indicating that the facility was in use until A.D. 106 and ended with the Roman annexation.

During the 2016 and 2017 work seasons, the Great Circle continued to be cleared and ancient earthquake damage to its natural bedrock carved inner wall repaired. The Outer Ring Wall, originally built of fieldstone and mud mortar, was encased in a protective field stone sheathing after its excavation.