

## Medieval Petra: Excavations at Petra Al-Wu'ayra 2023

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In 2023, the University of Florence undertook three excavations in Petra Al-Wu'ayra, focusing on the Northeast Tower Complex (TU 15 and 16) and the South Rupesian Chapel (TU 126). The TU 15-16 excavation, initiated in 2022 (with the excavation of the deposit inside the tower, TU 30; see Nucciotti and Ranieri 2024), aimed to enhance understanding of the settlement's long-term development. In 2023, it highlighted a sequence of architectural changes mainly dating from the Crusader to early Ottoman periods (Fig. 1). The tower showed signs of defortification in post-Crusader times, with restorations on the south external façade and domestic activities emerging outside the entrance (TU 16), evidenced by trash pits containing animal and fish bones. A nearby L-shaped platform (MSU 16056) possibly served as a staircase base, likely dating to the Medieval (Crusader) period.

The ongoing study of pottery from areas 15000 and 16000 provided preliminary insights. It revealed a prevalence of handmade pottery (including handmade geometric painted ware [HMGP]), mainly cooking wares and jars, suggesting a probable Middle Islamic-period horizon. This observation is particularly evident in the earlier stratigraphic evidence from both areas, encompassing layers such as 16058 and 16088—the latter two likely associated with the construction of the aforementioned platform. Lithic finds included a marble fragment from the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century AD and a repurposed marble threshold, suggesting Roman-Byzantine occupation.

The South Rupesian Chapel (Leporatti and Vanni-Desideri 2020) (Fig. 2) suggests a mixed-up scenario, with Middle to Late Islamic and pre-Crusader period materials. The chapel, characterized by a semicircular apse carved into the rock and covered in a 1 cm-thick white plaster, exhibits evidence of multiple restorations. The north side features a 10 cm-thick wall coating (SU 126036) composed of white mortar, sandstone, and Byzantine-period pottery fragments. This layer is covered by a 1 cm-thick smooth white plaster (126037). An earthquake probably occurred during the Crusader period, causing the collapse of the rock-cut apse and the ceiling, damaging the north wall. Subsequently, the chapel underwent a restoration including new perimetral walls (MSU 126008 and MSU 126002-3), covered by new plaster (SU 126040), and two arches supporting a flat roof, suggested by collapse composition of MSU 126008. Finally, the south wall underwent significant changes, with blocks removed to carve a small apse, possibly a mihrab (Fig. 3). These findings confirm the already proposed hypothesis of a monastic phase preceding the Crusader period, as well as a transformative phase from a Christian chapel to a mosque (late Ottoman period).



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 Petra: Al-Wu'ayra (Medieval Petra)

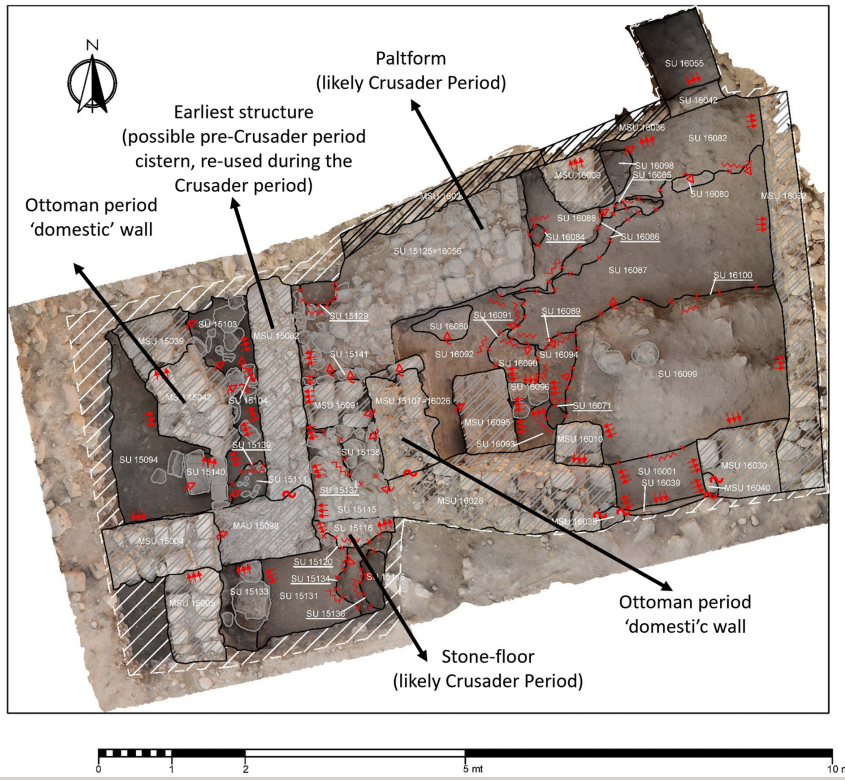


Fig. 1. Plan of excavation areas 15000 and 16000, with indication of the periods attributable to the main structures still visible. (Image courtesy of the University of Florence—Medieval Petra Archive.)



Fig. 2. Isometric (or bird's-eye) view of the chapel from the northeast during the excavation. Note the collapsed arch supporting the flat roof and the mihrab on the south wall. (Image courtesy of the University of Florence—Medieval Petra Archive.)

Il crollo dopo l'abbandono della moschea

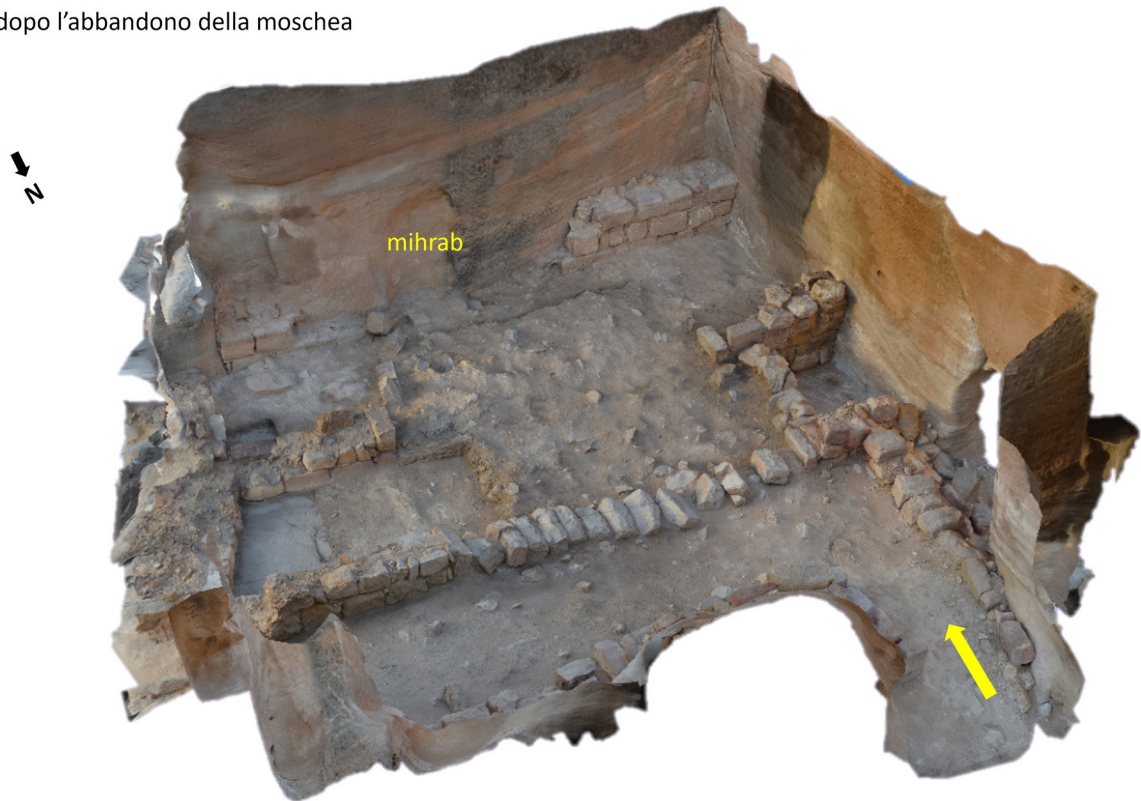


Fig. 3. Plan of the chapel under excavation. Note the collapse of the arch MSU 126008 supporting the new flat roof. (Image courtesy of the University of Florence—Medieval Petra Archive.)

### References

- Leporatti, S. and A. Vanni Desideri. 2020. "Monks across the Desert: Hermitic Life in Christian Petra." *Studies in Ancient Art and Civilisation* 24: 133–152.
- Nucciotti M., and R. Ranieri. 2024. "Medieval Petra 2022: Excavation at the Northeastern Tower Complex at al-Wu'ayra (Petra - Jordan)." *Spolia: Journal of Medieval Studies* 20 (10): 1–44. < [spolia.it/online/it/documents/Nucciotti\\_Ranieri\\_Spolia24\\_Estratto.pdf](http://spolia.it/online/it/documents/Nucciotti_Ranieri_Spolia24_Estratto.pdf) >