

ANCIENT SKIES

"Come Search With Us!"

Official Logbook of the Ancient Astronaut Society

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PETRA

BY GENE M. PHILLIPS*

In April 1978 I received a letter from the French author Robert Charroux. "In May I am going to Petra among other places," he wrote. "When I return I will send you photos and an article for Ancient Skies." At the time, Charroux was a prolific and very popular writer in the field of ancient mysteries, having published his first book in 1963, five years before Erich von Daniken's Chariots of the Gods? shocked the scientific community. A world traveller, Charroux's books were based upon his first-hand experiences at the places he visited.

Unfortunately, soon after returning from Petra, Robert Charroux died and our members were deprived of the benefit of his observations from the ancient astronaut viewpoint of that mysterious city. That prompted me to research the literature about the fabled site and in November 1982, I had the pleasure of leading an Ancient Astronaut Society Member Expedition to the Middle East during which we explored the "red rose city, half as old as time." (1)

Petra is old. Archaeological evidence shows that the area was inhabited by humans thousands of years before recorded history. Petra's first written history appears in the Bible as the land around Mount Seir (Esh Shera), home of the cave-dwelling Horites. It was first mentioned at the time of Abraham, who had two sons, Isaac and Ishmael. Isaac, the father of the Hebrews in Canaan, had two sons, Jacob and Esau. After a falling out, Esau took his family to Mount Seir and they became the Edomites. After hundreds of years of fighting between the descendants of Jacob and the descendants of Esau, the Edomites finally gained the territory, only to be driven out by the descendants of Abraham's other son, Ishmael, an Arab tribe called the Nabateans. They are credited with producing the fantastic stoneworks of the Petra area.

Petra became a powerful trade center under the Nabateans, but it was conquered by the Romans in A.D. 106. Much Roman influence is still evident in the city - stone paved roads, Romanized architecture in some of the edifices, and the colossal amphitheatre, which was carved out of the living rock and seats up to 5,000 spectators.

But, all good things come to an end. In the 7th Century A.D. the Arabs conquered Petra and closed it to the outside world for more than a thousand years. It was not until 1812 that a Swiss traveller, John Burckhardt, entered Petra disguised as a Bedouin sheik and was fortunate enough to escape and return

to tell of its mysteries. Because the Arabs considered Petra to be a holy place, "infidels" (non-believers) were not permitted to enter its confines. In 1836, John Lloyd Stephens became the first American to visit Petra, but he also was disguised - as an Arab "Merchant of Cairo." (2)

Petra is located in southern Jordan halfway between the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba, about 160 miles south of the capital city of Amman, in a desert area of sand and stone mountain ranges.

Perhaps the most baffling aspect of Petra is its entrance through "El Siq" (a cleft). A narrow defile through precipitous ranges of rock 500 to 1000 feet high, the Siq meanders from its outside entrance for more than a mile to its abrupt terminus into a cross-gorge. Twisting and turning, the narrow passage, 20 to 60 feet wide, winds through the towering cliff sides. Ancient people have cut water channels into the sides of the rock faces to carry water into the city. We had the choice of walking through the Siq, or going by horseback, a service strongly recommended by the local concessionaires, so we chose the equestrian method. Our horses slipped and slid on the uneven pavement of stones, placed there during the Roman occupation. After a half-hour of the slow-moving and tiresome pace, we rounded a bend and were struck by a stupendous sight - the relative darkness of the Siq gave way to brilliant sunlight and we saw, framed

between the rock faces, a sliver of what appeared to be an exquisite building facade. (See Fig. 1). The effect was dramatic and we got the impression that a curtain was being opened to reveal a futuristic world of beauty and color, in sharp contrast to the dark, drab surroundings of the narrow defile through which we had just passed. We paused to enjoy our first view of El Khazna (The Treasury), which has been called the finest of the "monuments" of Petra.

Emerging from the Siq, we crossed a rather flat ground of the cross-gorge for about 150 feet

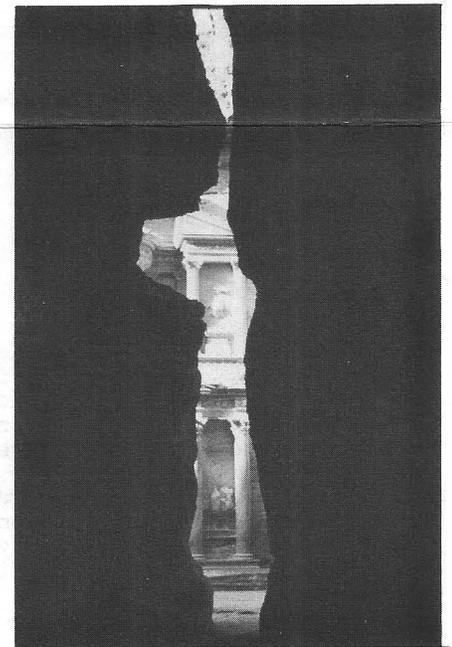


Fig. 1. First view of the Treasury from the Siq.

(Continued on next page) Photo by Marie Gieser.

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 to reach the portico of the magnificent edifice. Not a building, not a construction, the Treasury was sculpted out of the living rock! (See Fig.2).

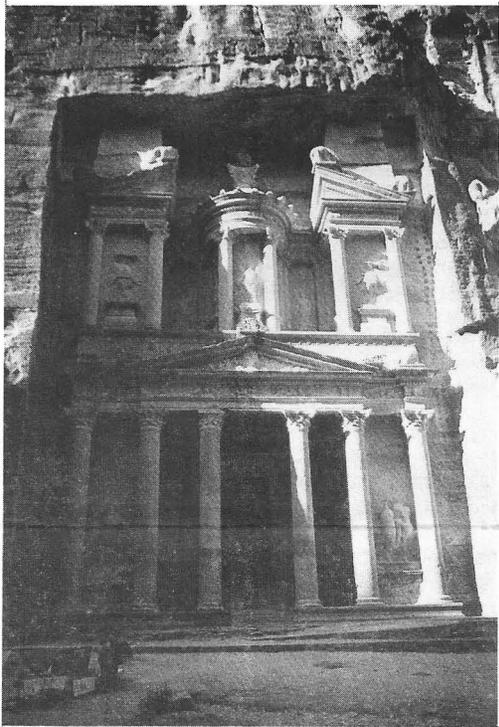
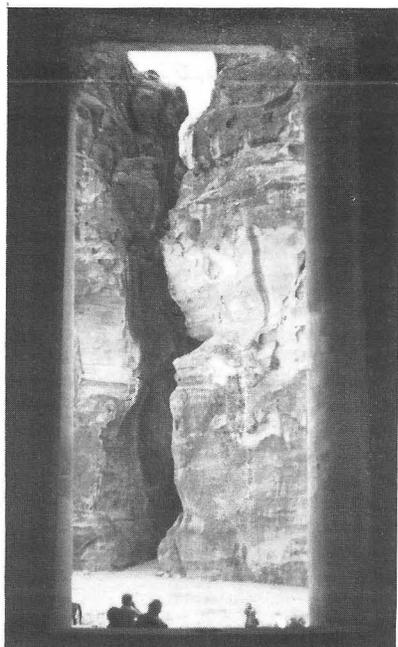


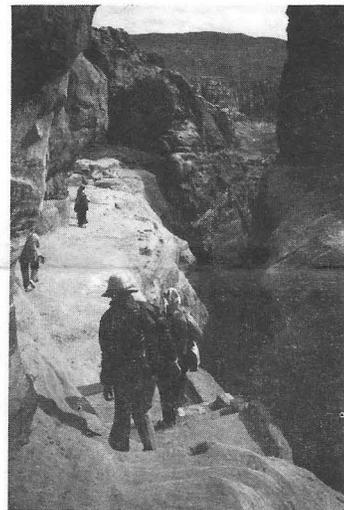
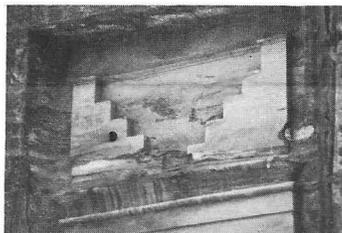
Fig.2. The Treasury. Photo by Gene M. Phillips

Not simply a bas relief, this is a fully-formed, three dimensional structure with huge columns in front and with large rooms cut into the rock behind the facade. The scale is huge. From the base of the portico to the top is about 180 feet! The door in the portico into the rooms is almost 40 feet high. Perhaps the most tantalizing features of the ruby-red facade are the cameoed carvings which appear in some of the insets in the structure. These elaborate sculptures feature elegantly gowned ladies and imposing personages on horseback. Standing in the portico and looking back we had a beautiful view of where we emerged from the Siq. (See Fig.3 below. Photo by Gene M. Phillips.)



Moving on from the Treasury towards the city itself, we saw many carved facades in the rock cliff faces. Some depict the stepped design, called the "stairway to heaven" (See Fig.4), which can also be seen in the ruins at Tiahuanaco in Bolivia, South America. There are some 1000 "monuments" carved into the rock faces of Petra, but only about 25 of them are considered to be of classical Greek or Roman design. The rest are attributed to the Nabateans, although one wonders if that nomadic tribe really possessed the technological capability to produce such exquisite works.

People still live in the cave dwellings inside Petra. In fact, the Petra Post Office is in a cave hewn out of the rock.



Left: Fig.4. The "stairway to heaven" motif.
 Right: Fig.5. Treacherous pathway to the Monastery. Photos by Gene M. Phillips.

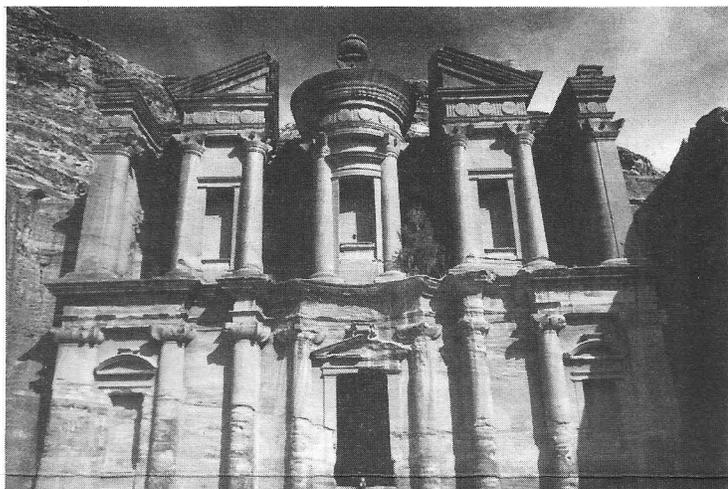
Petra is large. It covers an area of about four square miles. The distance between the two principal "temples", the Treasury (El Khazna) at the end of the Siq and the Monastery (Ed Der), atop a 1000 foot high stone range, is over two miles. Although our guide advised against our making the trek to see the Monastery (he was tired and it was hot), we started from the valley floor in the central part of the city and climbed over 600 feet up a steep, winding path of rock steps and inclines to reach a level path which skirts an open chasm hundreds of feet deep. There were no hand railings or protective barriers, so we treaded slowly, hugging the side of the rock face. (See Fig.5). About halfway up this treacherous pathway we looked up towards the sky and got a first glimpse of what appeared to be a huge stone urn perched high among the rocks. After we reached the top, we saw that the urn was actually the topmost feature of the Monastery, another exquisite "temple" carved out of the rock. One-third of the stone mountain top has been sliced away to provide a stone face large enough to accommodate this colossus, the size of which is overwhelming. From its base to the top of the urn is about 260 feet and the doorway is 50 feet high! (See Fig.6). Inside the doorway one huge room has been carved out of the rock mountainside. One very interesting feature of the Monastery is its capitals at the top of its columns and at the base of the urn. Neither Grecian nor Roman, these capitals are uniquely shaped, unlike any others in the world.

We saw that the lower few feet of the facade of the Treasury has been water damaged, but this was not surprising because it stands at the level of the floor of the Siq, which has been known to flood. However, at the Monastery, some two miles away and about 1000 feet higher, we also saw that there is evidence of water damage to the lower several feet

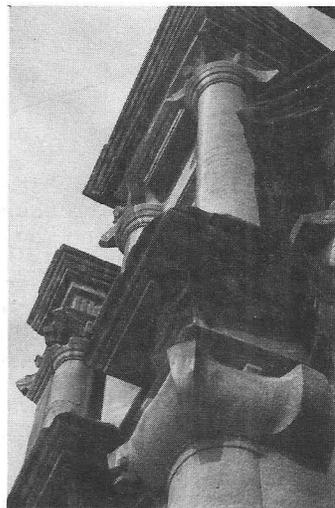
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of the facade. Obviously there was a huge inundation in times past to produce damage at that higher level, which leads to the speculation that the monuments of Petra are much older than believed, perhaps pre-dating the biblical flood.



Above: Fig.6. The Monastery. Below: Huge doorway and unique capitals. Photos by Gene M. Phillips.



It is inconceivable that the Nabateans, a nomadic tribe of Bedouins, could have produced the exquisite artistry in stone that is Petra. It is one thing to cut steps in stone with crude instruments, but another thing to plan, design and execute three-dimensional works of art in stone. Where did they get the tools? Where did they get the engineering and technological skills? There did they get the architectural skills? Where did they get the mathematics essential for producing such works? And where did they get the artistic and cultural knowledge? It is apparent that the Nabateans did not possess such skills and if they produced the works of art at Petra, it must have been under the direction of a more advanced civilization unknown to us. Or, they did not do it at all and a technologically advanced prior civilization produced the marvels. History has credited the Nabateans simply because they came upon the scene at a later date.

Notes:

- (1) National Geographic Magazine, February 1935, p. 129.
- (2) Incidents of Travel in Egypt, Arabia Petraea and The Holy Land, by John Lloyd Stephens. First published in New York in 1837. New Edition published by University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, Oklahoma (1970).

THE SEARCH CONTINUES

BY DR. STUART W. GREENWOOD*

Is it true that there is a dearth of new ideas on the ancient astronaut hypothesis? Let us suppose for a moment that the answer is "yes". Before we lapse into a state of melancholia as a result, let us consider the nature of all objective research - in this area or any other. It is a familiar experience of researchers that the pursuit of truth is accompanied by peaks and valleys of accomplishment. Moreover, the intervals of the peaks are often regrettably short, while the periods of the valleys are often agonizingly long. Research is certainly work, whatever else it is, and there is no guarantee of an even emergence of discovery in any given period of time.

So, maybe we're currently in a bit of a valley. Perhaps the easier part of our search is behind us. Now we need to take stock and prepare for deeper analysis of what we have already found. Critics of our efforts are fond of challenging us to provide evidence of ancient visits to Earth by extraterrestrials. I find it helpful to take a broad view of this challenge in terms of the general problem of scientific investigation of the remote past.

We take as a starting point the problem of identifying anything that exists, or has existed, on Earth as essentially terrestrial in origin. I use the term "essentially" to allow for the possible origin of matter on Earth as initially formed from events in space in the very distant past. We do know of some extraterrestrial items on Earth, for example meteorites, and the Moon rocks brought back by the Apollo astronauts. But what of all the rest? Let us contemplate a question that will strike many as unreal - Is mankind extraterrestrial?

The evolutionist will dismiss the question as ridiculous, for mankind is a comparatively recent product of the process of evolution on Earth. The only problem with this is that it has not been proven. In fact, the whole concept of evolution applied to all life on our planet continues to frustrate its supporters, and the wonder is that they don't just drop it. Whatever merit it might have is obviously confined to second or third order effects.

Disentangling mankind from the evolutionary maze is important to the future of the ancient astronaut hypothesis because it will permit scientists hitherto submerged in the evolutionary fog to take a clearer look at alternative scenarios about the human past. The picture that continues to emerge as research continues suggests that mankind has existed on Earth far longer than was earlier supposed. The general problem is that it is extremely difficult, perhaps largely impossible, to visualize events that took place in human affairs millions of years ago, and we can only attempt interpretations of such remnants of apparent evidence that survive to the present. My own belief is that the ancient astronaut hypothesis will gain increasing acceptance in the scientific community as a basis for analyzing the remote past, not because of some demonstrated proof of extraterrestrial contact but by an accumulation of supportive interpretation that best accounts for the data available.

The fundamental problem that faces all who attempt interpretation of ancient artifacts is to identify the extent to which the original message has been modified by embellishment or conscious change. Those Colombian gold objects typified by the Ancient Astronaut Society's logo cannot be positively identified as anything specific, so they have been variously described as stylized insects, and such. Unfortunately, there are no insects with vertical tail fins, so presumably that is considered stylization. But suppose the vertical tail fins are part of the real message, then perhaps the

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artifacts are symbols that indicate that one-way spacecraft from orbit once landed in South America, as I have suggested. But there are features on the artifacts that resemble insect characteristics. As with many other investigations in which we have been involved, the file on this one is still open and awaits inputs from modern researchers.

Critics sometimes dismiss ancient astronaut studies on the grounds that no convincing evidence has been produced that such events occurred. The argument appears to be that if we haven't found anything then we shouldn't have been looking. If we were to accept that position then we would have to criticize the long search by evolutionists for links between modern man and his alleged predecessors. Moreover, in more recent times, the SETI search for electromagnetic communications from extraterrestrial intelligences at interstellar distances would have to be declared a waste. There was not one iota of evidence of such communications when the SETI programs were undertaken, and this is still the position today. Now I happen to believe that SETI type operations are worthwhile, but their proponents should grant to ancient astronaut researchers the same leeway in looking for evidence that they themselves enjoy.

In those far-off days of the 1930's in Britain leading up to World War II, I was a teenager that eagerly acquired American pulp magazines containing fictional accounts of adventures on the planets and moons of our Solar System. At the same time, proposals for real space flights from Earth were gaining increasing attention, and gained notable stimulus from American and German developments in rocketry. In today's scientific community the emphasis on extraterrestrial intelligence has placed it safely at stellar distances, where it can be clinically contemplated. I believe this interest will chunter along fairly comfortably for the foreseeable future, but that scientists will pay progressively more attention to the history of life in our Solar System and events on its planets and moons. The search continues, and with it, I believe, our increasing involvement.

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THE DRAGON AND THE PEARL

BY DR. STUART W. GREENWOOD

From ancient skies they came to Earth
Thousands of years ago
And as they orbited above
They viewed the world below
And marvelled at the show

We call their view Asia today
Though then it had no name
Some looked toward the East and saw
The Dragon and its flame
Did they all see the same?

China was its head
and India its lower jaw
Malaysia its tongue
Sumatra, Java, flames galore
From volcanoes by the score

Sri Lanka was the Pearl
Shining from the darker sea
The Dragon's Head and Pearl
Linked for posterity
That's how it came to be

But now we hide the Dragon's Head
Our globes and maps face North
Rotate them ninety full degrees
The Dragon will show forth
As East replaces North

Critics reading this will vow
Its just an inkblot test
We see just what we wish to see
And what about the rest?
But heed at my behest

The Dragon myth entails for sure
Links to water and to flight
What else explains its origin?
Is there anything that might
Help us toward the light?

If not, we may have here a clue
To add to other clues
That ancient astronauts came here
Our planet to peruse
And settle as they choose

ODD OBJECTS FROM BELOW

BY CHARLES PIZZANO**

According to our anthropologists, mankind evolved from tree-swinging apes two or three million years ago. From that primitive beginning homo erectus gradually increased in intelligence until achieving the complexities of modern civilization. But this concept is open to question, especially when we consider those unusual artifacts found deep underground:

In 1891 a woman from Morrisonville, Illinois was breaking up pieces of coal to fit in her stove when a golden chain fell out. The state geological survey declared the coal to be from the Carboniferous era some 300 million years back.

In 1897 near Webster City, Iowa a puzzling find was made two thousand feet below the surface. Miners came upon a slab of rock two feet long, one foot wide and four inches thick. It was inscribed with lines forming diamond shapes. Within each diamond was the carved face of an old man.

In 1912 when a large chunk of coal was shattered an iron pot was revealed. It had come from the Wilburton mine in Oklahoma. The coal was deemed to be 312 million years old.

In 1928 a wall of polished concrete blocks turned up in another mine at Heavener, Oklahoma. The blocks were imbedded in a vein of Carboniferous coal having an age of 285 million years.

In 1968 quarry workers at Saint Jean de Livet, France, found some rectangular-shaped metal tubes. They were retrieved from a chalk layer 65 million years old.

What were these obviously hand-crafted artifacts doing deep in the earth? As a rule, conventional scientists ignore such discoveries - this is easier than trying to explain them. However, if even a single object proves to be valid, then the entire early history of homo sapiens will have to be rewritten.

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