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► **To cite this version:**

Christian Augé, François Renel, Laurent Borel, Chrystelle March. New Excavations in the Qasr al-Bint Area at Petra. *Ḥawliyyat dā irat al-ātār al-’ammaṯ* = Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, 2002, 46, pp.309-313. hal-03325484

HAL Id: hal-03325484

<https://hal.science/hal-03325484>

Submitted on 24 Aug 2021

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NEW EXCAVATIONS IN THE QAŞR AL-BINT AREA AT PETRA

Christian Augé, François Renel, Laurent Borel and Chrystelle March

The New Project

Since 1999, a French mission has been carrying out new excavations at Petra, in the sacred precinct (the temenos) of the well-known Nabataean temple called "Qaşr al-Bint" (قصر البنت). The temple proper had been in the 1970s and 80s the subject of partial excavations, studies and restorations by the Department of Antiquities, helped by architect François Larché, then of the French Institute of Archaeology in the Near East (IFAPO). The scientific publication of their results is currently in press in Paris: this book written by Fawzi Zayadine, François Larché and Jacqueline Dentzer-Feydy contains an updated study of the architecture and decoration of the Qaşr and of its cults (Zayadine *et al.*, in press).

Little was known about the surrounding buildings, which had attracted the attention of the early 19th century travellers and of German archaeologists in the early 20th century (especially Wiegand, in Bachmann *et al.* 1921). The excavations of Peter J. Parr and G.R.H. Wright, and later on of Fawzi Zayadine, had been limited in this area to the southernmost part of the paved court, between the altar and the great stairway of the temple, and to the steps themselves (Parr *et al.* 1968; Zayadine 1981; 1982: 374-376, pl. 124-127).

In order to set the temple back in its architectural and archaeological context and to secure more precise chronology, a new project initiated by the Department of Antiquities¹ and IFAPO started in 1999, thanks to the IFAPO directors, Jean-Mærie Dentzer and Jean-Louis Huot, and to Jean-Pierre Braun, then in charge of the 'Ammân branch. Since 2001, these researches became part of a regional programme, "From Petra to Wadi Ramm", directed

by Christian Augé (CNRS, Paris-Nanterre) and subsidized by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with the efficient help of the French Embassy at 'Ammân, of IFAPO and of several donors.²

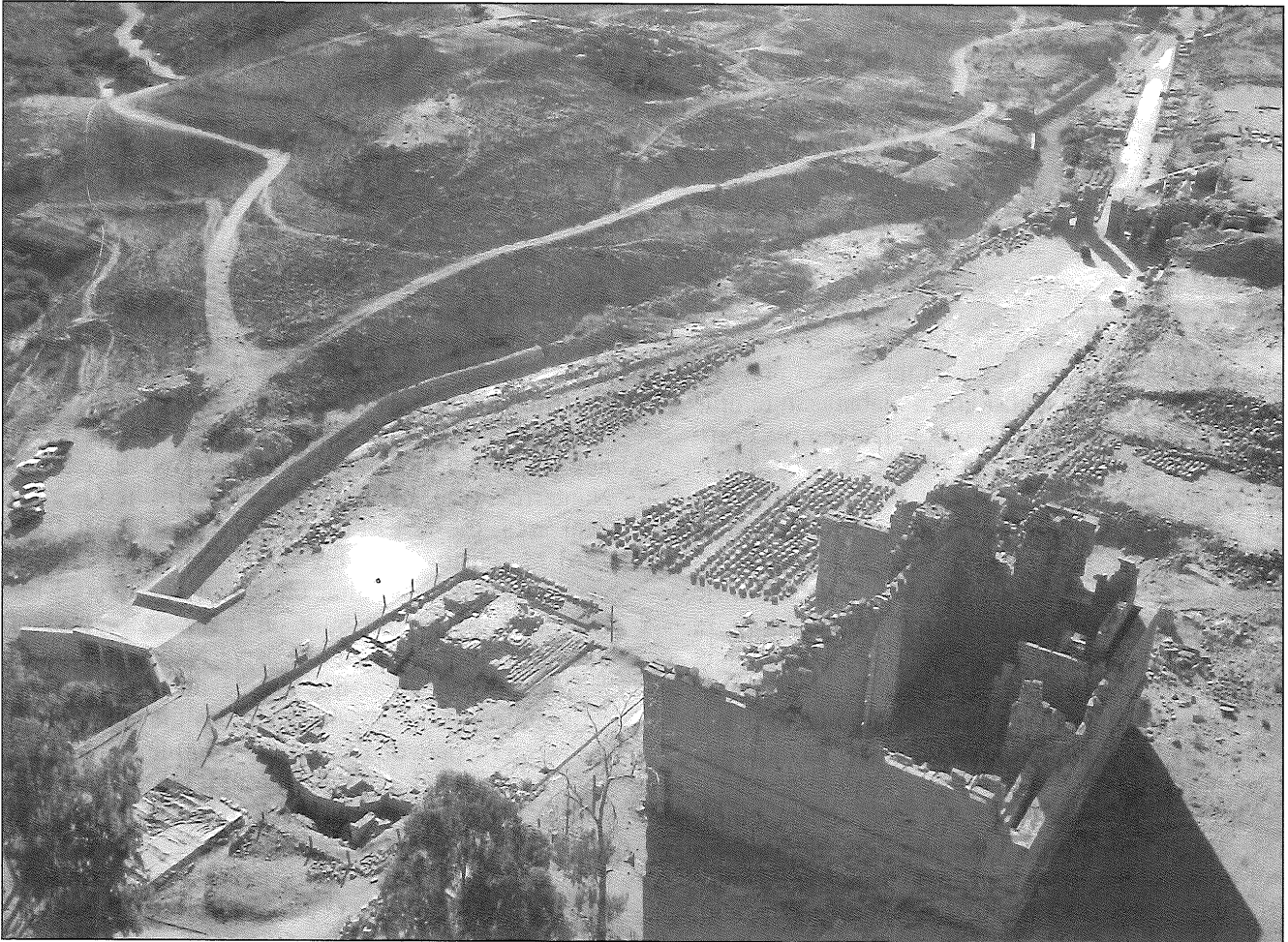
Five seasons of fieldwork, led by François Renel (Associate Researcher to the CNRS team at Nanterre) were already carried out in the Qaşr al-Bint area, the last of which was carried out from 23rd March to 15th May 2002. The team first investigated the main altar erected in the axis of the Qaşr and the exedra built on the western wall of the court, as well as an extensive Nabataean building, located close to the temple on the east. The programme of the mission includes the study of all the western part of the temple complex, that long paved courtyard entered through a monumental gate at the end of the main axis of the ancient town, the architecture and decoration of which are obviously linked to those of the whole temenos. In the year 2000, after the cutting off and diversion of the service driveway that crossed the area, the ancient pavement of the court was cleared out, setting off the high temple walls and the adjacent structures. Near the modern bridge across Wādī Mūsā first investigation of the northwestern corner of the precinct was performed in April-May 2002. At the same time, in the area formerly excavated by P. J. Parr and by Fawzi Zayadine, part of the steps of the Qaşr was unearthed, establishing a visible link between the temple and the courtyard (Fig. 1).

In order to inform visitors about the work in progress, three provisional notice boards in French, Arabic and English were recently set up near the work area, and a leaflet was prepared in both French and English. Until more elaborate reports are published,³ the following report aim only to

1. We express our warmest thanks to the directors and officials of the Department, Drs Ghazi Bisheh, Fawwaz al-Khraysheh and Fawzi Zayadine, and to the officials and staff of the Antiquities Office and Museum at Petra, especially Mr Sulayman Farajat and Mr Muhamad 'Abd al-Aziz.
2. The project includes two other operations in the same region: epigraphical and archaeological researches by Laïla Nehmé, CNRS Paris (including the excavation of the "Obodas Chapel" in Wādī Numayr at Petra, epigraphical surveys and further studies linked to the publication of her *Archaeological Atlas of Petra*), and the archaeological survey and mapping of Jabal ash-Sharāh by Laurent Tholbecq, Asso-

ciate Researcher to CNRS (Nanterre and Brussels). The Jordanian-French Mission in Wādī Ramm (Fawzi Zayadine and Saba Farès-Drappeau), with the participation of Saudi archaeologists and epigraphists, forms another part of the same regional programme

3. Already published articles: Dentzer and Renel 2000: 61; Renel 2001: 29-30. Several articles are in press or in preparation, among which are a preliminary report by F. Renel *et al.* for *ADAJ*; F. Renel, C. Augé, J. Dentzer-Feydy *et al.*, *Travaux récents dans le sanctuaire du Qaşr à Pétra*, to be published in *Syria*; and Zayadine, forthcoming.



1. General view of the excavated area (by L. Borel).

give a brief summary of the results of the work, and to make an updated plan of the area available to any person concerned with the topography of central Petra.⁴

The First Results

The great sacrificial altar was investigated and restored in 2000 (Fig. 2), owing to a donation of the firm Radisson SAS, implemented through the UNESCO agency at ‘Ammān. This formerly Nabataean building went through several transformations in Roman times, to which it is still difficult to ascribe precise dates. Remains of its marble cladding and decorative mouldings can still be seen. The cavity opened at the top of the altar was connected with an intricate system of channels and drains hollowed out on and under the pavement of the courtyard, the understanding of which is one of our main points of interest.

A monumental exedra was built on the western enclosure wall of the temenos (Fig. 3), in connec-

tion with a second altar — the north altar — which is almost square in shape and carefully clad with polychrome marble. The curved exedra is comprised of a high central platform flanked by projecting columns. It was adorned with statues, some of them larger than life and probably intended to honour the imperial family, as indicated by inscriptions naming Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, co-rulers in AD 161-169, that were found in the excavation (to be published by Zayadine, forthcoming). A number of fragments of marble and sandstone sculpture were found in the destruction layers of the monument, mixed with pieces from the Qaşr itself, thus providing rich study material to Jacqueline Dentzer-Feydy (CNRS Paris-Nanterre), who is in charge of the study of architectural decoration for both buildings. After the destruction and leveling down of the exedra in later Roman times, a dwelling was built upon its remains, and subsequently destroyed in the fifth century AD.

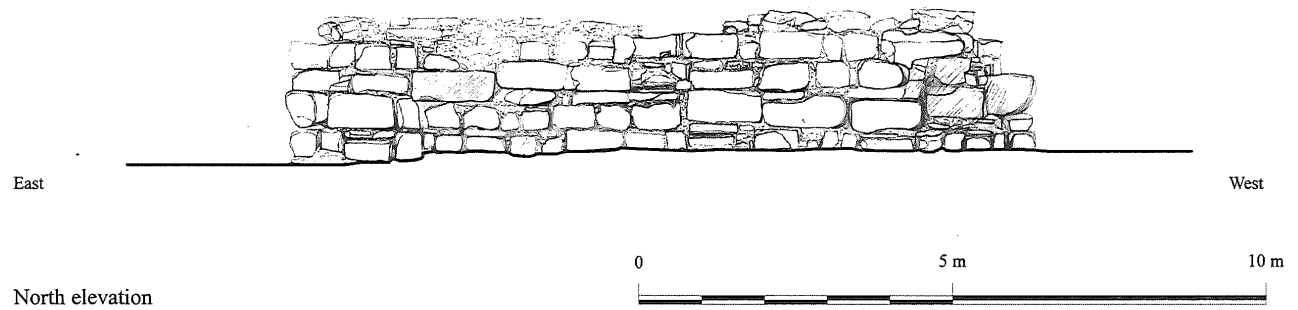
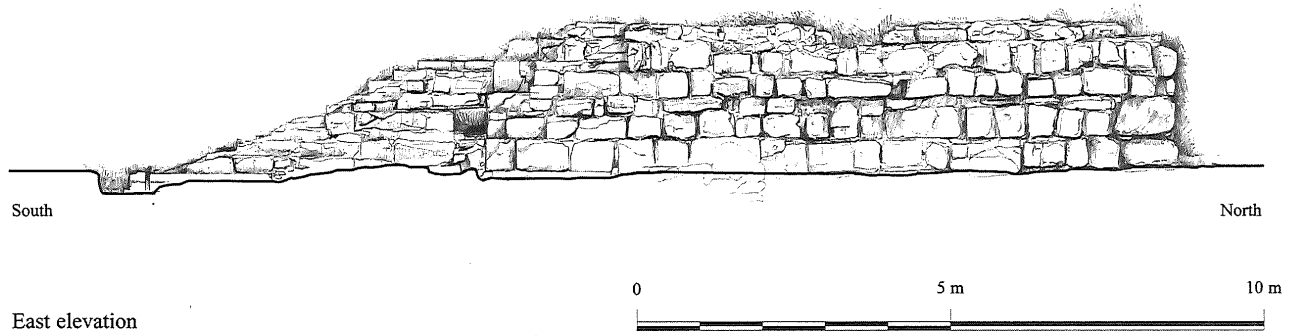
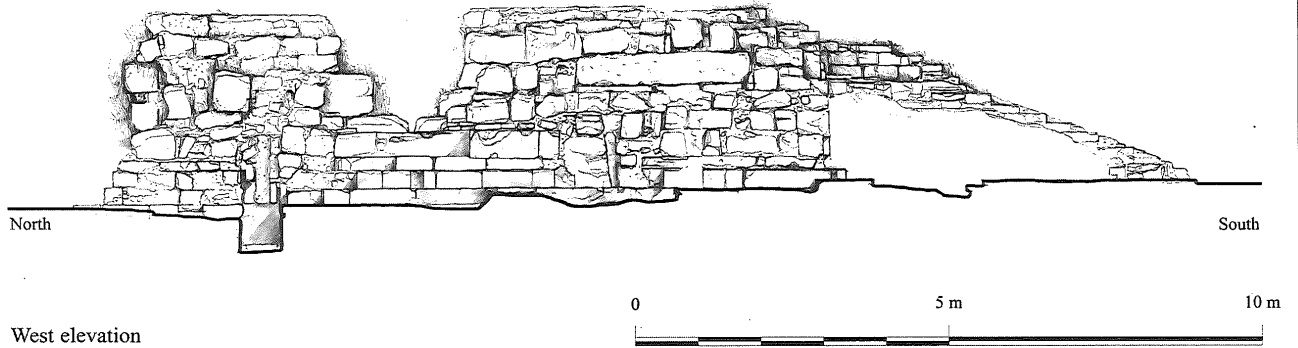
On the eastern side of the Qaşr, the team under-

4. Especially in connection with the important Petra Mapping Project by ACOR and the Hashemite University, and the Pe-

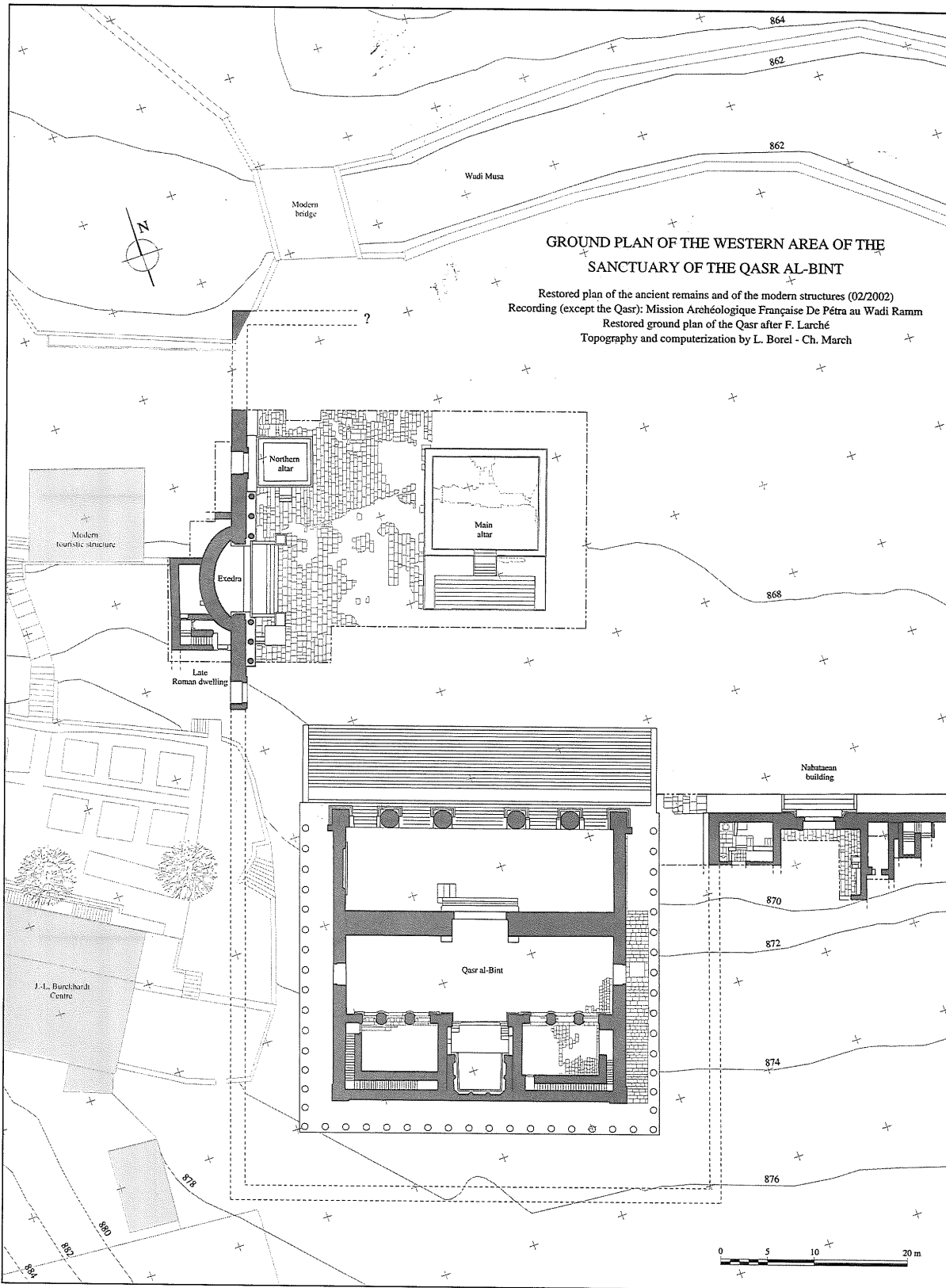
tra Documentation Center of ACOR. For their presentation, see Kanellopoulos and Akasheh 2001.

ALTAR OF THE QASR AL-BINT

Recording by L. Borel, E. Laroze and Ch. March
Computerization by L. Borel and Ch. March (2000)



2. West, east and north elevations of the main altar, by L. Borel, E. Laroze and C. March.



3. New plan of the western part of the temenos (February 2002) by L. Borel (IFAPO 'Ammān) and C. March, from recordings of the French Mission and the restored plan of the Qasr al-Bint by F. Larché.

took the excavation of an extensive Nabataean building, located behind the temenos enclosure and opening onto the sacred court through a monumen-

tal gate, notable for its huge monolithic threshold. Its large entrance hall and a row of rooms were partly excavated, showing the remains of a Late

Roman reoccupation. In the next campaigns, the mission intends to focus on the excavation and study of this building, in order to get more accurate information about its plan, its function — it was perhaps devoted to some official use in the Nabataean period — and about its precise chronology.

The five campaigns carried out up till now yielded a considerable amount of material, especially beautiful pieces of sculpture illustrating the imperial adaptation of this sacred area during the second century AD. From ceramics, coins and various artefacts, rich documentation has been gathered on the Late Roman phases of occupation and reoccupation around the former temple. At first sight, the results confirm the general conclusions reached by the American and Swiss missions in neighbouring areas: this part of the ancient town seems to have outlived the famous earthquake of AD 363. Further excavation, study and analysis should provide us with more precise information about the Nabataean period, especially on the planning of the whole sanctuary in Nabataean times, on the chronological sequence of the structures, and on the insertion of the temple in a comprehensive architectural programme.

A Plan of the Area

One of the first achievements of the mission is the ground plan of the whole area, due to its architects, Laurent Borel (IFAPO 'Ammān) and Chrystelle March. This plan is published here for the first time (Fig. 3).⁵ It results from the architectural recordings of the different structures, the altar, the exedra and the Nabataean building, that were drawn by several members of the Mission since 1999: C.-É. Bertrand, L. Borel, E. Laroze, C. March, H. Morel-Renel, M. Perrin, F. Renel and E. Ronza. Those plans, together with the restored plan of the Qaṣr al-Bint by F. Larché, were assembled, checked and rectified with complements by L. Borel and C. March.

This new plan reflects the progress of fieldwork after the fourth campaign of the Mission, in spring 2001, and now gives a reliable picture of the western part of the temenos. New features appeared in the fifth campaign (spring 2002), such as the pavement around the main altar and between the altar and the steps of the Qaṣr, and newly excavated rooms in the Nabataean building, but time was too short after the last season to get the drawings ready for publication. They will appear in future reports.

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5. This plan is also to appear in the forthcoming book by Zayadine et al., in press