

BRAP BEAT



**Balu'a
Regional
Archaeological
Project**

BRAP 2026 Begins!

By Monique Roddy



After two cancelled seasons the BRAP is back in the field with a small but enthusiastic team for the first time since 2022. We excavate this season from 21 June to 21 July, giving us four full weeks to accomplish our goals across three areas of excavation. Our field staff will report in the following pages, but we are excited to return to excavate in the Islamic Village and to open new excavations north of the Qasr. We will also carry out strategic probes at the House, which underwent conservation efforts in Summer 2025. We look forward to further partnerships with Sela for Training and Protection of Heritage this summer and will report on the community engagement events from last summer and this summer as well. Over the course of the season participants will join from the USA, Canada, Germany, and

Jordan; look forward to meeting them in these pages. Head to @BRAPJordan on Instagram to stay in touch with regular updates and photos.

This week our Pathways to Presentation team cleared trails to ease movement across site and provide access to spectacular views across the wadi for our end-of-workweek tour. We've admired the fields of grain being harvested around us (some is growing right on site between areas of excavation – Balu'a, which is owned by the government, provides for its surrounding communities still). And we've enjoyed reconnecting with our workers, who come from the nearby villages of Smakieh and Nazazeh, and from the tents right across from the site. It's been a full and productive first week, we're glad to be here. Enjoy catching up on our latest efforts here!

An Administrative District?

By Kent Bramlett, Director

Following the looting and closure of the excavation trenches adjacent to the Qasr which we investigated in the previous three field seasons (see 2017-2022 issues of *BRAP Beat*), we decided to continue work in the acropolis area of Balu'a in an area further to the north. This position holds the highest elevation on the site and commands a 180-degree view of the Wadi al-Balu'a. In the tradition of royal architecture, it would have been the ideal location for administrative buildings associated with the local elite. Wall lines can be traced on the surface over one hundred feet in length and suggest large structures lie below. We selected locations in two squares to address questions regarding wall relationships and stratigraphy that should help us determine the building plans, maybe identify an entrance area, and ultimately, understand the function of this space.

Qasr North

By Jake Hill, Area Supervisor

The 2026 excavation at “Qasr North: The Administrative District” aims to identify a possible Iron II administrative complex north of the Qasr. On the surface, the large wall lines connected to the Qasr imply the possibility of a large structure at the acropolis of Balu'a—associated with administrative activity. To reveal this structure and understand its role at the site we opened a new area of excavation at Qasr North for the BRAP 2026 season. With the first week of BRAP 2026 wrapped up, “Team Qasr North,” which includes Sarah, Raúl, Ryan, Alex, Sanford, Nathaniel, Naif, Awad, and Ahmad, has gotten off to a strong start. This week, we first focused on defining our excavation field and clearing surface debris not associated with the architecture. Following this initial cleanup, we began excavating, uncovering large walls ca. 1.8 meters thick and a possible doorway. In the coming weeks we will work to define these architectural features, clarify the date of this possible complex, and determine its relationship to the Qasr in order to evaluate its political and economic role at Iron Age Balu'a.

Setting up the new area north of the Qasr (MR)



Large wall lines extending north of the Qasr (IJ)



The Islamic Village

By Ian W. N. Jones, Area Director

The Islamic Village is a large (ca. 10 acres) concentration of buildings in the southwestern part of the site where earlier surveys found surface pottery dating primarily to the Middle (1000-1400 AD) and Late (1400-ca. 1950 AD) Islamic periods. Excavations here began in 2022 in the Khan and continue this summer in both the Khan and a new area, the Bayt, located in the nearby village.

At the Khan we spent the first week clearing a combination of backfill, fallen stones, a truly remarkable number of thistles (probably a cotton thistle species known as *'atūr* in Arabic), and a Levantine tortoise (gently rehoused). The 2022 excavations in Khan Room K1 reached a phase dating to the 16th–17th centuries AD, or the first centuries of Ottoman rule in Jordan (see *BRAP Beat* 3:4). During this phase Room K1 had been remodeled to possibly house animals. 2022 probes suggested an earlier foundation date for the main building walls. Zainab, Omar, Mary, 'Ammar, and Salem will excavate through this phase to reach occupation phases below and answer questions about the construction and use of the khan as a road inn. Based on historical sources and residual pottery, I hypothesize a date for the khan between the 13th–14th centuries AD.

At the Bayt (surveyed in 2022, see *BRAP Beat* 3:1) Christine, Carolyn, Lo, Ma'an, and Yaman began clearing topsoil and collapse across the square. Architecture visible at the surface indicates that the Bayt is a barrel-vaulted house. Excavations this week revealed a wall that divides the southern room, B1, from a space to the north, Room B2. Room B2 may have functioned as an entryway providing access from a courtyard to Room B1 to the south and another room to the north, outside of the square. Two open spaces inside the Bayt's western wall may be small windows or lamp niches. Pottery primarily dates to the earlier part of the Late Islamic period, contemporary with the reuse phase of the Khan. A small number of residual sherds from the Roman and Byzantine periods, however, may indicate a long occupation in this area, which would help us fill a significant gap in our understanding of Balu'a's rich history.

Cleaning Khan Room K1 to reopen excavations (MR)



Thistles at the Khan (IJ)



Excavating in the Bayt collapse layers (IJ)



The House

By Monique Roddy, Director

This season we are reopening the House for limited excavation in the western rooms. Excavations in 2012, 2017, 2019, and 2022 (see previous *BRAP Beat* issues) identified this large complex as an Iron IIB domestic structure, with eight rooms excavated through three doorways and an expanding layout. A thick destruction layer preserves a surface assemblage of ceramic storage jars and food production tools excavated across the structure. Small probes in 2012 and 2022 identified an earlier Late Iron I/IIA phase. Our goal this season is to excavate larger probes below the Phase II (Iron IIB) occupational levels to establish the extent, nature, and architectural foundations of Phase I (Late Iron I/Iron IIA). While Area Director Stephanie Selover was not able to join us this season, we continue under her close (digital) supervision toward our goals.



View toward western rooms of House A (MR)

Pathways to Presentation

By Douglas Clark, Pathways Lead

The 2026 season at Balu'a saw the repair and expansion of pathways on the site constructed to give access by the excavation team to many parts of the large settlement and to provide access to visitors adventurous enough to brave the trip to get there. Begun several seasons ago, "Pathways to Presentation" formed, and still forms, an integral component of the project, creating several kilometers of 2-meter-wide trails. But over time the paths become obstructed by stones left strewn about by traversing sheep and goats and intense winter weather. It took the team of three to five of us most of two days to refresh the old trails and another two days to build out beyond the previous walkways to include new trails near excavation areas so that staff and workers could move about freely without risking twisted ankles. Perhaps the most important expansion of 2026 involved a trail from the farthest excavation field to the *hammam* (outdoor restroom facility) which cut the distance from 701 steps to 385 steps, as measured scientifically by Mary Boyd.



Clearing the trail leading from the main gate of the Iron Age settlement down into the wadi (MR)

The Fields of Moab

By Friedbert Ninow, Director

This year's excavation season of Khirbat al-Balu'a on the al-Karak plateau is framed by the wide fields of grain surrounding the ancient site that have not yet been harvested. The rising sun dips the ripe heads into a golden sea moved by the soft morning winds. This majestic golden sea greets us every morning as we reach Balu'a around 5:45 am to start our excavations.

The grain harvest in Central Jordan (Madaba area, Dhiban plateau, al-Karak plateau, Tafila) is traditionally rooted in dry-farming. The Karak plateau sits right at the 250 mm annual rain-fall isohyet, which is the general cutoff for successfully dry-farming grain. However, precipitation varies significantly depending on the exact location and elevation. Recent data suggests that over the last 15 years the average temperature has risen while the average annual rainfall has dropped.

Most of the fields around Balu'a are owned by people living in the surrounding villages like as-Smadiyah. They lease their fields to members of the Azazmeh tribe whose historical territory spans the borders between the Sinai, the Negev Desert, and southern Jordan. For centuries, these resilient pastoralists have sustained a traditional nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyle by herding flocks of goats and sheep. By working the fields during the warmer months of the year they generate additional income. During the colder winter months, the Azazmeh temporarily occupy arable and lower-lying areas of the plateau, such as the region around al-Lajjun or Wadi al-Mujeb, to seek water and a warmer climate.

While 30 years ago I could still observe the harvest of the grain fields with sickles over several

days, today the process is governed by modern combine harvesters that do the work in a few hours. Those in the region consider the vast grain fields around Balu'a as a basic resource of subsistence and a means of income. We strive to be mindful of our natural resources and to be conscious of our actions while enjoying the rolling, bright, and golden tide alongside them this summer.

The fields of grain around Balu'a (FN, top and middle)



Harvester combine crew at work around Balu'a (KB)



First Weekend Tour

by Monique Roddy

Our first weekend together as a team we loaded into our bus and headed up the Dead Sea Highway to the Baptismal Site in Jordan. This archaeological site on the Jordan River memorializes centuries of pilgrimage and religious construction on a spot on the river associated since the 5th century with the baptism of Jesus. Churches and baptismal pools marked the spot then and still do today, attracting tour groups and pilgrims now as then. We continued our journey up the plateau to Mt. Nebo where a 5th–6th century church commemorates Moses’ view of the Holy Land. The layers of mosaics excavated in the church are more of an attraction than the hazy view west, with intricate patterns featuring Christian symbols and a variety of animals and plants. We finished our jaunt in Madaba, enjoying lunch and a tour hosted by Doug Clark of the rich cultural heritage of this ancient city. From Roman roads to more gorgeous mosaics excavated in elite homes and a number of churches, we appreciated the work that MRAMP, a project Clark has been director of for a number of years, has done in cooperation with the Department of Antiquities to preserve and showcase the rich history of Madaba. Lunch at Haret Jdoudna was a particularly special treat, featuring a range of delicious dishes to introduce the team to the region’s culinary delights.



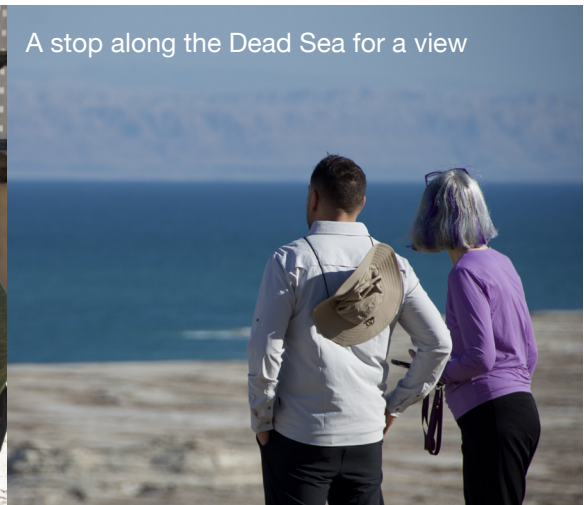
Lunch at Haret Jdoudna



Church at the Baptismal Site



Doug Clark guides the team through Madaba’s history



A stop along the Dead Sea for a view