

BRAP BEAT



Balu'a
Regional
Archaeological
Project

BRAP 2026 Week Four and Beyond: From Field to Lab

By Monique Roddy



Pottery reconstruction team hard at work on the last day! (JL)

Participants are on their way home or enjoying their last days in Jordan. Staff are busy writing reports at ACOR, the American Center of Research in Amman. After two days of moving supplies to our storehouse in Madaba and our finds to the Department of Antiquities warehouse in Amman, we are all taking a moment to breathe and reflect on our accomplishments this season.

Week Four we reached bedrock in nearly every excavation area, which gives us a complete sequence of the preserved activities in an area. We imagine then the first inhabitants as they moved in, squared up, and began construction. Thanks to these efforts, we've added new periods to our understanding of Balu'a's history of occupation, including Iron I and Byzantine phases.

"Week Five" we photographed and drew our excavations, "planting" plastic bags to mark our stopping points, ready to resume next season. Then we shifted from field work to lab work. Every item we excavated this season has been cleaned, described, registered, photographed, labeled, and carefully packed. With everything wrapped up we moved northward to Amman and delivered a preliminary report to the Department of Antiquities. While for most participants this is the end of the road for the BRAP 2026 season, for core staff, this is only the beginning. It will take us the coming years to process and analyze all that we have uncovered this season. We look forward to sharing more in the Archaeology in Jordan session at ASOR 2026 this fall!

Qasr North

By Jake Hill, Area Supervisor

We began the season excavating to understand a monumental building, approximately 25 m by 50 m in size, north of the Qasr. The presence of large wall lines, its strategic location overlooking the entrance to the site, and its connection with the Qasr suggested that this building represented a possible administrative complex. Our initial survey indicated that the plan was that of a casemate structure.

Our excavations revealed that the western part of the structure consists of two large parallel walls with a thickness of 1.8 m. Between these walls a smaller dividing wall creates adjacent casemate rooms with beaten-earth surfaces. Where the inner wall opens into a possible courtyard, the doorway stands 1.2 m wide. This possible inner courtyard had a thick plaster surface. Little remained on these surfaces to help us determine the use of these rooms except part of a pithos excavated in the northern casemate room.

Probes across Qasr North this season established the stratigraphic sequence of construction for this building. Pottery indicates an early Iron IIB foundation for the walls, which were

then filled at considerable effort with a series of leveling earth layers. The earth and plaster surfaces were then laid on top of these preparatory fills. Immediately above these surfaces we uncovered an Iron IIB destruction layer. This destruction layer included ashy soil and charcoal remains of wood beams collapsing from a roof or second story. This destruction layer matches that found in other Iron IIB occupation layers on site and as elsewhere, appears to be caused by a natural earthquake and not a violent destruction. Here at Qasr North, the pattern of wall collapse over the founding earth layers and bedrock further suggests an earthquake event, much as was seen with the collapse of one of the N-S walls at the House when excavated in 2017.

The large drainage channel or Qinah, discussed in Week 3, cut into the earlier Iron IIB occupation layers. The Qinah appears to have been utilized to collect water from contemporary surfaces, emptying into a depression to the west, which was identified as a probable cistern in BRAP's 2019 survey. While the exact provenance for the Qinah is difficult due to erosion and later human disturbances, pottery found within the Qinah's channel and plaster surface suggests an Iron IIB-C/Persian period, or later, use for the Qinah.



Tracing the Qinah to the cistern at Qasr North (JL)



The Islamic Village

By Ian W. N. Jones, Area Director

The fourth week of excavation proved very exciting in both squares in the Islamic Village. In the Khan, we continued excavating through the Middle Islamic II (1200-1400 AD) beaten earth surface into the very dense debris layers below to investigate the stone feature that began to emerge at the end of week 3. While we initially thought this feature might be associated with the Middle Islamic period building, two probes on either side of the feature revealed it to be an earlier wall, confirming our suspicion from the deep probe in the doorway last season that the Khan might be built atop an earlier structure. Pottery from the probes, including a complete Byzantine lamp belonging to a type produced in Petra, provides a tentative Byzantine-Early Islamic date for this phase. Although we cannot yet say how this building might have been used, this provides clear evidence of a new occupation phase at Khirbat al-Balu'a, and we are excited to return and continue investigating this earlier structure beneath the Khan next season.

In the Bayt, work continued in Room B1 as we reached the end of the deep collapse layers and found occupational surfaces. Careful excavation of the features we thought were tabuns revealed these instead to be two unfired, hand-

made bowls, providing very exciting evidence for domestic pottery production in the village. Although these features turned out not to be tabuns, half of a tabun rim was found lying on the surface just to the east of these bowls. Excavation in the bin on the south side of the room then revealed the bottom of this tabun half installed against the bin wall and filled with pebbles, with clear evidence of burning behind it. A hand-made, painted, two-handled jug found crushed above a possible hearth in the north side of Room B1 rounds out the interesting finds from this occupational surface. Through a valiant group effort, the team was able to reconstruct this unique jug in the last several days of the season, allowing us to document its complete form with photography, illustration, and 3D modeling. Taken together, the finds from the occupational surface in the Bayt suggest a typical household occupation of the Middle Islamic period, with evidence for cooking and other sorts of domestic production. Although a high outcropping of bedrock seems to be appearing in the western part of the room, a probe in the eastern part revealed a complicated series of fills and surfaces, likely all dating to the Middle Islamic period as well.

As always, the last week of activity in the Islamic Village was very busy, involving illustration, final photography, and backfilling of our excavation squares to protect them for next season. Although work has concluded for this season, both squares have raised new questions as they answered old ones, and we are excited to return to the village in our next field season to continue investigating these structures.



Stefan with the Byzantine lamp he excavated (IJ)



Heroic hands and the jug they rebuilt (JL)



The House

By Monique Roddy

Week Four we excavated below the Iron I cobble surface in a small probe to identify any possible earlier remains in our larger Room A5 probe. We were surprised when only a few centimeters below the cobble surface we found a second cobble surface! And a short way below that surface the expected bedrock. The 2012 probe had not identified two cobble surfaces, so this indicates a new phase at the house. Four surfaces in less than a meter of depth, each built directly on top of the surface buildup of the previous one, indicates intensive and continuous use of this area of the House over time in Phase I. The southern wall was constructed in conjunction with the cobble surfaces, providing one boundary of the structure that existed here in Phase I. We will be studying the pottery and radiocarbon samples from these surfaces carefully to clarify the dates of use of each. We look forward to expanding our Phase I exposure next season to better understand the nature of occupation in the Iron I period at Balu'a.

While in Week 3 we had started a series of probes west of the large boulders that separate the

Phase II Rooms A5 and A6, we were faced with more looting disturbances. Twice we thought we were below the looter's pits, only to then discover a modern sponge, or more memorably, a carefully excavated plastic shoe. We look forward to continuing excavation in this area next season in layers that are shoe- and sponge-free. The edges of the looters pits, however, hint at another cobble surface in one of the Room A6 probes, perhaps a westward continuation of the surface in the Room A5 probe. The large boulders that separate the two rooms tantalize as a carefully framed doorway with a westward ascent, later blocked in Phase II. But we will have to wait until next season to find out more!



Using a large sailcloth for a photo of a new locus. (JL)



Measuring the width of a large boulder between Rooms A5 (L) and A6 (R). (MR)



Excavating a modern shoe (JL)

2026 Retrospective

By Kent Bramlett

With six weeks for the BRAP directors now in the rearview mirror—one week with arrival and startup logistics, four weeks of excavation with the team, and one week of closedown and working with the Department of Antiquities on final documents and delivery of excavated materials—we can reflect on the achievements of the 2026 season.

First of all, we are grateful that a stable political situation held in Jordan such that we were able to field the team and conduct our project in a safe environment despite the regional tensions which we monitored on a daily basis. Perhaps this contributed to the tightknit and dedicated team spirit that developed. With a smaller group than initially expected, everyone stepped up and filled in where needed.

At the beginning of the season there are always hopes and expectations about what might be learned and discovered in the weeks ahead. We can now survey the accomplishments and reflect on what we've learned.

In Qasr North, we mapped out a large administrative complex and excavated parts of the compound's walls and side rooms. This area holds much potential to illuminate the period of Moabite state formation in the 9th and 8th

centuries BC (c. 900–700 BC). This is a formative period when the Iron Age kingdoms of Jordan (Ammon, Moab, and Edom) as well as Israel and Judah, were largely independent of the empires of the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians that would dominate the succeeding centuries. Future work in this area could reveal the mechanisms of state administration and provide insights into Moabite royal architecture.

At the House, we succeeded in exposing Iron I layers in the earlier phase of architecture there. This is exciting because samples from sealed sub-phases of the architecture could provide better historical dates for this period of material culture. Our hope is to recover testable carbon-14 samples from soil flotation processing and correlate this with detailed pottery analysis.

The Islamic Village also held some surprises. Not only did excavation expand to the village itself from the caravanserai (khan), but we discovered that Byzantine occupation probably lies below the Islamic period houses in some areas.

Did we achieve our season objectives? Mostly yes, and in some cases, more than expected. There were surprises too, and that leads to new research potential. We are already looking forward to the next field season even as we have much work to do in analyzing and publishing this year's work.

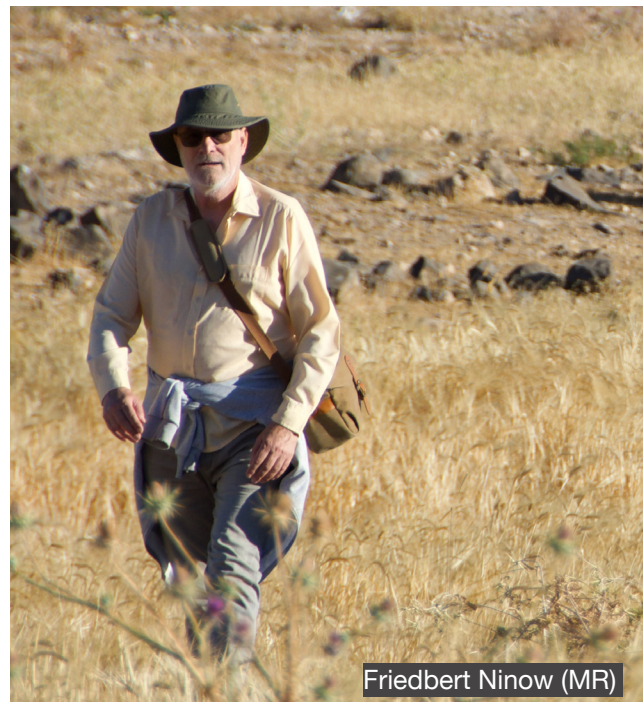
Honoring Our Retirees

By Monique Roddy

BRAP would like to honor our longtime participants who have declared this to be their last season. We half suspect they will reappear at some point in the years to come, if only to observe and catch up on the latest finds.

Friedbert Ninow, of course, has worked at Balu'a the longest of all – bridging the German teams to our current joint project. I will always picture Friedbert striding across the fields, his eyes fixed on the ground for tell-tale sherds. Wernfried Rieckmann also carries through these years. He's engineered several creations over the years to support doorways or our deep dives into probes. Carolyn and Mary have both contributed much to the BRAP years, pitching in wherever needed for a myriad of tasks.

Thank you, all. We are going to miss you!



Friedbert Ninow (MR)



Wernfried Rieckmann (FN)

Carolyn Waldron: Relationships

To me archaeology in Jordan is about relationships. First of all, relationships with the dirt, rocks, walls, pottery, and so much more, trying to tease out how people lived and worked together during ancient times.

Being in Jordan also involves the present though; relationships between teammates, and staff from different towns, states, countries, backgrounds. It has meant learning bits of the Arab culture: being accepted as a person rather than by nationality and government stances. Jordanian workers have been observant and diligent. Hotel staff have gone out of their way to make a stay meaningful and personal.

After participating in 13 archaeology sessions over 24 years (At 'Umayri, Madaba, and now Balu'a), I feel like my education has just begun. I feel sad that this season of my life is coming to an end, but grateful that I have been lucky enough to have the experiences and



Carolyn Waldron (MR)

memories that have come with it. Thank you to all who contributed to this time in my life.

Mary Boyd: Reflections on Digging

In June 1994, I set off to Jordan to fulfill a life-long dream to dig at an archaeological site. My seminary professor, Dr. David Hopkins, dug at 'Umayri, so I joined him there. I immediately fell in love with this crazy process of archaeology. Digging in the hot sun, sifting guffaf of soil, recording everything carefully, washing pottery, laying out pottery to be read—it was all good.

And so I returned, season after season to 'Umayri, until the last season in 2016. In 2019 I joined the team at Balu'a, digging at the Qasr. It was different than 'Umayri, spread out rather than a tell, basalt rather than limestone. The first season we found a pithos, now restored and in the Karak Museum. The next season we excavated three pithoi! Now I've moved centuries later to the Islamic Village.

I think what delights me most about archaeology is that you never know what you will find that day. While many days are routine, there are often surprises to delight. This week we were clearing under rock destruction and suddenly, pieces of pottery that may be re-constructable.

Probably best of all are the people I've met and the friendships I've made. Archaeologists are good people to know. Jordan is such a wonderful place, with a welcoming spirit.

As this adventure comes to an end for me, I'm a bit sad, but mostly grateful for the rich experiences I've had. I look forward to reading the *BRAP Beat* in future years and delighting in hearing the work you are still doing to uncover and understand the past.



Mary Boyd

Site Preservation & Community Outreach with Sela

By Monique Roddy

In 2024 BRAP was awarded the Archaeological Institute of America's Site Preservation Grant for conservation and community engagement activities. Stephanie Selover, who headed up the grant application for BRAP, emphasized our interest in building relationships with the communities around Khirbat al-Balu'a through specialized training for our workers in on-site conservation and through a series of community events. Our application was prepared in concert with Sela for Training and Protection of Heritage, a Cultural Resources Management (CRM) company based in Wadi Musa, Jordan.

In spring 2025 Sela began work on our plans, hosting a lecture at the nearby Mutah University and organizing two community events in Smakieh, where most of the local landowners around Balu'a reside and with which the Balu'a teams have had a long relationship (until 2019 we resided in local apartments in Smakieh during the excavation seasons). While the BRAP team had planned to join these events as part of our then-canceled excavation season, we followed along online as the children of Smakieh interacted with archaeological stories and archaeologically-inspired crafts (restoring pottery, weaving, storytelling, and mosaics). Sela also trained several of our experienced local workers in stabilizing a looted

wall during a conservation workshop at Balu'a.

This summer we were delighted to participate in the final elements of the grant. We watched consolidation training firsthand on the freshly excavated structures at Qasr North and joined in discussions for further restoration at the House.

Most exciting of all we got to attend the debut of a children's book written about Balu'a! As part of the 2025 events Jordanian author Rasha Dababneh had worked with the children of Smakieh, Sela, and BRAP to develop a unique storyline about the ancient site. The story is in Arabic but the gist of it is that Kareem, the main character in Rasha's series of books, visits family in Karak and dreams of traveling back to the past, visiting the BRAP excavation areas to learn more from Balu'a's ancient inhabitants about their lives. We were delighted to listen along with the children of Smakieh this month as Rasha dramatically read the story, inviting the team to say a few words at the end about what archaeologists do and why. The event finished with a tie-in to the story as the children learned to weave, just like Kareem does when he visits the loom weights at work at the Wall, excavated in 2019 and 2022!

We look forward to building on these initial relationships with our local communities in future seasons with further events.



Mohammad, Sela conservation specialist, training Hasan and Abu Fadi on wall consolidation (JL)



Weaving activity (JL)

BRAP Bones

By Kara Larson

Alongside fieldwork, exciting research is happening back at La Sierra University. This past week, I traveled to the Center for Near Eastern Archaeology to begin analysis on the BRAP faunal assemblage to accomplish and/or begin two tasks: (1) collect teeth and bone samples from good contexts for stable isotopic analyses and (2) begin primary identification of all faunal remains collected during BRAP excavations. A total of 111 specimens were collected for bioapatite ($\delta^{13}\text{C}$, $\delta^{18}\text{O}$, and $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$) and collagen ($\delta^{13}\text{C}$ and $\delta^{15}\text{N}$) isotopic analysis. These analyses will be instrumental in reconstructing herd management and pastoral practices at Balu'a, revealing key insights into urban foodways during the Iron Age occupation. Faunal identification work has started with identification of remains collected from the House. There is an overwhelming majority of domesticates, such as sheep (*Ovis aries*), goat (*Capra hircus*), and some cattle (*Bos taurus*). Other exciting species were encountered, albeit in less quantity, such as donkey (*Equus asinus*), pig (*Sus scrofa*), and various bird species. One of the highlights came on the last day of the research trip, when I was able to refit a large portion of a domestic dog

(*Canis familiaris*) maxilla and crania back together. Of note, the House appears to have interesting element and body portion distributions that suggest unique meat distribution practices to the household, perhaps even suggestive of household butchery. However, further work is needed to explore this avenue. Stay tuned!



Kara and the BRAP faunal assemblage at CNEA



Rasha Dababneh reads her Balu'a story to the children of Smakieh and BRAP (JL)

Petra

by Marcelo Caballero

For our mid-season break the scholars embarked on a very special journey to Petra! Our two-night stay in this breathtaking ancient city gave us the opportunity to fully immerse ourselves in its incredible history while exploring its stunning rock-cut architecture, ancient monuments, and unforgettable landscapes.

We began our journey on Thursday afternoon, packing our weekend bags before boarding our faithful bus for the three-hour drive south to Petra. Excitement filled the air as we left Karak behind and traveled through Jordan's breathtaking desert landscapes toward one of the world's most extraordinary archaeological sites. At last, we arrived around 5:30 p.m. at the beautiful five-star Mövenpick Resort Petra, located just steps from the entrance to the archaeological park. After checking in, we enjoyed a rooftop dinner beneath a sky full of stars.

The anticipation the next morning was through the roof. Most of the scholars were up by 6:00 AM, fueling up with a hearty breakfast before crossing the street and entering the world-famous archaeological site of Petra, ready to experience

one of the New Seven Wonders of the World.

As we passed through the narrow sandstone gorge known as the Siq, the towering rock walls built anticipation with every step until Petra's most iconic monument, the Treasury (Al-Khazneh), suddenly came into view. Carved directly into the rose-colored sandstone more than 2,000 years ago by the Nabataeans, this breathtaking façade marked the beginning of an unforgettable adventure.

Beyond the Treasury, we explored the Street of Facades, the Royal Tombs, the Great Temple, and the Colonnaded Street, each revealing another chapter of Petra's remarkable past. For many scholars, however, the highlight was the climb to the Monastery (Ad Deir). After conquering more than 800 rock-cut steps, we were rewarded with sweeping views and one of Petra's most magnificent monuments, making every step of the journey worthwhile.

The next morning, scholars had the choice to relax at the hotel or venture back into Petra for one last visit. We gathered in the lobby at noon, made one final stop for some well-earned ice cream, and then boarded the bus back to Mujeb Hotel, where we began preparing for the final two weeks of our Jordan adventure.



Dinner under the stars



Petra overlook (MC)

Amman Trip

by Monique Roddy

Our last weekend tour took us once again northward. This time we traveled deep into the historic heart of Amman, driving through the ancient city center, past the Roman fountain and theater, and then climbing up to the Amman Citadel past the many modern homes. Here vast stretches of history map across a high mound, including an Iron Age Ammonite palace, a Roman temple to Zeus, and an Umayyad administrative complex. A quick trot through the archaeological museum to revisit old friends (the Neolithic Ayn Ghazal plaster statues are always my favorite) and then back on the bus and back down to the city center to our next stop, the Jordan Museum.

I visited the Jordan Museum during the early years of its construction, and was delighted to see the final results in place. I was captivated by the introductory exhibit connecting life in ancient and modern Jordan through a carefully curated selection of artifacts from then and now, such as a Bronze Age ceramic yogurt churn and a diagram on the Jordanian dish mansaf, which includes a yogurt sauce. Then it was onward through Jordan's history chronologically, a jour-

ney some of us made last a bit longer than others. Finally we all exited together past the dolmen exhibit (group photo time!) and onward to lunch.

After lunch we stopped at Tall al-'Umayri, where many of us started out in archaeology here in Jordan. We led the tour across the site, explaining the Bronze and Iron Age stone structures and their contributions to archaeological history.



A stop at Tall al-'Umayri (JL)



Jordan Museum Dolmens (MR)