
BRAP BEAT

Results of Week 3

By Kent Bramlett



Our third and final week of excavation produced surprises in each of the areas. We expected some answers but were pleased with what we learned and the opportunities for future exploration tantalize us.

The **Qasr** team continued excavating the debris layer near the Qasr wall. They cleared out the loose earth in the disturbed area next to the wall and clarified the fox burrow that was partly to blame for the loose earth and bits of plastic found at this level. By mid-week the team reached the bottom of the bioturbation and discovered that the layers sealed against the adjacent course of giant wall stones of the qasr. There was no foundation trench cutting into the earth layers after all.



Time limitations did not allow us to excavate to the bottom of the qasr wall. We may be near the bottom, or there may be several more courses. The lowest layer excavated appeared to consist of destruction debris interspersed with charred wood and animal bone fragments. This layer contained a quantity of pottery that dated earlier than any of the other layers encountered in the 2017 season. Late Bronze Age pottery dominated with some Iron I forms present. A careful study will be made to refine the ceramic readings from this deposit. Tentatively, it appears this debris layer, if not of secondary deposition, could provide a *terminus ante quem* (date before which) for the construction of the qasr, which would place its construction date in the early Iron Age sequence.

The **House** team traced floors this week. The major objective was to understand the sequence and dating of occupation levels and house phases. The surface reached last week was carefully excavated with earth samples taken for later floatation and analysis. Information from the samples may reveal what kind of plants were being utilized in the household and some preserved seeds may give us what are called “short-lived” samples for 14C dating. It’s not much help to date a roof beam because the tree lived many decades or even centuries before being incorporated in the house. However, an olive pit or charred grain resulted from one year’s growing season and could help us narrow down the pottery chronology for this region. As excavation continued, a lower surface was reached that predated most of the walls of the house. Except for a portion of a wall reused as a foundation in the later house, the later house’s walls were founded in the debris above this earlier floor. The pottery sherds also indicate a somewhat earlier time period in the Iron Age II.





One question we wanted to answer this season was whether there were additional strata below this floor. Would there be Iron I occupation—or earlier? The excavators opened a probe to explore below and within six inches reached bedrock. Well, at least we now know! Other parts of the town do seem to have earlier periods represented, but not in this area. The team's energy was then turned toward extracting two large storage jars that were half exposed in the balk, or side, of the square. We couldn't leave them because looters would be sure to dig around

something so visible. Happily, this task was completed on the final day of excavation.

Over at the **Wall**, excavation continued between the large parallel fortification walls. The space between is part of a casemate room, a kind of construction of two parallel fortification walls with living spaces divided up between them. What had looked like a corner platform when only partially uncovered actually was a dividing cross-wall creating a doorway leading to another room. Interlinked casemate rooms are somewhat unusual though not without parallel. It is more common for houses to be built out from the wall and incorporate one of the casemate rooms at the back of each house. The portion of the casemate room excavated produced 45 clay loom weights. The unfired loom weights were very crumbly but were photographed in situ and extracted as intact as possible. A number of groundstone fragments were also excavated in these fill layers, further suggesting domestic or economic activity in this room.



A third phase to the wall area was indicated in a probe on the eastern external side of the east casemate wall. This probe extended more than three meters down to the wall's founding level on bedrock and indicated three phases of construction.



The alignment of the courses of the wall corresponded to the tower phase at the top, a middle phase as represented by the excavated portion of the casemate room, and a lower phase not reached in the interior. The pottery from the lower phase probably indicates a date early in the Iron Age II. It is a real accomplishment to have excavated to the founding level of this important wall and more discoveries no doubt await in the interior room.



Final Days

By Monique Vincent

The final week included two staples of life in Jordan. The first was an invitation to have tea in the tent of one of the workmen, Salem Awwad. Some of the team drove out and met Salem's wife and four daughters, his mother, and his brother and his family, who all share a tent seasonally pitched in the fields around Smakiyya. Arabic coffee, an unsweetened, cardamom-flavored brew served in tiny cups, made the rounds first, followed by black tea brewed with lots of sugar. Between rounds, the team watched as Salem herded the family's sheep and goats into their pen for the night. A few lucky souls even got to hold a baby goat. Jordanian hospitality is legendary and was much appreciated by those of us able to enjoy the evening visit.

Wednesday night dinner was replaced by a *mansaf* feast prepared by team cook Mohammad, who is also called Abu Jamil (the father of Jamil). *Mansaf* is a traditional Jordanian dish consisting of a

bed of rice overlaid with lamb or goat and topped with nuts and *shrak* bread. A sauce called *jameed* is created from dried sheep/goat yogurt and is poured over the dish. It is then eaten by hand, rolling the rice and meat into balls with the right hand and popping them into the mouth. This is a skill to



learn! Some of us had to eat off our own plates, thanks to a vicious cold spreading quickly around the team, but others enjoyed trying the communal dining experience. Yousef, the team's guard, and his family were invited to the feast and insisted on bringing *jameed* prepared by Yousef's mother in the village. This was a treat and, together with Abu Jamil's superb cooking, made for an unforgettable *mansaf*.



Sheep and goats moving through Balua



Friday morning started like a normal excavation day, but after taking final photos of the squares everyone's attention shifted to closedown preparation. Supervisors and assistants worked on drawing balks (the unexcavated edges of each square that show stratigraphy) and then everyone worked together to backfill the squares (a practice designed to preserve unexcavated layers for future seasons by covering them with about a meter of sifted earth). Around noon the trucks arrived for moving the equipment and excavated artifacts and pottery back up to Amman. The team dug deep into their reserves of energy to head straight back to camp to inventory the tools and crates of supplies before loading them onto the trucks. The site toilet, a wooden box built in 2011 and serving the MPP-`Umayri team faithfully since, crowned the lead truck and made an easy target to follow as the procession headed up the Desert Highway. Thanks to a quiet traffic



day and aching muscles everything was safely stowed away in Amman by late afternoon and the packing party could enjoy ice cream at Gerard's in Abdoun before heading back down to Smakiyya.

Saturday morning the team dispersed from Smakiyya to enjoy a weekend in Petra or Amman before flying home to their various destinations. While the season was short at only three weeks, everyone worked hard to accomplish more than it seemed the time would allow. A big thank you to all participants and supporters for making this season possible!

The 2017 BRAP Team

The contributions of each member of the team are essential to a great season. We want to take this opportunity to thank each member and acknowledge their part in making the 2017 season a success!



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