

# BRAP BEAT



Balu'a  
Regional  
Archaeological  
Project

## The BRAP Wrap: The End of the Season

By Monique Roddy



Celebrating the end of the season at Haret Jadouneh, hosted by Doug Clark

It seems like just yesterday we were arriving in Jordan eager for a new season, and yet here I am back at ACOR, it's August, and most of the team has departed on their flights home. The past few weeks since the last *BRAP Beat* have been hectic, filled with dedicated hard work by the team to meet our excavation goals and prepare our finds for shipping and storage. This final issue for the 2022 season includes reports from each of our supervisors in the field and in the lab, photos from participants, and even a short reflection from one of our students on her experience with music and local culture in the field. The directors can't express enough our appreciation for the efforts put in by each member of the project this season. From our dedicated sanitation manager (shout out to Stelle for making sure we had toilet paper and hand sanitizer each day at site), to the students who trained into specific jobs on the spot this season (thanks, Roma and Sam for photographing our hundreds of artifacts and Megan for floating endless bags of soil, especially from the three new pithoi), to the square supervisors and pottery washers, our team members stepped into their responsibilities with

enthusiasm and carried them through to the end of the season. Thank you to the entire BRAP 2022 team for your contributions to the important research being carried out at Khirbat al-Balu'a! We hope to see some of you back next season in 2024. And thank you to our readers for following along with us this season!

Weekend tours during the second half of the season included the anticipated two-day trip to Petra, a visit to Iron Age sites around our region north and south of the Wadi Mujeb, a float in the Dead Sea, and a delightful day guided around Madaba by Doug Clark and enjoying a delicious meal he hosted for us at Haret Jadoudneh. Some of the students organized their own trips into Amman to see the Jordan Museum or to climb up the Mujeb watery trail. We fit a lot into the six weeks we are in Jordan and the opportunity to explore the many jewels of Jordanian cultural and natural heritage often features prominently for team members alongside the excavations.

## The Qasr

By Charles Hughes-Huff, Area Supervisor

The BRAP had set a goal of establishing the date of the construction of the Qasr, which we initially met in 2019 when we narrowed the Qasr's date to Early Iron II/Iron IIB. This date and the relationship of the structures found north of the Qasr required further clarification this season.

To meet our goals this season we expanded the excavation area 1m to the west and 5m to the north of the previous probe. On the west side of the square we excavated where a looter had dug a small cave and discovered the continuation of a pavement from the earliest architectural phase, which predates the construction of the Qasr. Pottery in and under this pavement dated from Iron I. The Qasr was then constructed above fill layers laid on top of this pavement.

The next phase is best represented by what we informally designate the Pataikos House, based on the figurine found on its surface in 2019. A large wall on the eastern side of this house was partially excavated in 2019 and further exposed this season to include a doorway with intact lintel stone to the north. Further architecture defines a clear space on three sides of the Pataikos House room. The pottery continues to indicate that the Pataikos House is an Early Iron II building, likely built shortly after the construction of the Qasr.



Excavating a small probe



The eastern wall of the Pataikos House with doorway

The next major structure in this area, named the Pithos House, reused the large eastern wall from the previous phase. It was under the earthen surface of this house that the team discovered three more intact but cracked pithoi, or large storage jars. Two of the pithoi, both repeatedly mended (we found a lot of mend-holes on pottery this season!), were buried upside down, their bottoms intentionally broken. One was filled with ash and may have been used as a makeshift oven. The third was buried in the traditional fashion, top-up. Both the ware of the pithoi and the pottery of the beaten earth surface confirm a date of Iron IIC for the Pithos House.

A new addition to the phasing north of the Qasr this season is represented by a shallow wall under the Nabataean surface but over the Iron IIC structure. This represents a phase perhaps dated to the Persian era. An ostrakon found at this level with Aramaic-style script may confirm such a phase.

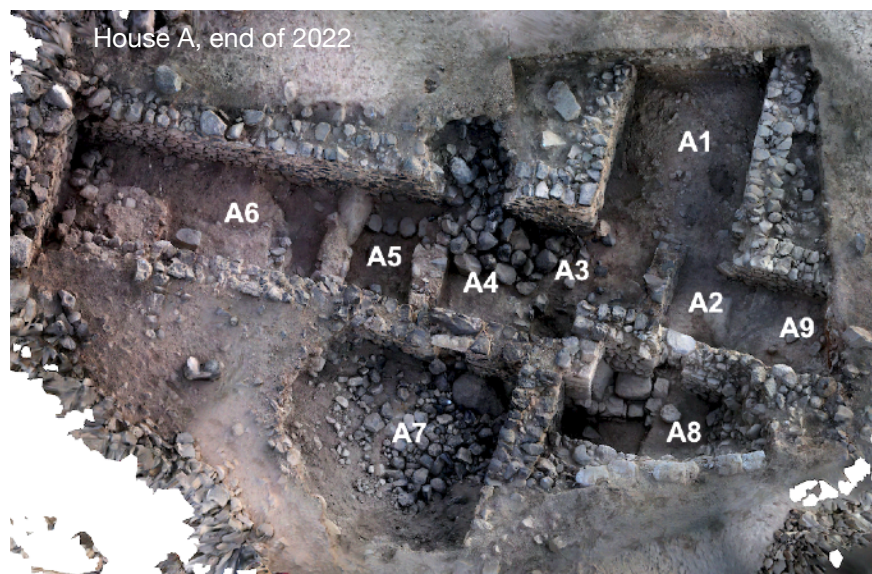
## The House

By Stephanie Selover,  
Area Director

During the 2022 season in House A, three probes of the House were opened: Room A6 in the western edge of the house, extending a wing of rooms first begun in the 2019 season; a 2m wide extension to the north and east of A1, which is assumed to be the entryway into the house; and a smaller room, A8, to the southeast, reached via an intact doorway from A2. The goals for this season were to first reach the Phase 2, Iron IIB, floors in all areas, and to open smaller probes in all three areas to find the Phase 1, Iron IIA or earlier, floors, which were previously excavated in the 2012 and 2017 seasons.

By the end of the season, Phase 2 floors were reached in all three areas. A6 was excavated to a large wall that was later revealed to be from a later phase, cutting the house;

the true western edge of the house is not yet known. Bedrock was discovered directly under the floor of this room, with a shaped boulder jutting from the bedrock. An elevated platform was built





Room A6 shaped boulder and mudbrick platform

over the bedrock in the southern half of the room. The room's fill contained pottery, grinding stones, glass beads, and five figurine fragments.

In Room A1 the room was extended north from last season to reveal more of the floor. A smaller room, Room A9, had a plaster floor covered in mudbrick collapse. The northern and eastern edges of these two rooms were not found this season. On the final day of the season, a 1x1m probe was opened along the western wall of the entry

room, revealing an earlier floor level under the wall, as well as a large fragment of iron. This may be part of Phase 1, possibly a floor!

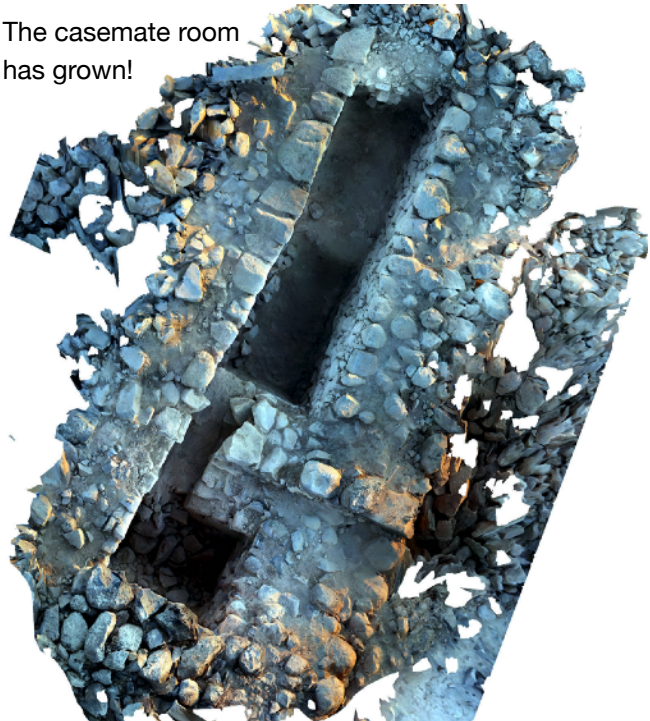
In the southeastern room, a series of floors were discovered, including an undated cobblestone floor just under topsoil, a Hellenistic clay floor, and the Iron Age Phase 2 floor. A half-room probe revealed Phase I wall lines.

## The Wall

By Owen Chesnut, Area Supervisor

The goals of the 2022 season at the Wall were (1) to determine the date of the towers built on top of the casemate fortification system by excavating inside of the northern tower and (2) to expand the probe to the west of the casemate wall system in order to confirm the date and use of a building constructed against the wall. In the casemate system we expanded the square previously excavated in 2017 and 2019. By season's end we could confirm our dates for the earlier phases of the fortification system, including the Late Iron I date of the earliest wall (at left of the room in image). The second wall was likely added in the Iron Age IIB, as confirmed by a clear foundation trench excavated this season (at right of the room in the image). A small dividing wall (not pictured) defined a room with a thick plaster floor covered in the sherds of at least three pithoi smashed when the room collapsed during destruction. More loom weights like those found in earlier seasons were found on both sides of the dividing wall. This area was disturbed when the north tower was built on top of it. There was no floor associated with the

The casemate room has grown!



tower as it appears to have been built using a battered construction technique where the walls were put in place and then stones were built up in a pile against them. We dismantled the southern wall of the tower (visible as a gap in the east-west wall in the center of the image on p. 4) and were able to date its construction to the Iron Age IIC, providing a date for the last phase of the fortification system.

The building to the west of the casemate wall was excavated down to its lowest level, revealing a floor with objects and pottery on the surface, a doorway leading north into another room, and a plastered installation partially revealed in the western balk. We discovered that the construction of the floor consisted of a layer of flagstones, then a leveling subfloor, another layer of flagstones, and then topped with at least two layers of plaster. Pottery from the subfloor and plaster surface all date to the Iron Age IIC/Persian Period placing the construction of this building firmly at the end of the Iron Age IIC. It appears this room was used for domestic purposes such as food preparation and textile production as two large mortars, a number



The building to the west of the casemate wall system



Plaster installation (left) and surface

of pestles and other grinding stones, and 15 or so loom weights were found scattered on the floor. The sherds of a storage jar were found shattered across the floor and part of a pithos had been cut and smoothed and placed in the floor as an installation. The heavily plastered installation (see image below) was built up above the floor and was covered with a thin layer of ash. It is unclear what its purpose was, perhaps it was used as a clean surface for cooking or food preparation.

## The Islamic Village

By Ian Jones, Area Director

This season new excavations were opened in the southwestern portion of Khirbat al-Balu'a, dated to the Middle and Late Islamic periods on the basis of visible architecture and surface pottery and informally called The Islamic Village. Our work focused on a large (ca. 50 x 50 m) square building at the southwestern edge of the settlement, consisting of a series of rooms surrounding a central, open courtyard. This building has tentatively been identified as a khan, or road inn. Excavations this

season were conducted in a roughly square room (Room 1) in the northeastern part of the Khan, with the primary goal of gaining a better understanding of the chronology of this space and the ways in which it was used.

The latest phase of use in the room can be characterized as sporadic reuse of the area during the Late Islamic IIB (19th-20th century AD). Finds from this phase included glass bangle fragments consistent with a Late Islamic period date. While the exact nature of this reuse is not entirely clear, the area surrounding the khan continues to be used to graze sheep and goats, and the latest phase of use is likely related to this.

Below this phase we uncovered a thick layer of collapsed stone, likely representing the collapsed roof and upper arches of the original structure. Throughout the excavation, stone platforms were visible in all four corners of the room. Excavation revealed that these were probably originally arch springers. Below the collapse, we reached a floor level associated with a reuse of the room during the Late Islamic I (15th-16th century AD) or Late Islamic IIA (17th-18th century AD). Several modifications had been made to the room during this period. Between the two eastern platforms, the occupants had built a single-course wall, turning this space into a grain bin. Slightly later, a smaller bin in the southern corner of this grain bin was built from several flat stones. Another rounded installation, this one 2-3 courses high, was built against the northwestern platform. A single-course wall was built between the two installations, dividing the room in two. The northern portion was built at the top of the wall line, involving a step up from the southern portion, and paved with a rough cobble surface. The southern portion was slightly lower, and here we found a plaster floor. Finds from this phase included many glass bangle fragments, handmade pottery, and half of a basalt rotary hand mill, used for grinding grain (visible at center of image).

The original construction phase of the building was only



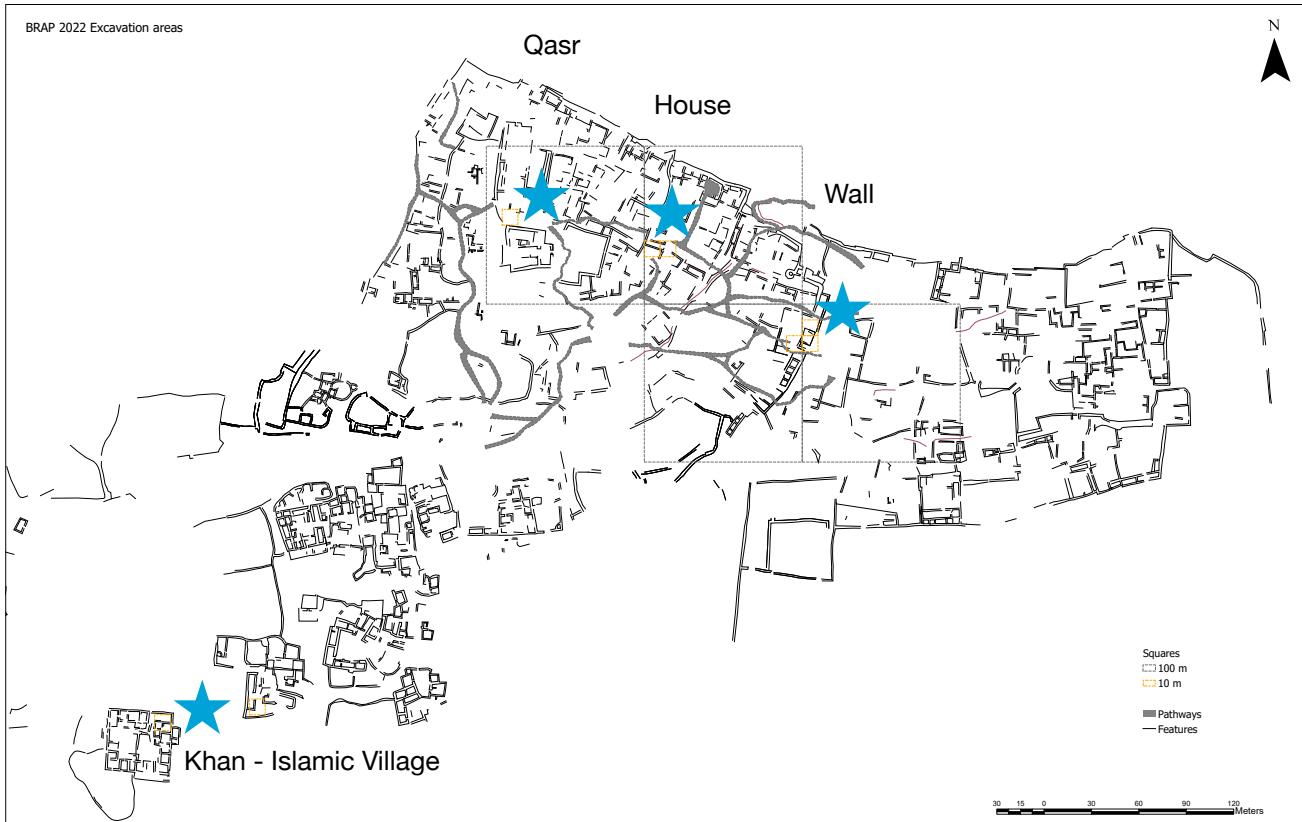
The NE room of the khan

Common type of glass bangle fragment



Late Islamic I or IIA reuse of the room

reached in probes near the end of the season. Unfortunately, very little diagnostic pottery was recovered from these probes, but the presence of glazed pottery dating to the Middle Islamic II (13th-14th century AD) in the later phases suggests this as a likely date for the building’s original use phase. We hope that continued excavation during the next BRAP season will reveal more about the dating and original use of the room.



## GIS Update

By Sarah Richardson, GIS Manager

During the 2022 excavation season at Balu’a hundreds of GPS coordinates were taken within excavation areas, for artifacts found in situ, locus elevations, and samples including soil, charcoal, lithic, and pottery for residue testing. As part of daily photography we created photogrammetry models of each excavation area. These were then georeferenced for accuracy and can be used in further study for measurements and the drawing of top plans and balks. Six more cisterns were added to the Cistern Survey, which will help us better understand the careful system of water collection at Balu’a.

The site of Balu’a has been and continues to be disturbed by looters. We continued to survey and document looting pits within the Iron Age settlement as well as newly in the Islamic Village area, continuing a project started informally in 2010 and systematized in 2019. Evidence of looting falls into two general categories: deep looting pits often dug along visible architectural features and small shallow pits possibly dug after the use of a metal detector. New disturbances

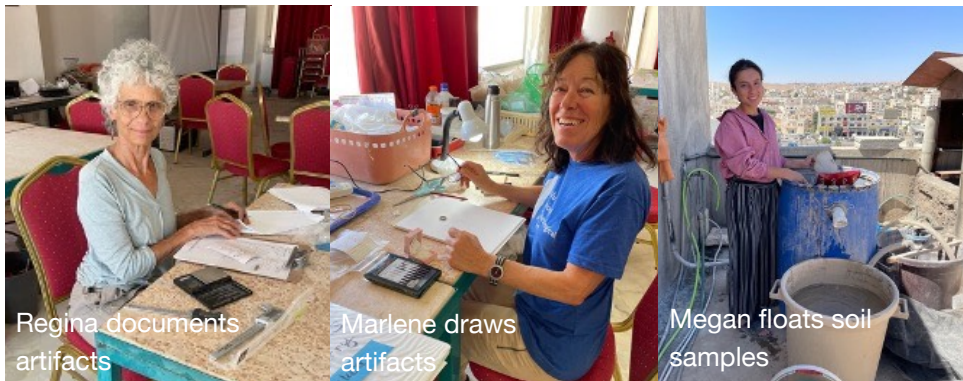
were noted within the Iron Age city walls including both looting pits and metal detector pits. The metal detector pits are often clustered in open spaces and along or within the paths that were created in 2019. There was a systematic looting strategy in the southern area within the Iron Age city wall in three lines with the pits approximately equidistant apart. During the season, there were frequent overnight looting disturbances in each excavation area. We will continue to document this issue at Balu'a in future seasons in order to raise awareness to the ongoing problem.

## The Lab Overfloweth!

By Betty Adams, Lab Manager

The 2022 dig season exceeded our projections in the lab for every category. We processed 1,050 publishable pottery pieces, nearly 500 artifacts, 300 samples, 150 flotation samples, 16 residue analysis samples, and 495 faunal bone bags. The groundstone tools dominated the artifact excavation, but jar stoppers ran a close second in numbers, with bangle fragments and loom weights rounding out the most processed artifacts. None of the careful documentation for each of

these artifacts would have been possible without some very dedicated students and volunteers. Thank you to the many who worked so hard in the lab this season.



## Salem Listens to Rap Music for the First Time

By Roma Aatifi, Student Volunteer

By some happenstance, Peter took this photo of Salem, Prof Jones and me. My back is turned to the camera. My arms are crossed. The viewer doesn't see the bewilderment on my face. I witnessed Salem experiencing underground rap for the first time, consisting of artists such as Freddie Gibbs and Spitta Andretti (Curren\$y).

Here the four of us were all in the same place, experiencing and mesmerized by different aspects of the excavation area. Multiple occurrences are happening that are at once simultaneous. We are in a room dating to the Islamic period, physically looking for relics of history while Salem is experiencing American Rap, created out



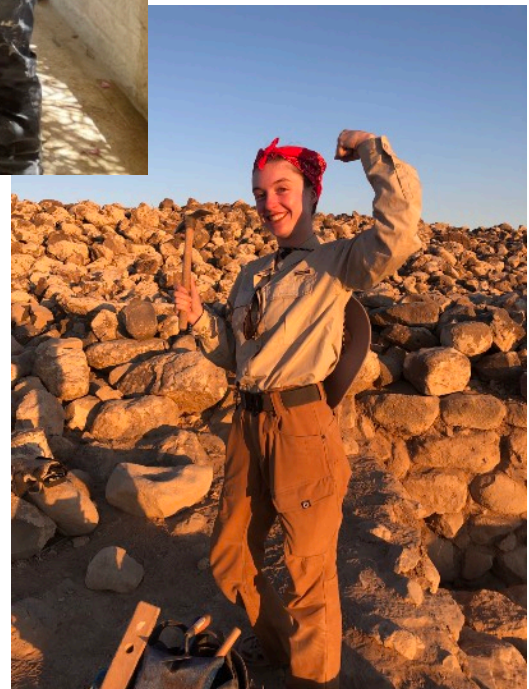


of Black oppression, for the first time. There is a parallel here. Not only is he dancing with it, but he is also altering the beats, adding his own Arabic rhyming slang, and still adhering to the basic drum sub-base beat of the original song. Professor Jones is carrying a Munsell book for studying soil colors while we are looking for physical objects transporting us to past history. Meanwhile, Salem was also able to transcend with us through time as well. He took the past culture of marginalized Black Americans, Latinos, Puerto Ricans, and immigrants and warped the present moment for us by creating his version of hip-hop and adding phonetic Arabic sounds.

As archaeologists, we are trying to connect time. We are trying to bridge the gaps from the past to the present in the hopes of better understanding human culture by discovering something tangible from the past. The parallel here is that Salem was able to show us his history through sounds by converging it with hip hop. He brought us fully to the present. Salem used jargon that would be familiar to an Arabic ear.



Participant photo submission by Adrienne Baker: “Zoe is Edie the Excavator” UW student Zoe is working hard at the House!



Participant photo submission by Carolyn Waldron: “The aftermath of dismantling the soil flotation machine - look at all that mud!” Volunteers worked to remove many buckets of mud from the machine, which they carried down four flights of stairs to dump behind the hotel. Then they had to carry the equipment down to the patio for storage.