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## Western Harra Survey Project

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► **To cite this version:**

Marie-Laure Chambrade, Stefan L. Smith. Western Harra Survey Project. *Archaeology in Jordan*, 2018, 1. hal-03537609

**HAL Id: hal-03537609**

**<https://hal.science/hal-03537609>**

Submitted on 20 Jan 2022

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# ARCHAEOLOGY IN JORDAN

علم الآثار  
فني الأردن  
NEWSLETTER



ACOR  
أكور  
AMERICAN CENTER OF  
المركز الأمريكي  
ORIENTAL RESEARCH  
للأبحاث الشرقية

2016 AND 2017 SEASONS





Archaeology in Jordan Newsletter: 2016 and 2017 Seasons  
Edited by John D.M. Green, Barbara A. Porter, and China P. Shelton  
© 2018 by ACOR – The American Center of Oriental Research  
PO Box 2470  
Amman, 11181, Jordan

November 2018

[www.acorjordan.org/archaeology-jordan-aij/](http://www.acorjordan.org/archaeology-jordan-aij/)  
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Original design by Jawad Hijazi  
Layout by Starling Carter  
Arabic site and project names compiled by Samya Kafafi

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Cover image: Detail of wall painting from the Bayt Ras Tomb  
(Orthographic photo: Soizik Bechetoille-Kaczorowski/Ifpo Amman)

ISBN: 978-0-578-41390-7

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan  
The Deposit Number at the National Library  
(2018/5550/ د )

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# MAP OF SITES AND PROJECTS



# INTRODUCTION

**John D.M. Green, Barbara A. Porter, and China P. Shelton**

The first edition of the "Archaeology in Jordan" Newsletter appeared in the *American Journal of Archaeology* in 1991 with the intention of presenting recent fieldwork conducted in Jordan to a broad academic audience. The series was initiated by the then ACOR director, Bert de Vries. From that time, the newsletter was published annually (1991–2008) and bi-annually (2010–2016) resulting in 22 editions published within the *AJA*, all of which are available as open content online. Subsequent editors after de Vries also came from ACOR or were closely affiliated. *AJA*'s regional newsletters are an integral part of its history, coming to an end in 2016. To continue this important tradition the *Archaeology in Jordan Newsletter*, or *AIJ* for short, is relaunched here as an open-access online publication through ACOR. It is intended to serve as a platform for recent archaeological and cultural heritage management projects. Official and complete reports from project directors continue to be published in the *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan (ADAJ)*.

This edition presents reports on projects that took place in Jordan between January 2016 and December 2017. As in prior editions, reports are generally organized from north to south by region (map on p. 1). In all, there are 50 projects with a wide range of periods and regions represented, and 89 listed contributors. There is a strong cohort of projects focused on prehistory in the Eastern Desert region of Jordan, the Early Bronze Age in various parts of the country, and numerous projects in the Petra region focusing on the Nabataean/Roman through the Islamic eras. While the number of projects being undertaken in Jordan has not changed much over the past decade, there has been a trend in recent years towards shortened or alternating seasons within smaller areas of excavation. This can be related in many cases to the financial and logistical challenges faced by project directors due to the combined impact of rising expenses and cuts in funding for research and grants. Nevertheless, major achievements continue to be made. Some key discoveries presented in this edition include the unusual Chalcolithic tailed ossuaries at Harrat Juhayra as reported by Sumio

Fujii, the discovery of marble statuary on the Petra North Ridge by Tom Parker and Megan Perry, and the report on the elaborate Roman era painted chamber at Bayt Ras by Jehad Haron and Claude Vibert-Guige (cover image). Notable also is the first report on maritime archaeology in the *AJ*, with the presentation of findings from the early Islamic harbor at ancient Ayla by Ehab Eid, Sawsan Al Fakhri, and Islam Sleim.

The editors recognize that all authors acknowledge the support and partnership of the Department of Antiquities (DOA) of Jordan. Due to the short length of these entries, many expressions of thanks and acknowledgment are omitted for the sake of brevity. During the time these field projects were undertaken, the Director-General was H.E. Dr. Monther Jamhawi, to whom all contributors expressed their thanks. Not all specific funding agencies mentioned by project directors are acknowledged for the sake of being concise. Of course every project relies on funding and support, often from their own institutions as well as from other sources. It is appropriate here to thank all who support these endeavors.

This newsletter was produced by ACOR and funded through the ACOR Cultural Heritage Fund and ACOR's Publication Fund. Layout and editing were finalized by freelance designer Jawad Hijazi and Starling Carter of ACOR. Samya Kafafi of ACOR compiled Arabic site and project names in the contents listing. The electronic version of this newsletter is intended to be easily accessible for those interested in knowing about current archaeological work in Jordan. Many projects have websites, and links are provided where possible. A considerable number of projects can also be found on Facebook. For more information on the projects, please contact the authors directly (see list on pages 100–101 for contact information). All figures are courtesy of the individual project directors unless otherwise noted.

For further information on *AIJ* and links to past newsletters, please visit: <https://www.acorjordan.org/archaeology-jordan-aij/>

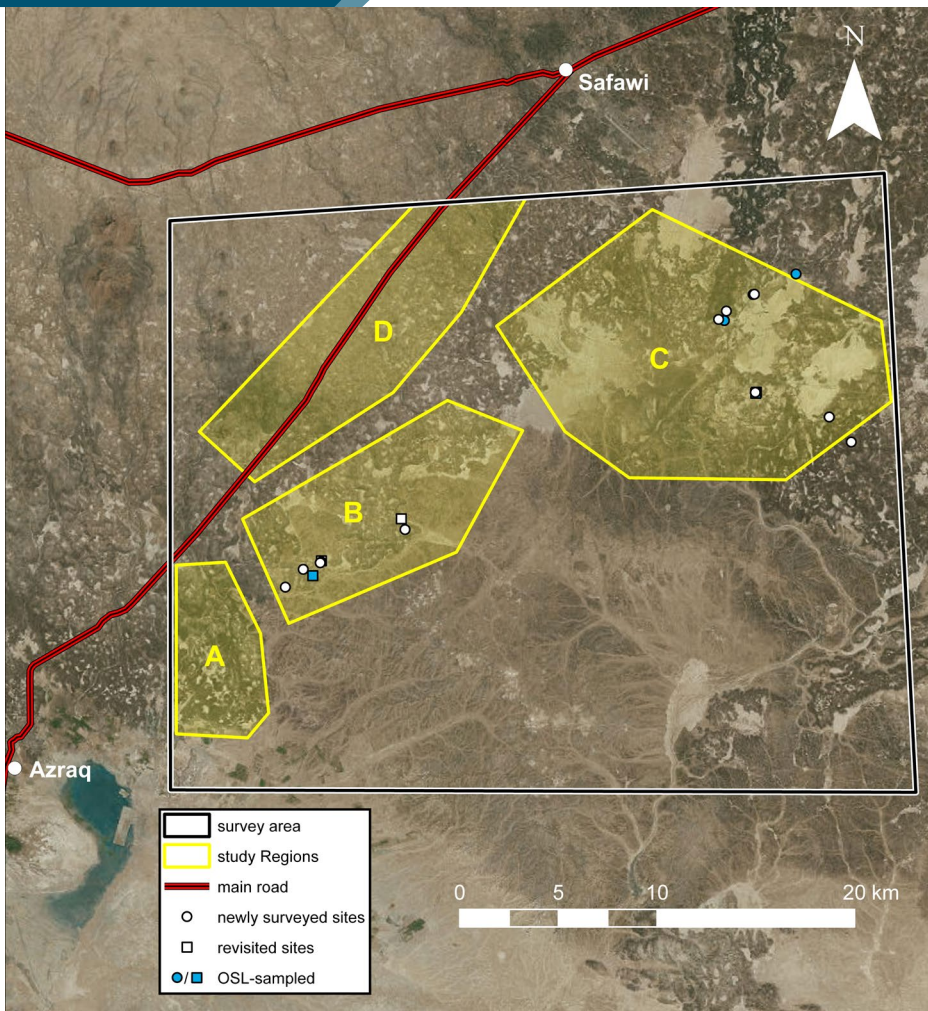


Fig. 5: Aerial image indicating the area of the survey, which comprises over 1,000 km<sup>2</sup> between the towns of Azraq and Safawi

The Western Harra Survey Project is investigating late prehistoric settlements, from the Late Neolithic to the Early Bronze Age (7th millennium–early 3rd millennium B.C.), in the arid harra region of northeastern Jordan—the so-called Black Desert. The research area covers a rough square of over 1,000 km<sup>2</sup> between the towns of Azraq and Safawi, divided into four targeted regions selected for detailed fieldwork investigation (Fig. 5). These regions are representative of the different types of landscape found in the harra: A) undulating steppe carpeted by a dense layer of basalt blocks; B) large wadi (valley) systems surrounded by pockets of basalt outcrops; C) large *qe'an* (mud flats) within areas otherwise similar to A; and D) basaltic hilly areas crossed by small wadis. The aim of the project is to give a holistic picture of the region's past human landscape through a diachronic approach to the study of settlement systems and socio-economic activities, according to the environmental context and available resources. This is being carried out with an emphasis on material dating evidence and the categorization of site types through comparisons with their appearances on satellite imagery from a remote sensing investigation that identified nearly 2800 sites and structures.

Following a first survey in 2015, a second short fieldwork season was carried out in September 2017. We investigated 20 basalt features—especially those known as “wheels” and “encircled enclosure clusters”—to be able to more precisely specify the properties of these site forms. The preliminary lithic study identified large quantities of raw material in Region B, and

## WESTERN HARRA SURVEY PROJECT

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Fig. 6. Probable ancient 'stepped' pathway found during surveys

showed that while some of the sites contain material of the Chalcolithic/Early Bronze Age, the majority were at least first occupied during the Late Neolithic (Imad Alhussain, pers. comm.). These conclusions are currently being synthesized with the ongoing OSL dating of sediment samples that were taken at five different sites using a process recently successfully employed at Wisad Pools (Athanasas et al. 2015). By collecting from both "wheels" and "encircled enclosure clusters", any clear difference in dates between the two site types should be identifiable, tying into one of this project's main goals of enabling rapid dating of sites across the wider region by remote sensing.

Additionally, the 2017 season's work emphasized the natural environment and the identifying of off-site features related to landscape building. We focused on methods of traversing the harra, a crucial issue as travelling in the region is made difficult due to the dense cover of basalt boulders. Apart from the open spaces of the qe'an (singular: qa'a) and the corridors made by wadi valleys, paths need to be created in order to allow for easy and speedy travel. We identified several such paths, clearly arranged by the deliberate moving of basalt boulders. Some are several kilometers long while others are very short, for example from a site to a nearby qa'a or wadi. In this case, paths up or down slopes seem to be arranged with some kind of "steps" (Fig. 6). We believe these paths to be ancient, possibly contemporaneous to the visited sites in some cases. Their study will be a priority of the next season, as well as investigating sources of raw material and continuing the OSL sampling methodology by collaborating with Dr. Dimitri Vandenberghe of the University of Ghent Geology Department.

#### REFERENCE:

Athanasas, C.D., G.O. Rollefson, A. Kadereit, D. Kennedy, K. Theodorakopoulou, Y.M. Rowan, and A. Wasse. 2015. "Optically stimulated luminescence (OSL) dating and spatial analysis of geometric lines in the Northern Arabian Desert." *Journal of Archaeological Science* 64: 1–11.

Project website: [www.facebook.com/WesternHarraSurvey](https://www.facebook.com/WesternHarraSurvey)



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