

## THE BORDERS OF ARABIA AND PALAESTINA PROJECT: 2006 FIELD SEASON, PRELIMINARY REPORT

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The administration of the Roman Empire, into which much of modern Jordan fell from either the conquest of Pompey in 64 / 63 BC or the annexation of Nabataea in 106 AD, has been the subject of scholarly investigation since at least Mommsen published *Die Provinzen (The Provinces of the Roman Empire)* in 1885. It comes as something of a surprise then to find that the route of most provincial borders is completely uncertain. There is some evidence scattered across the empire, such as milestones, boundary markers (Breton 1980; Urman 2006: map 8), toponyms<sup>1</sup>, pilgrims' itineraries (Geyer and Cuntz 1965), church attendances and literary efforts<sup>2</sup>. Much of the epigraphic, direct evidence ceases by the end of the 4th century AD, and none of it is ever extensive. However, in order to understand what a province was for, and to try and reconstruct the reasons for restructuring territorial boundaries, we need first to better establish where the border lines ran. There is in fact abundant evidence with which to tackle the problem. Work in the southern Levant has shown that the distribution patterns of low-profit coarse wares is distorted in the later Roman and early Byzantine periods (roughly 250-650 AD)<sup>3</sup>. The likely cause of this distortion is not distance from manufacturing centre, or difficulty of terrain, but rather the presence of a customs duty on some major provincial borders. The tax, even if only 2.5 % (Jones 1964: 429 and 825; Sijpestejin 1987), and the time taken to pay it or get reimbursed, was sufficient to deter distributors of cheaper ceramics. These ceramic classes, generally, were sold only within the province of their manufacture.

Although some leakage across the border can be expected, the bulk trade in these types of ceramics — storage jars, lamps, cooking pots and basins — should run close to but not over the provincial border.

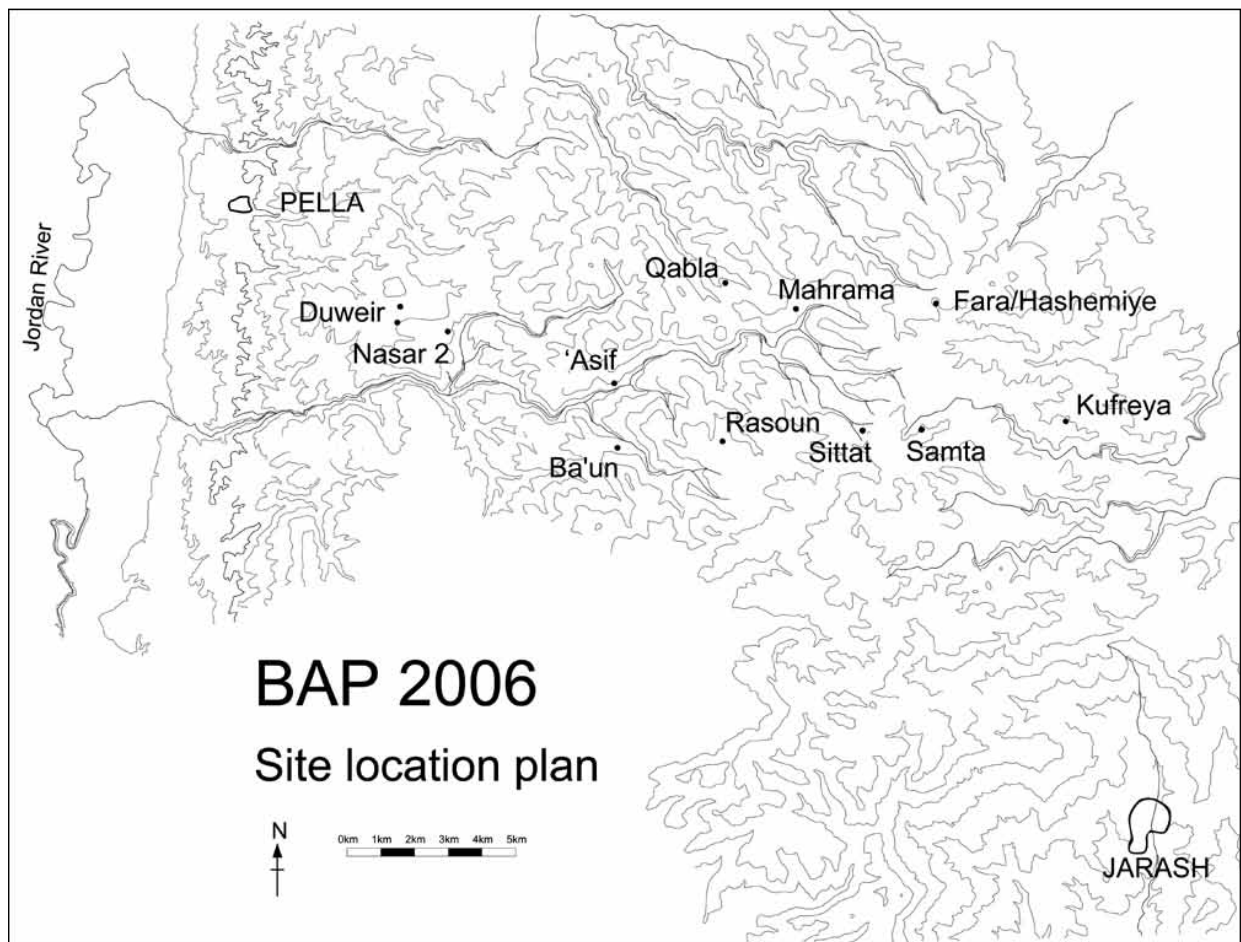
*The Borders of Arabia and Palaestina Project* is developing a new methodology based on targeted ceramic sampling to determine the route of Roman provincial borders. The project is using the area between Pella and Jarash as a case-study (**Fig. 1**) and will, in two field seasons, sample ceramics from up to 20 sites strung along the traditionally supposed route of the border between the Roman provinces of *Palaestina* and *Arabia*. For part of its length, this border is thought to be Wādī ar-Rayyān (previously Wādī al-Yābis), but east of the watershed there is very little indication of the border-line. We collect all ceramics found in our sampling squares, but are particularly focussing on material from the 3rd to 7th centuries AD.

In late 2006 the first field season took place, targeting sites previously identified in earlier surveys, including Wādī al-Yābis (e.g. Palumbo 1993), Wādī Ziqlāb (e.g. Banning 2001) and that of Mittmann (1970). Very little information is available for most of the sites we selected for sampling, and many were simply identified in previous surveys as having ceramics from the Roman / Byzantine period and usually have no plans or other information published. Additionally, the sites surveyed by Mittmann have been subject to more than 40 years of intensifying development pressure, and now often lie under villages or towns which barely existed in the

1. Ad Fines in Bosnia lies on the border line of Savia / Dalmatia (Talbert ed. 2000: Map 20E5).

2. Eusebius' Onomasticon; Ammianus Marcellinus' geographic digressions in Books XIV-XXVI, Res Gestae.

3. Magness 1993; *Galilee*: Adan-Bayewitz 1993; *Golan*: Hartel 2003; *Palaestina*: da Costa 2001b; 2003; *Pella*: Watson 1992.



1. Plan of BAP 2006 survey area with sites sampled.

1960s. We are aiming to document more fully the extant above-ground architectural remains of each site, within the time-constraints of the survey.

At each site visited, we attempted to maximise the recovered ceramic material by targeting our 5m x 5m and 1m x 1m collection squares in areas with relatively dense artefact coverage. One 5m x 5m square at each site additionally had the topsoil removed, and material collected from that. The 1m x 1m squares were used to obtain sub-surface ceramics. We spent between 2 and 5 days at each site, depending on the size of the site and the amount of ceramic and architectural material. Intensive study of the body sherds, as well as diagnostic material from each site, means that pottery processing will continue for some time.

Sampling was undertaken at the following sites:

Site name	BAP number	JADIS reference
Kh. Sāmtā	001	2219.018
Kh. Mahramah	005	2220.021
Bā'ūn	011	2119.008
Kh. ad-Duwayr	012	2120.027
Kh. Naṣṣār	013	2120.030
Kh. al-'Āsif	017	2120.035
Kh. Qāblah	026	2220.029
Kh. Sattāt	029	2219.012
Kh. Kufriyyah	036	2319.027
Kh. Fārā (now Kh. al-Hāshimiyah)	040	2220.031
Rāsūn	043	2220.022

**Kh. ad-Duwayr (BAP012; Mittmann 117; Wādī al-Yābis 55)**

SW corner of collection Square 3: 750071E 359093N, 420 m asl

Based on information from local informants and the UTM co-ordinates on JADIS, we selected the hillside NW of Kufr Abil, which had clear rock-cut rectangular shafts and basins, as the site of Kh. ad-Duwayr (Fig. 2). However, we were uncertain as to whether we were in the same location as that described by Mittmann in his survey (nr. 164). He did not mention any rock-cuttings, but did note the presence of an old house which we were unable to find. Fur-

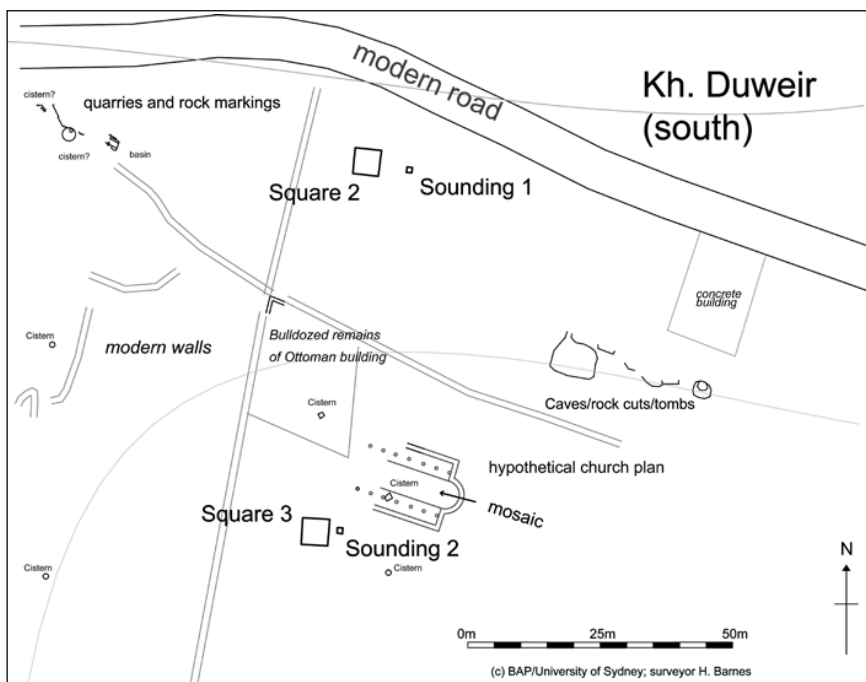
thermore, the pottery appeared small and water-worn, as if deposited from manuring.

Further questioning of the local landowners resulted in the discovery that the name “Kh. ad-Duwayr” referred to a much larger area, including a site to the south of the rock-cut shafts, where an Ottoman (possibly late 19th century) house had recently been bulldozed in order to eradicate snakes. A considerable quantity of large, sharply broken pottery was recovered from south of the bulldozer scar and, to the north, from the terraces of an olive grove. Significantly less pottery was found to the west of the private land boundary, although there were cisterns and an enigmatic series of rock-cuttings. These extend NW from a quarry, and consist of a small chamber flanked by triangular markers, with the edges of rectangular cuttings further to the NW. Excavation of the area may elucidate the function of the markers and basins.

A large in-situ mosaic survived the bulldozer, a small part of which was photographed. This clearly relates to a curved wall, with a section of straight walling to the north, and an apparently *in situ* column drum to the south-west. Given the carefully worked stones, some prepared for plaster rendering, considerable tesserae, and pottery in the bulldozer scar, our surveyor reconstructed a church on the site (Fig. 3). This would explain the limited visible architecture



2. Photograph of rock-cut shafts at Kh. ad-Duwayr (north).



3. Plan of Kh. ad-Duwayr (south).

and associated industrial rock-cut installations, along with the pottery which seems on first sight to be principally Byzantine.

**Kh. Mahramah (BAP005; Mittmann 138; Wādī al-Yabis 62; Wādī Ziqlāb 60)**

SW corner of collection Square 2: 762009E 3590227N, 971 m asl

The site is in two main sections, one large rectangular area to the south-west, and the main area of walling and vaulting to the NE (Fig. 4). A bedouin family currently camp on the northern section of the site, and some areas within the site have been cleared for tents and animal pens. Many rooms on the site have been robbed out, but not recently. The spoil from this robbing is probably confined to the south and south-east of the main area. Both the Wādī Ziqlāb and Wādī

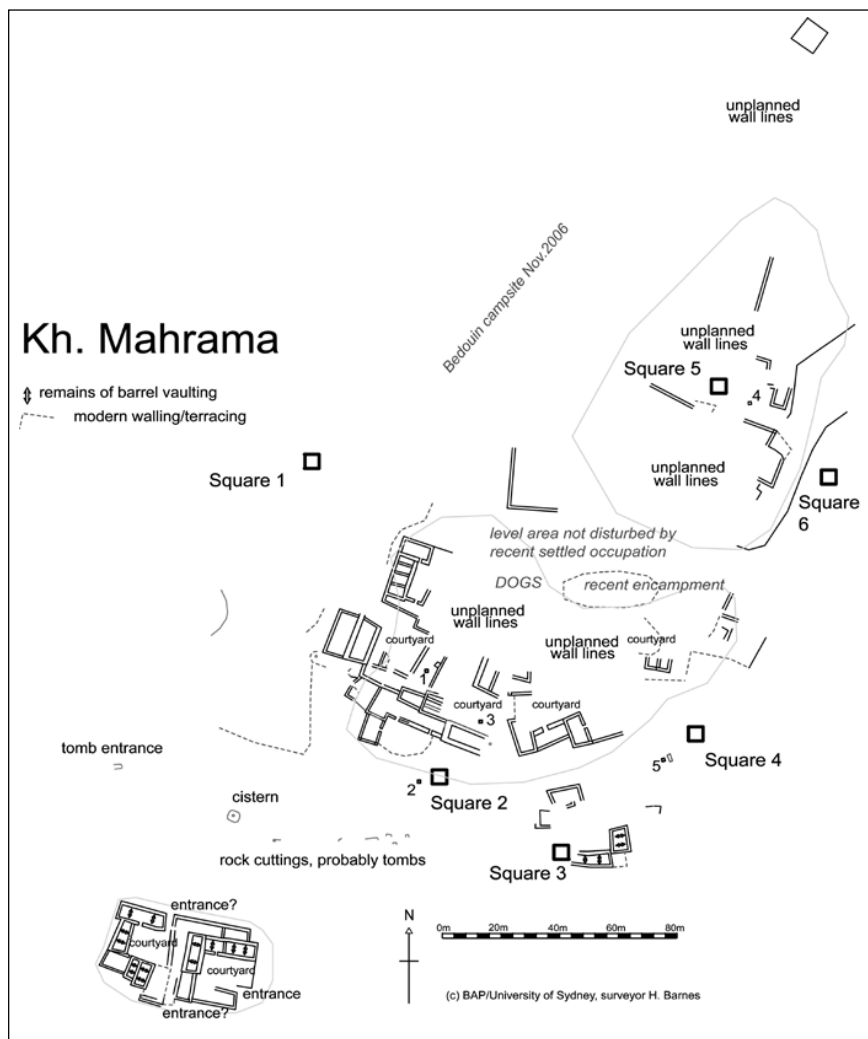
al-Yābis surveys sampled this site.

It appears from wall lines that the latest walls are Mamluk or later (Fig. 5), although several are built on earlier walls. The layout of the village is confused and many of the long rooms are quite narrow. The amount of rock tumble suggests that most buildings were constructed entirely of stone, many with two floors.

Most pottery appears to be glazed Islamic, Handmade Geometric Painted and other post-Abbasid wares. However, there are useful quantities of Late Roman, Byzantine and Umayyad pottery, and surprising amounts of Chalcolithic.

The main site is ringed by natural caves, mostly small. Some have been modified into Roman or Byzantine burial chambers, or cisterns.

5m x 5m squares were laid out to sample across the south-western part of the site. The



4. Plan of Kh. Mahramah.



5. Photo of Mamluk walls.

middle part was inaccessible owing to bedouin dogs and had been previously used for camping, so that the surface was covered with animal dung. It was not possible to sample under the oak trees as the composted leaves were too deep. Some 1m x 1m soundings were placed in areas deemed likely to preserve stratigraphy, but in two of these (soundings 1 and 3) rock tumble was reached before ancient deposits. Another 1m x 1m sounding appeared to be placed in robber spoil (sounding 5), but the others may have been sampling stratified deposits.

**Kh. Naṣṣār (BAP013, Mittmann 120, Wādī al-Yābis 58)**

SW corner of collection Square 1: 751755E  
3589892N, 423.7 m asl

The UTM co-ordinates for this site in JADIS led us to a ploughed field, said to be owned by 17 people, with almost no visible ceramics. However, the field lies between the hillock of Kh. Naṣṣār and the main road down to the Wādī ar-Rayyān crossing. Kh. Naṣṣār, to the south-east of Kufr Abīl, is now almost entirely covered by houses and their yards. One family property attracted our attention on reconnaissance in April 2006 by having clearly worked stone blocks reused as garden edging. Investigation showed some rock-cut installations and considerable amounts of large, sharply broken pottery. During the field season in 2006, the team spent

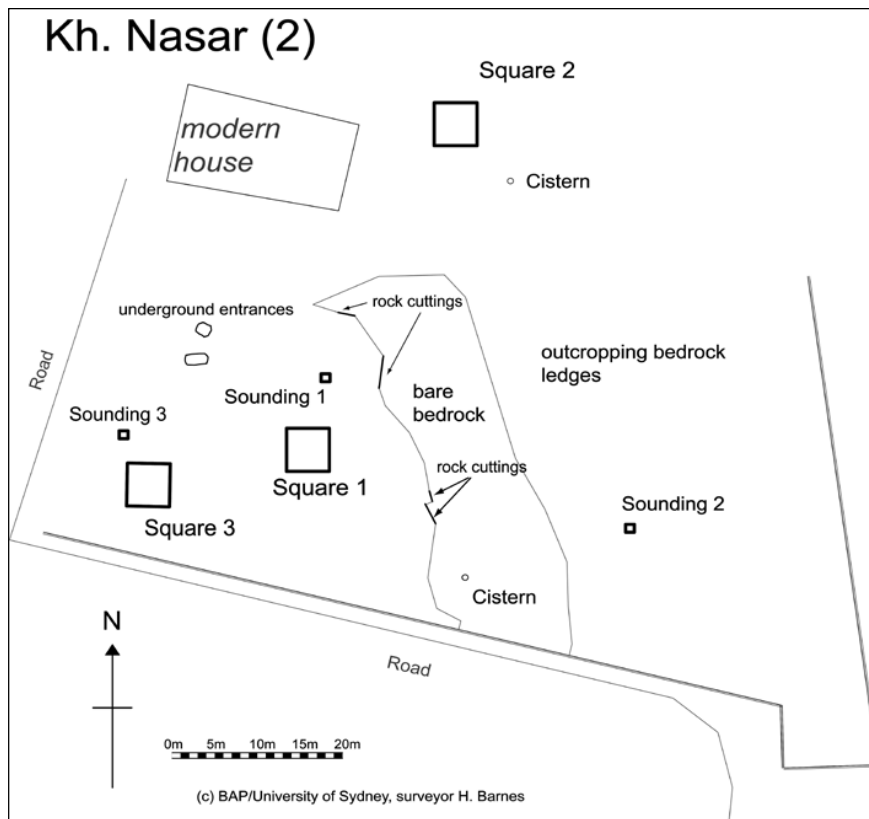
two days at Naṣṣār (**Fig. 6**). The yard is given over mainly to mixed orchard, although the soil depth is quite limited in most of it. 5m x 5m pickup squares were productive at Naṣṣār, but the 1m x 1m soundings rapidly reached bedrock. Nonetheless, large quantities of ceramics were recovered.

A particularly surprising early result from the ceramic processing was the identification of fragments of five pottery spacer rings, indicating ceramic production at the site (**Fig. 7**). No other particular evidence, such as wasters or quantities of ash, was found. Alternatively, these rings may have been used to seat round based storage jars, however they are relatively shallow and seem most likely to be kiln tools.

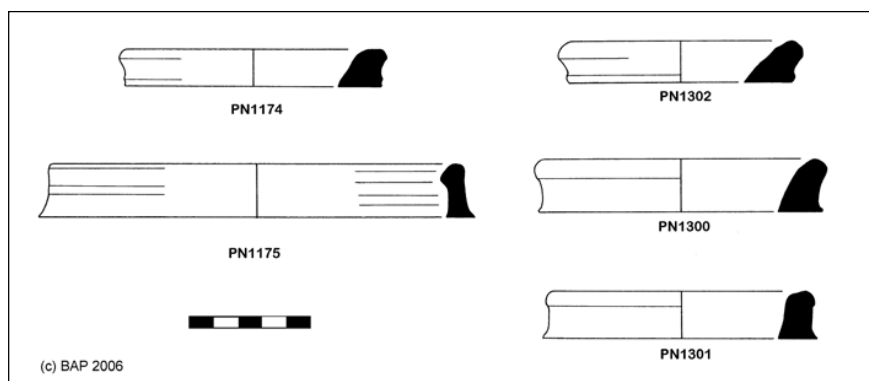
**Bā'ūn (BAP011, Mittmann 164, Wādī al-Yābis 73)**

SW corner of collection Square 1: 756639E  
3586457N, 622 m asl

When Mittmann visited Bā'ūn, the modern village was quite small and a number of 19th century houses remained. By the time of our initial reconnaissance in April 2006, the listed UTM co-ordinates fell in the middle of the modern village, under a road next to the mosque. A vacant lot with some abandoned old stone houses seemed to have sufficient pottery on it for the purposes of the project, so we ear-marked this as our target site. Returning to Bā'ūn in Novem-



6. Plan of Kh. Naṣṣār collection area.

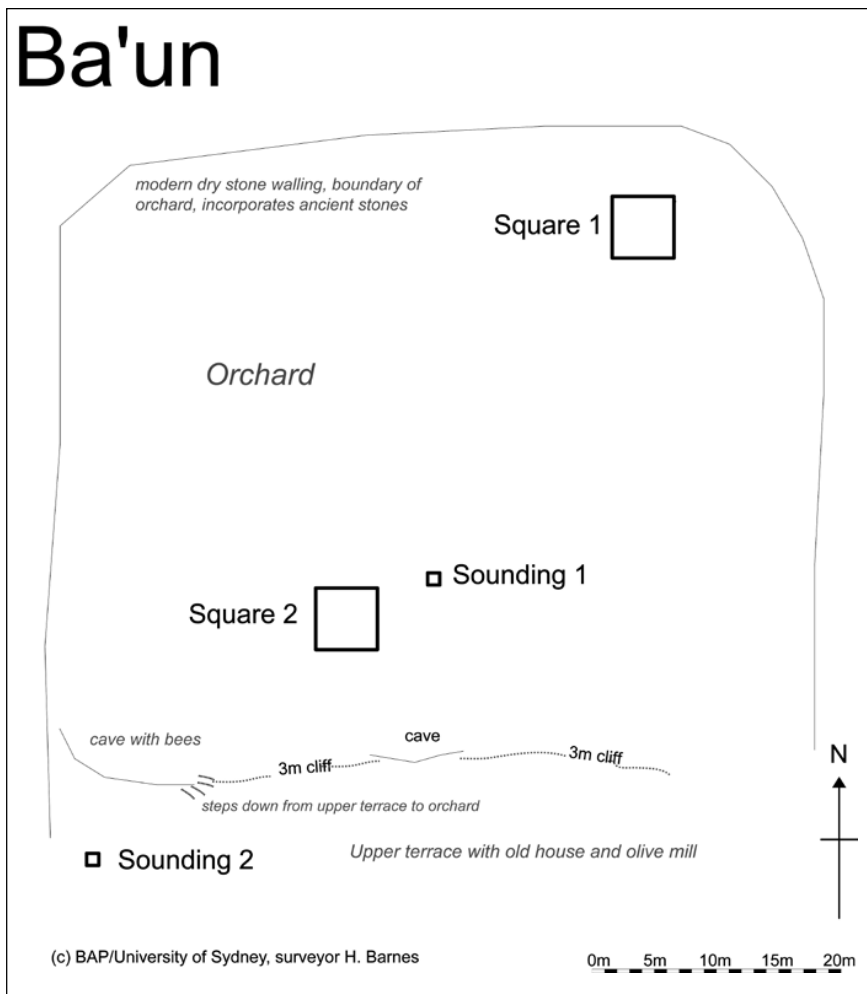


7. Drawing of Kh. Naṣṣār pot spacer rings.

ber 2006 and investigating further, we found a ploughed orchard field under the cliff of Bā'ūn which was littered with large, sharply broken pottery. We elected to sample this area, which also corresponded better with Mittmann's description of where he, too, had seen a concentration of pottery (Fig. 8). The landowner informed us that at some time in the past, the top of the cliff had been bulldozed over the edge to flatten the area for modern housing. We presume that part of these bulldozed deposits was pushed into the field we were sampling, but the area is also likely to have been the rubbish dump for ancient

Bā'ūn as well (Fig. 9).

There was so much pottery in the field that no scrape of a 5m x 5m square was made. Two 1m x 1m soundings were dug, one in the field and one at the top of the cliff, in order to determine whether settlement deposits remained above. Neither sounding detected definite stratigraphy, so the nature of both areas remains unclear. Excavation to a greater depth, probably in an area greater than 1m x 1m would be needed to determine the nature of the site, but is beyond the scope of the project. Examination of the ceramics suggests late Iron Age, then relatively little



8. Plan of Bā'un collection area.

settlement until the 6th century AD, with later occupation extending well into the mediaeval period.

**Kh. Qāblah (BAP026, Mittmann 188, Wādī al-Yābis 92, Wādī Ziqlāb 112)**

SW corner of Square 1: 760015E 3591074N, 810 m asl

This site consists of an ancient village, marked by a number of wall lines, under oak trees. It rings the top of the hill and extends downslope to the north towards the wadi between the site and Zūbyā (Fig. 10). On the south of the hill, out of the oak forest, are two large 'reservoirs', a number of rock-cut installations and the main cemetery for the site. Further to the south, across the shallow saddle of a wadi and under the scree slope of a modern quarry dump, are more elaborate rock-cut chamber tombs.

Within the ancient village confines are a num-

ber of underground chambers, of which two were investigated. At least one street was detected in the village, leading down from a large cleared area on the very top of the hill, which seems not to have had any structures on it in antiquity.

The southern slope of the hill was divided into three main areas. There are two large 'reservoirs', the southern one of which has plaster still adhering to the sides (Fig. 11), a rock-cut, stepped access, and the remains of a substantial wall forming the northern side. This was clearly used as a water reservoir. The northern 'reservoir' equally clearly had been a stone quarry — some half cut blocks remain *in situ* — and the edges are irregular. Nonetheless it could have also functioned as a water reservoir, although no trace of plaster remains.

To the north-east of the 'reservoirs' are a number of rock-cut installations. These include basins, quarrying marks and underground cham-



9. Photo of Bā'ūn site beneath cliff.

bers which are not tombs.

The best known underground chamber at the site is reached by a subterranean, constructed passage with a corbelled roof. In the chamber are two large millstones, storage niches and a cistern. There are indentations in the walls, probably made by beams being used in whatever processing work was being done in the chamber. One set of marks form an elongated cross, which the owners believe indicates that the chamber is an underground church. This is not the case.

Qāblah appears to be an important manufacturing site, using underground chambers for the processing of some kind of material. We plan to raise additional funds to further investigate the unusual features of the site.

The latest occupation appears early Mamluk in date, although the main period of use was probably during the Byzantine and early Islamic periods. The houses of the ancient village are relatively well preserved, and the underground chamber system is extensive. Although underground houses and stables are attested at other

sites sampled in the project (see Kh. Sāmtā and Kh. Sattāt), Qāblah has evidence of underground manufacturing.

**Kh. al-al-‘Āsif (BAP017, Mittmann 167, Wādī al-Yābis 76)**

SW corner of Square 1: 756959E 3588106N, 582 m asl

This site was difficult to define, but based on the visible surface pottery within an old olive grove, it extends over a limited area on a terrace on the south bank of the Wādī ar-Rayyān, opposite ‘Arjān. Remains of an old (late Ottoman) house exist in an area which had been cut into the olive grove. Only the north wall of the old *diwān*, a room (now incorporated into the current owner’s new house) and buried wall lines, said to be of the stable buildings, remain of this 19th / early 20th century AD complex. Originally the *diwān* wall had been assumed to be ancient, but the correct dating was provided by the current owner, who had been born in the old house complex.

The cutting into which the *diwān* was built provided a 3 m-high section, showing a very large amount of Roman — early Islamic pottery in a *ca* 30 cm-thick layer above the current complex’s courtyard level (Fig. 12). Surface collection was significantly less than the pottery revealed in the section (Fig. 13).

Downslope from this area, towards the wadi, a very complex interconnecting set of underground chambers was found. Time prevented planning and full investigation. There are also large pre-modern walls on this lower terrace, but they are difficult to access and plan.

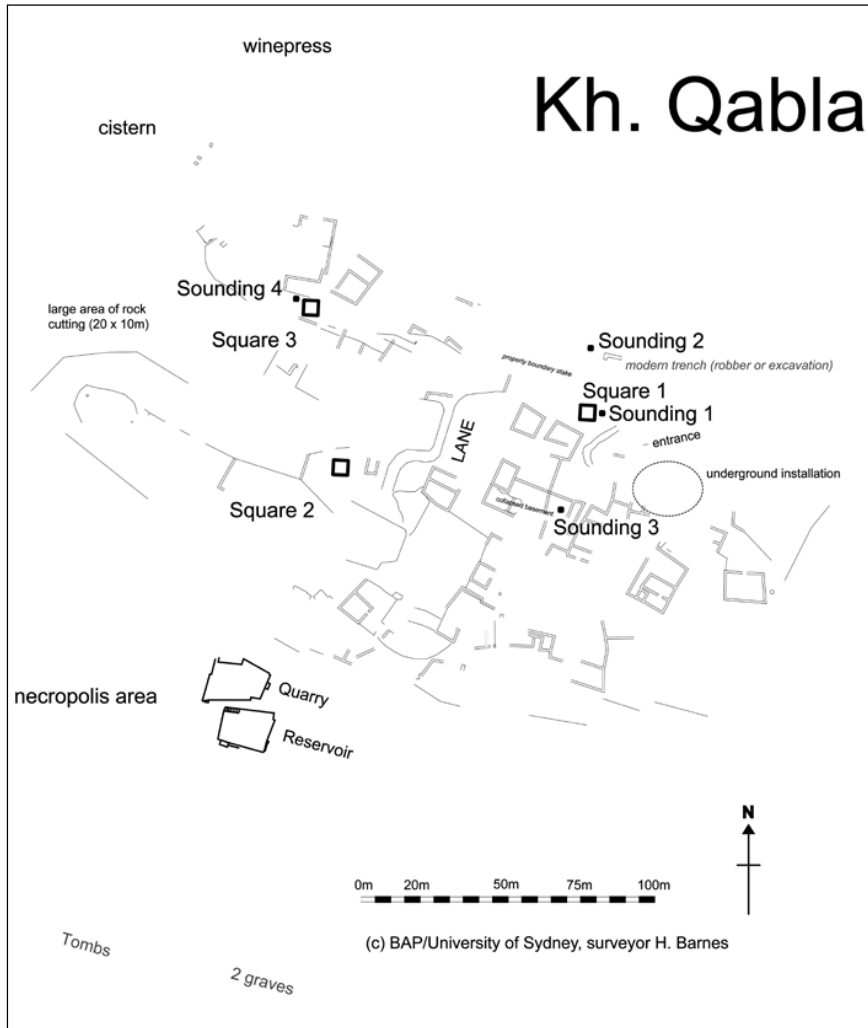
Deep excavation would be needed to investigate the Roman and Byzantine deposits at Kh. al-al-‘Āsif, but that is not possible owing to the valuable and ancient olive trees on the site.

**Kh. al-Hāshimiyah (previously Fārā) (BAP040, Mittmann 140)**

SW corner of Square 1: 766045E 3590468N, 1011 m asl

This small, ancient village is on a little hill top to the west of the Irbid - ‘Ajlūn road. To the south-east of the village, a number of rock-cut basins and settling tanks were planned (Fig. 14); at least two cisterns were noted to the south of the village. As at several of the other sites in





10. Plan of Kh. Qāblah.

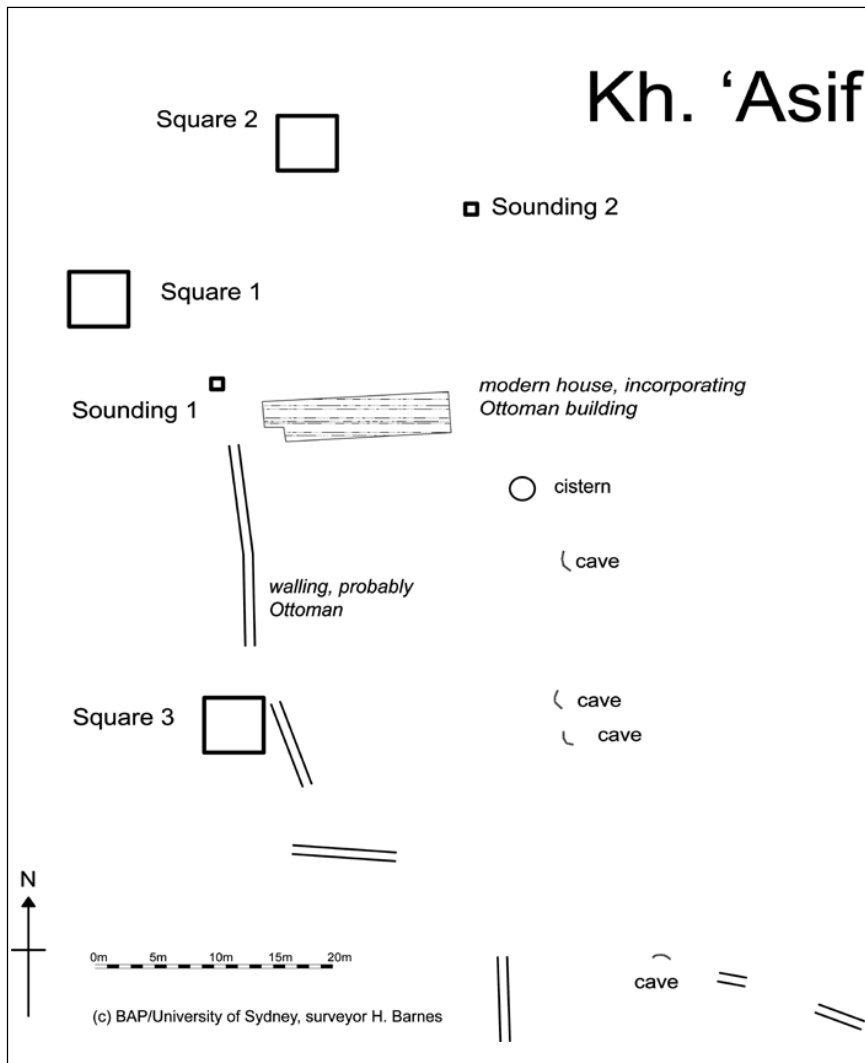


11. Photo of rock-cut reservoir at Kh. Qāblah, with Hugh Barnes pointing to plaster remains.



(c) BAP/Kate da Costa, photographer F. Reidel 2006

12. Photo of diwān wall at Kh. al-‘Āsif cutting into overburden, with pottery-rich layer at base.



13. Plan of Kh. al-‘Āsif collection area.



14. Photo of settling basins south-east of main Kh. al-Hāshimiyyah / al-Fārā village.

the project study area, natural caves within the area of the settlement had been modified for use as tombs or cellars. There was also one cistern reached by a short staircase. From the remaining wall lines and rock tumble, we estimate that some houses at the site are probably preserved over 2m high (Fig. 15). There is no substantial modern occupation at the site, and probably no significant post-Umayyad settlement.

Pottery retrieval at the site was one of the lowest in the project, and neither 1m x 1m sounding reached stratified deposits.

There is a carved lintel stone (of standard design and ordinary workmanship) lying near a tomb on the north-east side of the site.

#### **Kh. Kufrayyah (BAP036, Mittmann 189)**

SW corner of Square 2: 770412E 3587137N

Kufrayyah is the furthest east of all sites sampled this season. It is well past the Jordan / Yarmūk watershed and in an area where the provincial border line is very uncertain. It is south of Duḥalah, excavated by Dr Saleh Sari of Yarmouk University, which appears from the published lamps to have been located in *Palaestina* (Sari 1992).

In April 2006 a visit to the JADIS UTM coordinates revealed a terraced field on a ridge, with a few rock-cut basins and some very water-worn pottery of Iron Age to Islamic date. Returning to the site in December we found tombs, cisterns and underground chambers to the east of the UTM point, with increasing amounts of pottery in the ploughed fields to the north of the

modern road, again increasing in quantity as we moved east. A large quantity of glazed and Handmade Geometric Painted sherds was found in an unploughed field to the south of the road, associated with some wall lines. Earlier pottery seemed concentrated in the fields north of the road, and a series of 5m x 5m sampling squares were laid out in ploughed and unploughed fields (Fig. 16).

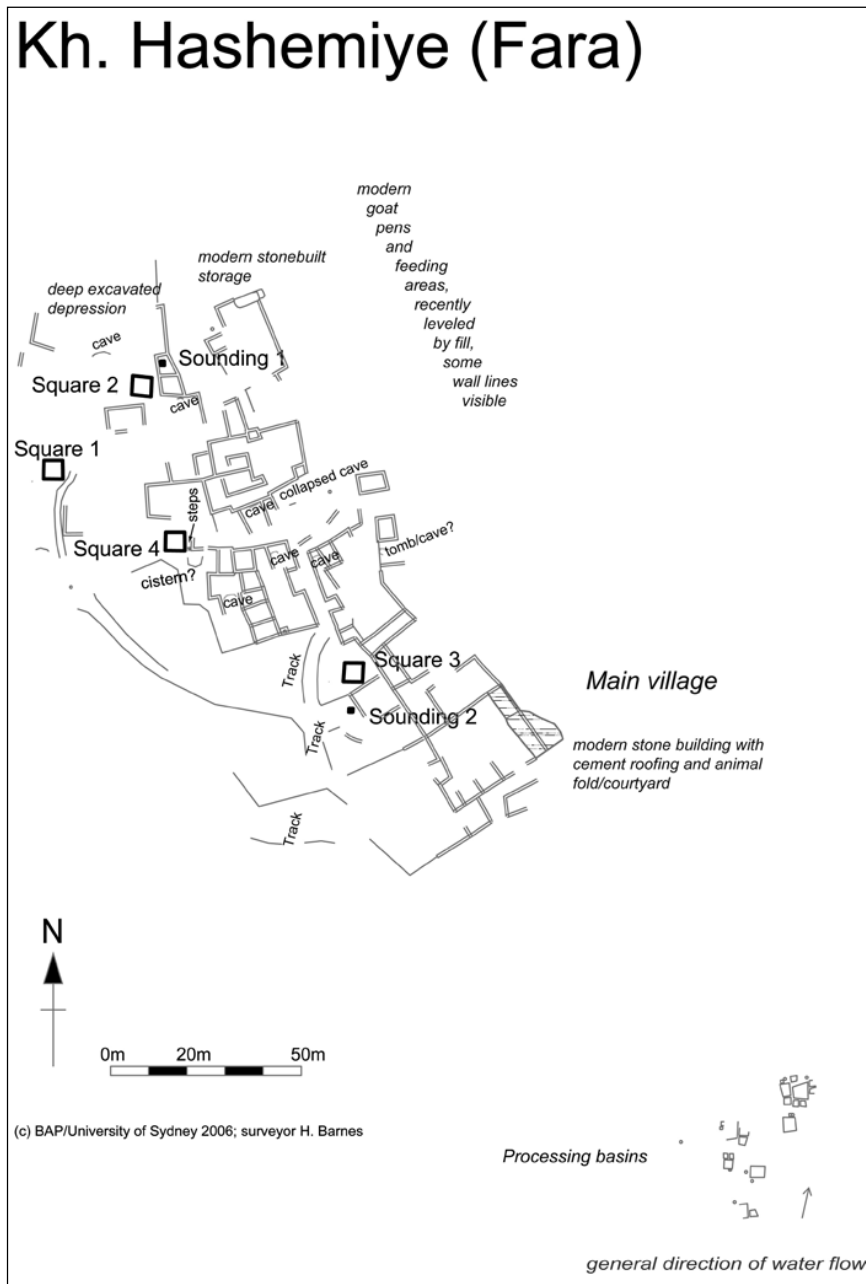
A single 1 m x 1 m sounding was excavated in an unploughed field. At a depth of 50-60cm tilted stone slabs were exposed, although the soil appeared to be exactly the same from just below topsoil to underneath the sloping slabs. When the slabs were lifted, a human skeleton was revealed. Excavation ceased immediately and the sounding was backfilled. There had been no cuts in the soil or markers on the surface to indicate a grave, but we marked out the square with stones, placing larger stones at the head and foot of the grave. We believe the whole area is an Islamic cemetery, possibly associated with the Ayyubid / Mamluk settlement to the south (across the modern road).

Because of the absence of architecture and poor weather, the team only worked two days at Kufrayyah and retrieved mainly Islamic period ceramics.

#### **Kh. Sāmtā (BAP001, Mittmann 188, Wādī al-Yābis 92)**

SW corner of collection Square 2: 765783E 3586910 N, GPS point 1100 m asl.

A well-known Mamluk mosque is situated

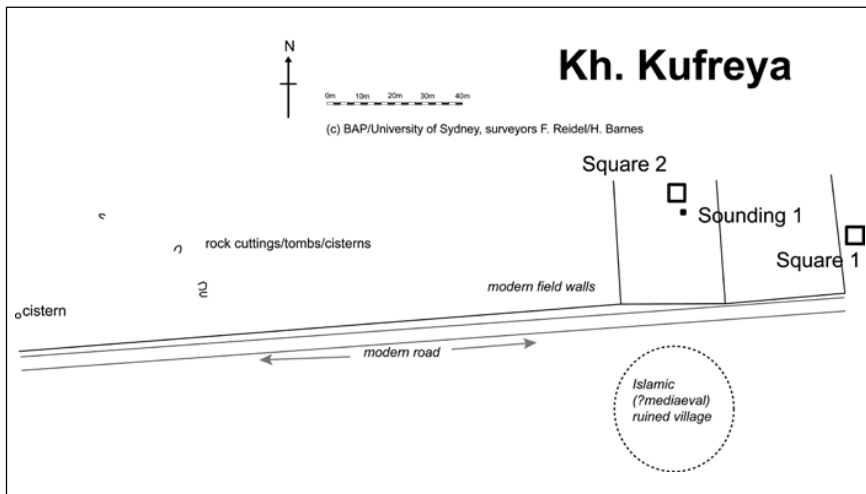


15. Plan of Kh. al-Hāshimiyyah / al-Fārā.

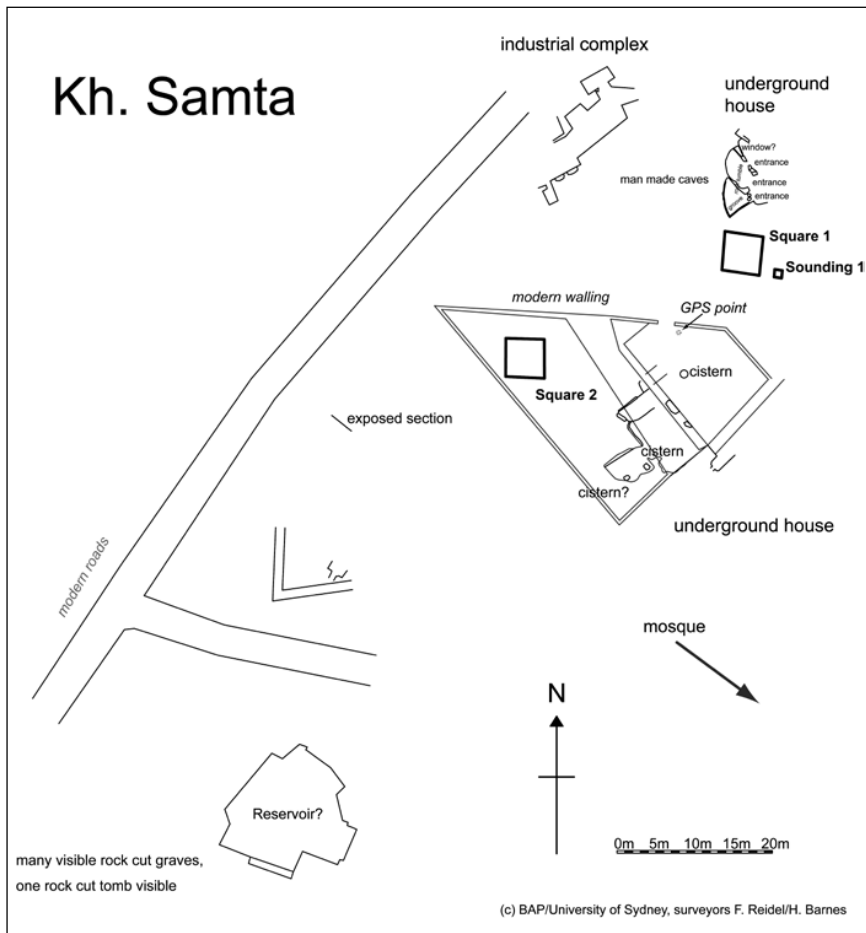
in the grounds of the modern mosque at Sāmtā (MacKenzie 2002: 618). The rocky knoll on which the ancient site is centred is riddled with underground houses, chambers, tombs, cisterns and other rock-cut installations (Fig. 17). Between the time of the initial reconnaissance visit in April 2006 and our return in December, a significant section of ancient walling and part of a rock face had been bulldozed away by the landowner (with whom we had spoken in April) in order to reveal a large multi-chambered un-

derground house which the owner plans to use as a cow-stable. Modern field walls and bulldozed spoil now cover or obliterate one of the few sections of ancient wall lines which could have been seen in Sāmtā.

Because this area had been so badly disturbed, we decided to spend only two days at Sāmtā, endeavouring to recover some data from the bulldozer spoil. However, the ceramic yield was low. The team was able to document some of the underground houses, which in at least one



16. Plan of Kh. Kufrayyah collection area.



17. Plan of Kh. Sāmtā collection area.

case looked from the outside as if it were a tomb (Fig. 18).

There are a number of other rock-cut features, including quarries and industrial installations in Sāmtā, which need immediate documentation as the village is growing rapidly.

**Rāsūn, ancient Resous (BAP043; Mittmann 169, Wādī al-Yābis 77)**

SW corner of Square 1: 759897E 3587892N,  
SW corner of Sounding 2 716 m asl.

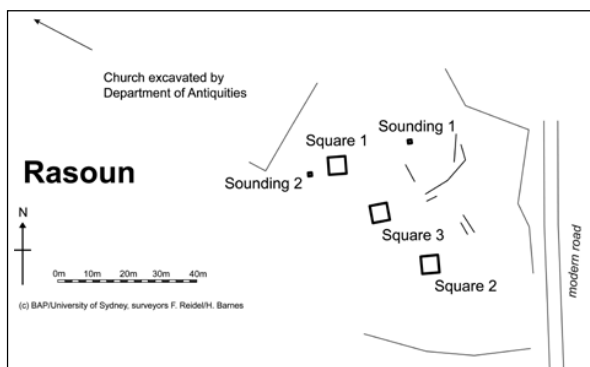
Our initial plan, based on Mittmann's description, was to sample the area south-east of



18. Photo of underground house at Kh. Sāmtā.

Rāsūn, near ‘Ayn Rāsūn, called Kh. Maslamānī. Reconnaissance in April 2006 had found only Iron Age pottery, with one large underground chamber of probable Roman / Byzantine date. On our return we were directed to another area of Rāsūn, further down the wadi, where clear Byzantine walling was found. Pottery was also relatively abundant in the ploughed soil within the old olive grove to the east of the wadi, as were wall lines as the land rose. Because the Department of Antiquities had excavated a church near the area (the wall lines are still visible in the wadi at 759799E, 3587970N, 709 m asl.), we located our collecting squares some distance uphill (**Fig. 19**).

Numerous large ancient wall lines were visible in the grove. Considerable amounts of small multi-coloured tesserae were collected from the surface, the 5m x 5m scrape and in both soundings. Sounding 2 uncovered a broken part of a miniature column, likely to have been a pulpit support or some other kind of church furnishing (**Fig. 20**). Pottery was found in medium quantities; very little of it appeared to be Islamic.



19. Plan of Rāsūn collecting area.



20. Photo of limestone column (RN4, BN230) in situ, Sounding 2, Rāsūn.

We also made a cursory examination of the openings in the hillside east of ancient Resous. Several were clearly tombs, many with *kokhim* openings, suggesting Roman rather than Byzantine construction. Others were more complex, with what appeared to be light wells, if they were underground houses, or collecting tanks, if they were cisterns. Several had collapsed into each other, although at least one had a nicely carved doorway linking two sets of chambers. This area needs to be properly surveyed, as it is likely to be the main necropolis for the ancient city.

#### Kh. Sattāt (BAP029, Mittmann 173, Wādī al-Yābis 81)

SE corner of collection Square 1: 763858E 3585847N, 1077 m asl

Because sampling at Kufrayyah, Sāmtā and Rāsūn had taken less time than expected, we added Kh. Sattāt to our sites for the 2006 season. Reconnaissance in April had been very limited, and we only saw the rock-cut basins and well-known tomb with its Greek inscription immediately south of the modern village. In December we were directed to the ruined village further south again, and especially to a very well preserved series of underground dwellings which incorporate extremely elaborately carved stables (**Fig. 21**). These underground structures, and the others in the ‘Ajlūn district (Qāblah and Sāmtā in particular), will be further studied in a future joint project with the Department of Antiquities.

Our collection squares were placed in what appears to be the eastern part of the built up area of the ancient village (**Fig. 22**). The rock-



21. Photo of one of the underground house / stables (Cave F, 02906) at Kh. Sattāt..

cut basins and necropolis lie to the north of the sampling area, and will be planned in 2008. The soil at Sattāt is very clayey, but nonetheless very large quantities of pottery were recovered, which seem mainly to be pre-Islamic.

### Acknowledgements

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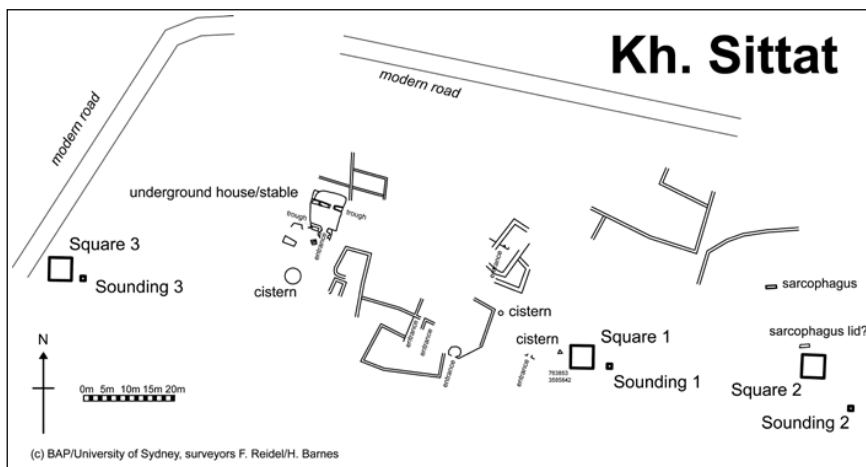
affiliated with the CBRL Amman since 2006, and Dr da Costa would like to thank all CBRL staff for their assistance. Project website: <http://acl.arts.usyd.edu.au/bap/>

Participating staff in 2006 were the director, Dr Kate da Costa (University of Sydney (UoS)), field director Franz Reidel (UoS), surveyor Hugh Barnes (Denmark), archaeologist Mel Kennedy (UoS), illustrator Toni Licciardo (University of Newcastle, Australia) and Department of Antiquities representative Dr Khaled Junaideh. Students were from the University of Sydney (Lily Taperell-Withycombe and Jacque Venesjärvi) and Macquarie University (Clare Rowan and Rob Bruce).

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22. Plan of Kh. Sattāt collecting area.

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