



Fig. 68. A tentative reconstruction of Mosque 2. From above: the excavated structure; a reconstruction of the upper part of the building; a reconstruction of its exterior (Reconstruction by Qais Tweissi on the basis of the team's study of the structure's walls)

## PETRA: ISLAMIC BAYDHA PROJECT

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The site of Islamic Baydha corresponds to Khirbet at-Baydha, about 7 km north of ancient Petra's city center. The site was settled at least from the Nabataean to the Ottoman period and even remained in use until quite recently. The Islamic Baidha Project, led by Micaela Sinibaldi and affiliated with the Council for British Research in the Levant, was launched in 2014. Here we report on the 2016 and 2017 seasons (the third and fourth seasons of the project; see Sinibaldi 2016 for the first two seasons).

The Islamic Baydha Project consists of excavations, surveys, conservation, training and outreach, and is part of the broader Late Petra Project, also led by Micaela Sinibaldi, which aims at understanding settlement in the Petra region during the Islamic period, a still largely neglected era in the history of Petra. This broader project has provided solid evidence that Petra and its surrounding region was not abandoned after the Byzantine period. Instead, settlement shifted to areas with better opportunities for water and agriculture. The site of Islamic Baydha holds the most substantial and accessible evidence for Islamic-period settlement in the Petra region, and focuses on the relationship between the Baydha and Petra hinterlands and the Petra valley during the Islamic period.

The village under current investigation includes a large number

of clustered habitations and two mosques, dating mostly to the Late Islamic period (Mamluk/Ottoman). Particularly valuable in the context of this research are two mosques, which are currently the only ones identified and excavated in the region. They have been the focus of the work in seasons 2016 and 2017. Following a study of village habitation and the beginning of work at the two mosques in the 2014 and 2015 seasons, the team focused its efforts in seasons 2016 and 2017 on the excavation of the two mosques. Mosque 2 has now been completely excavated and recorded, and a 3D model of the building has been created (Fig. 68). The mosque, which is in a remarkable state of preservation, has been reconstructed as spacious enough to contain up to about 40 worshippers at one time. It was probably destroyed by an earthquake. The building reused part of a former Nabataean colonnaded structure and was therefore accessed by several steps down. It is built with techniques still in use locally until very recently. Mud mortar bonded its non-rectilinear walls, themselves made of reused and very diverse building elements. The roof, probably made of wooden beams and mud, was supported by two arches running east–west, abutting two central pillars made of column drums reused from an earlier Nabataean building. The mosque is now ready for site conservation and presentation.

Excavations at Mosque 1 have also revealed very interesting finds. While its building style and architecture are very similar to that of Mosque 2, there are differences between the two buildings. Mosque 1 has different proportions and its two arches run north–south. This may be due in part to the fact that the mosque was built on a number of earlier buildings, including one which can be clearly attributed to the Nabataean period. The most interesting discovery was, however, the presence of red-painted plaster covering large areas of the interior walls of the mosque, an important element for reconstructing the decoration of mosques of this period (Fig. 69).

These last two seasons of the project included a study of the local modern material culture in order to better understand the evidence excavated. Finally, it also included the training of archaeologists from Jordan and the United Kingdom, and, like every season, a special day was dedicated to visits by schools from the Petra region.

#### REFERENCE:

Sinibaldi, M. (2016), "The Islamic Baydha Project, seasons 2014 and 2015," in G. Corbett et al., *Archaeology in Jordan, 2014 and 2015 seasons*, *American Journal of Archaeology*, 120.4, 660.



Fig. 69. Working on exposing the painted plaster along the walls and mihrab of Mosque 1