



Fig. 1. Khirbat Braq. General map of the visible remains, 2018. (Plan by M. Kurdy.)

In 2018, a new collaborative project was launched including al-Hussein Bin Talal University (Ma'an, Jordan) and Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB, Belgium). The aim of the project was to document Khirbat Braq, a long-known Nabataean site that had remained inexplicably neglected despite its apparent importance and, unfortunately, was being regularly looted. Khirbat Braq (JADIS 1996.005) is located in the Jabal Shara, the limestone mountain range overlooking Petra, a few hundred meters south of the suburbs of Wadi Musa, on the modern road to Tayybeh, and about 2 km in a straight line from el-Khazneh. The ancient site owes its existence to one of the main perennial springs in Jabal Shara that, along with 'Ayn Debdebeh and 'Ayn Musa, provided water to Petra. The existence of the spring must also have motivated the construction of a religious complex at the site during the Nabataean and the Roman periods, together with other contemporary and/or later structures, the chronology of which still needs to be established. Earlier explorers of the area (e.g., N. Glueck and P. Parr) reported decorative sculpture as coming from the site, but only one isolated building of the complex was excavated by the Department of Antiquities in 1994/95 (Farajat et al. 1998).

Petra: Khirbat Braq

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The current project has mapped visible surface remains (Fig. 1), thus defining the limits of a major spring-related sanctuary. It consists of a temple (ca. 17 x 12 m) and a temenos (ca. 35 x 30 m), articulated with a natural cliff from which the spring emerges. The temenos was accessible from the western side through a decorated propylaeum (8 m wide), today flanked by two multi-phased cisterns (ca. 6 x 5 m and 10.20 x 10.50 m). Although this area has been intensely looted, it still has the highest concentration of architectural fragments. Several other massive constructions (altogether ca. 60 x 20 m) have been recorded on the top of the cliffs, including a monumental entryway. Also, there are two isolated complexes, one of which can be interpreted as a caravanserai (ca. 30 x 24 m) with a central courtyard. The surface ceramic finds indicate a continuous occupation of the site during the Nabataean, Roman, and Byzantine periods. However, it is surprising that Braq, unlike Khirbat Mu'allaq, for example, has not produced any Iron Age or medieval ceramics. This phenomenon may, perhaps, be related to fluctuations in groundwater, which may have temporally increased the importance of the site.

References

- Farajat, S., M. Marahla, and H. Falahat. 1998. "The Excavations at Khirbat Braq (ḥirbet brāk)." In *Nach Petra und ins Königreich der Nabatäer*, edited by Ulrich Hübner, 120–31. Berlin: Philo.