

## Assessment and Documentation Project for the Archaeological and Tourism Situation in the Eastern Desert

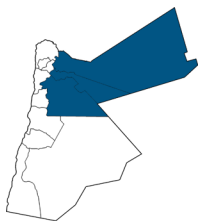
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Fig. 1. Qasr Burqa'. (Photo by Ahmad Lash.)

Despite the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic on activities and restrictions on the movement of people, which caused cessation of most archaeological missions during 2020–2021, the author took this opportunity to conduct a field project aimed at reassessing the state of the archaeological sites scattered in the eastern Badia. The eastern Badia was chosen as a target for this project for four reasons:

1. This region is rich in archaeological sites dating to a variety of historical periods.
2. Archaeological missions have been working at only a limited number of archaeological sites in the region.
3. Many archaeological sites in the eastern Badia have not received the protection or monitoring they require.
4. The eastern Badia has not been given the promotion it deserves, given the archaeological sites it contains, especially those sites considered rare site types in Jordan and the world.



From May to August 2020, the author led a project to redocument and evaluate most well-known archaeological sites, starting from the Wadi Al-Ghadaf area and ending in the Al-Ruwaished area, including Qasr Tuba, the Jelat dam, Kharanah IV, Qasr Al-Kharanah, Qusayr Amra, Qasr Uwained, Khirbet Al-Omari, Al-Hazeem Wells, Al-Ain Al-Saoda, the Umayyad reservoir, Ain Al-Qaisyah, Al-Azraq Castle, Ain Al-Sil, Usaykhem, Al-Shubayka, Qurma, Al-Qatafiyat, Al-Wesad, and Qasr Burqa' (Fig. 1). Documentation and evaluation work also included the Roman road that linked the Azraq area and the main stations of that road in the northern Badia, starting from Azraq toward Rujm al-Madaweer and Tulul al-Manasif, to the Huwaynet site at the Beshryya crossroad (Fig. 2). During this project, most of the desert kites spread between the Azraq and Safawi areas were recorded as well.

During the project, evaluation and documentation were carried out for each of those sites, determining vandalism and disturbances and related needs and also the availability of tourism components or potential components. The study also included composing a literature review and developing a viability analysis for tourism in the eastern Badia. This latter aspect aims to present some proposals to advance the tourism of the region, particularly trails or dedicated routes, which it is hoped will cover most of the important archaeological sites. Such a program would contribute to creating job opportunities in the region, as the eastern Badia is considered among the least developed for such purposes, despite the natural and archaeological diversity it contains.

The results of the project were divided into two parts. The first section was a comprehensive evaluation study for most of the archaeological sites in the eastern Badia, the strengths and weaknesses of each site, the level of threats facing each site, what is necessary to protect each site, and the possibility of placing it on the tourist map. This study was submitted to the Department of Antiquities and the Ministry of Tourism. The second section was a book in Arabic on the archaeological sites and places of interest to tourists in the eastern Badia, meant to serve as a summary reference on the most important archaeological sites there. It provides clear, basic information for interested decision makers, scholars, and tour guides. The preparation of and printing of this book were supported by the American Center of Research's USAID-funded Sustainable Cultural Heritage Through Engagement of Local Communities Project (SCHEP). I would like to thank Mr. Wesam Esaid, the head of the desert castles office at the Department of Antiquities, who joined me throughout the fieldwork trips.





Fig. 2. Traces of a Roman road. (Photo by Ahmad Lash.)