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The New Madaba Regional Archaeological Museum Project (MRAMP)

Introduction

The Madaba Regional Archaeological Museum Project (MRAMP hereafter) is an Italian-American-Jordanian commitment to prepare an urban archaeological site in Mādabā, one of the main touristic sites in central Jordan, located some 35km south-west of Amman, for the construction of a regional museum to display archaeological finds from the Mādabā region.

In the mid-2000s then Director General of the Department of Antiquities, Dr. Fawwaz Al-Khraysheh, made a request for three things in connection with the Madaba Museum:

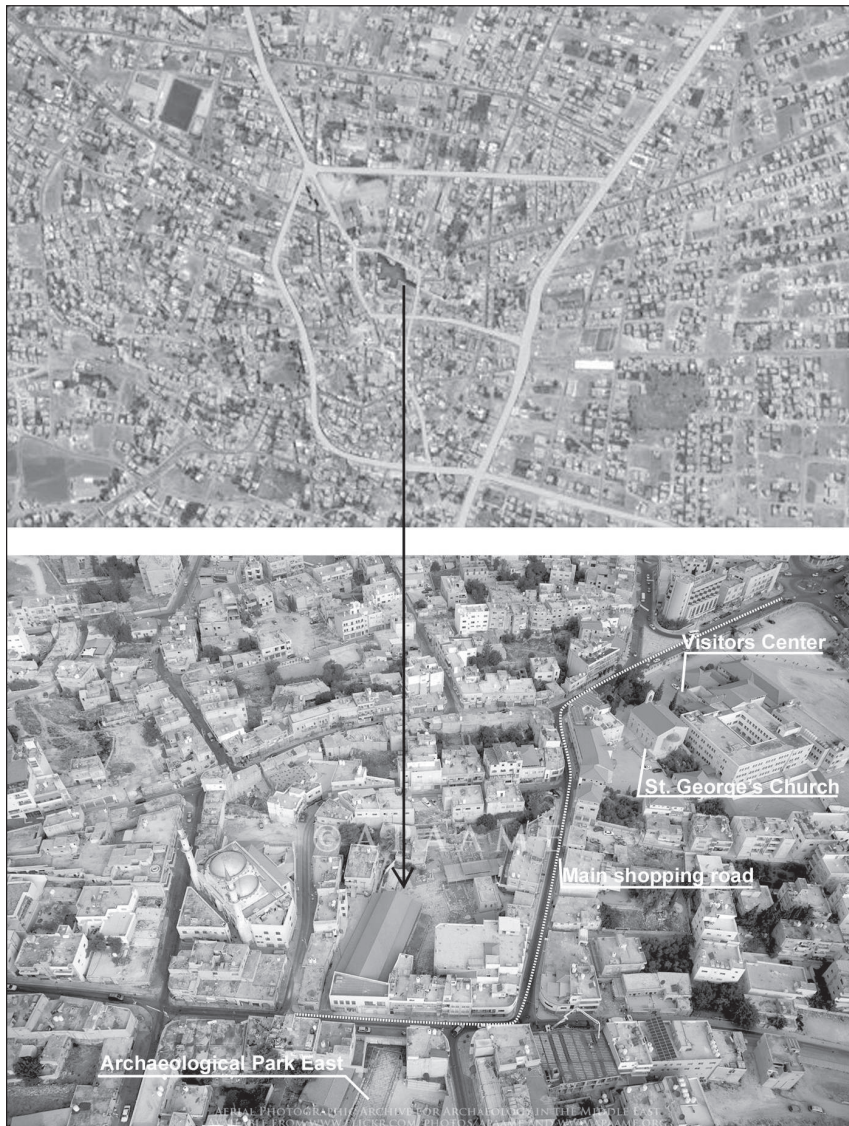
- 1) Renovate the Madaba Archaeological Museum.
- 2) Train the staff to administer the museum and the collections.
- 3) Digitize the museum's records.

Following several years of discussion among dig directors in the Mādabā region and significant fund-raising efforts, there is a renewed and enthusiastic focus on this project, after new impetus given to this initiative by an Italian-American collaboration. In cooperation with the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, Douglas R. Clark (La Sierra University), Suzanne

Richard (Gannon University), Andrea Polcaro (University of Perugia) and Marta D'Andrea (Sapienza University of Rome) recently submitted a proposal for an Italian-American project to develop a new museum.

The project proposal is focused on the choice of the area known as the Madaba Archaeological Park West (FIGS. 1-3) and, thus, it sets out to prepare an urban archaeological site for the construction of a regional museum to display archaeological finds from the Mādabā region. The specific type of research agenda is tied to the long-term goal of archaeologically preparing for and ultimately establishing a significant archaeological institution for the betterment of archaeology and archaeological resources in Jordan. The sponsoring institutions are La Sierra University, Gannon University, Perugia University, and the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, with the Mādabā regional directorate of the DoA as on-site coordinators.

In this paper, we report on the choice of a new location for a museum, the background and history of the Madaba Museum and the archaeological research in the Archaeological Park, and the results of our 2016 Pilot Season. We



1. Location of the current Archaeological Museum of Madaba in relation to the main touristic routes in the town (top photo: graphic elaboration by Studio Strati; bottom photo: © APAAME, Robert H. Bewley).

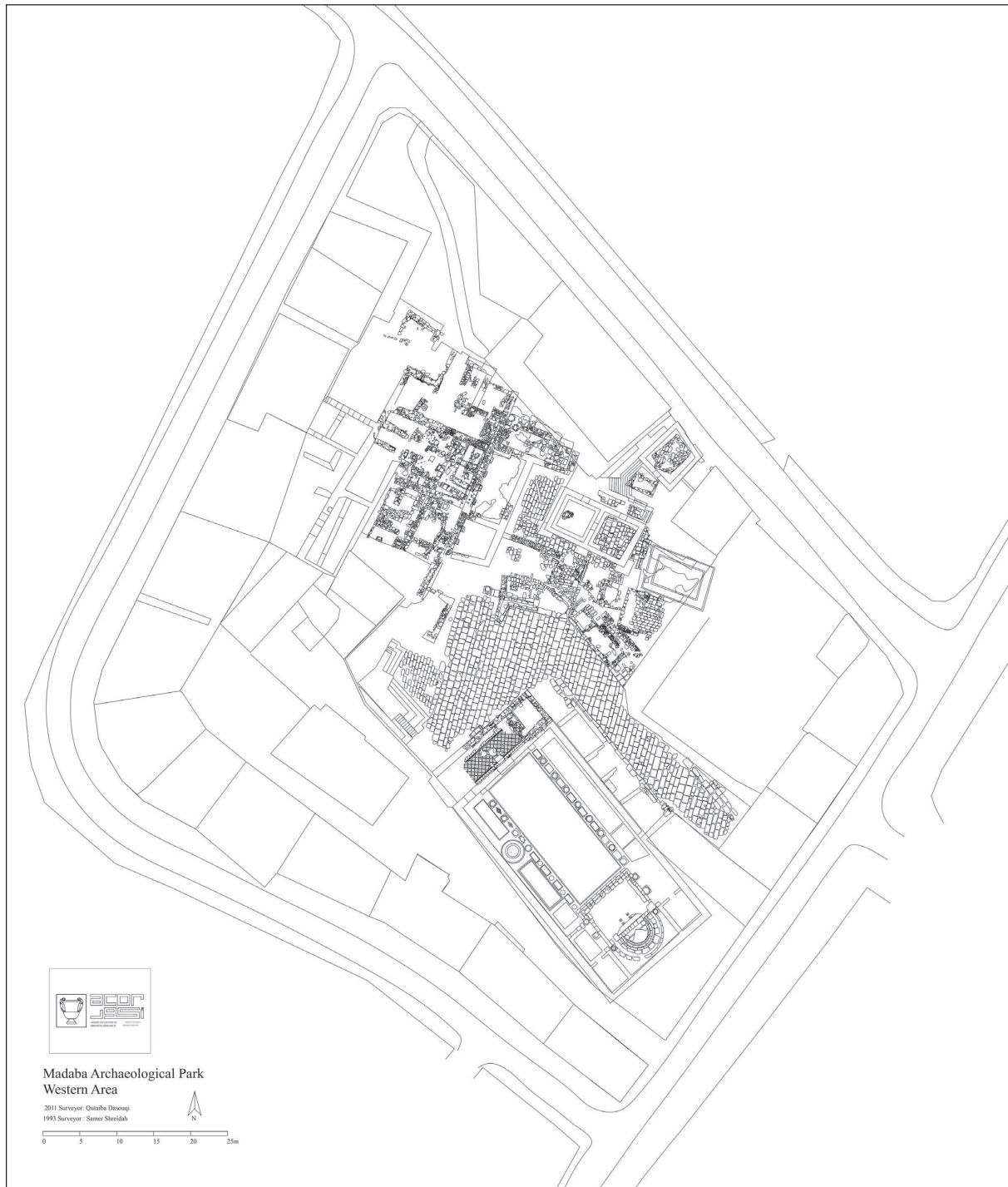
subsequently present briefly the vision for the new Museum and next steps of the project, and conclude with the significance of the MRAMP.

The Choice of a New Location for the Madaba Archaeological Museum

Mādabā is one of most visited towns in Jordan. Tourists are attracted by the spectacular Byzantine mosaics (Piccirillo 1989, 1993), some of the better preserved in the region, but the history of Mādabā goes back to the late 4th millennium BC (Harrison 1996b, 1996c; Harrison, Foran and Graham 2007: 146) and human occupation in the region is documented from the early Prehistoric period (on the history, archae-

ology and culture of Mādabā, (Bikai and Dailley (eds.), 1996; Harrison, Foran and Graham 2007). The town has a favourable geographical position, located along one of the most ancient routes of communications, known as the King's Highway from ancient sources, later transformed in the *Via Nova Traiana* by the Roman Emperor Trajan between AD 111 and 114 and still bordering the town on its southern side.

At present, the Madaba Archaeological Museum is situated away from the main touristic routes in the town. Therefore, the proposal of a new regional archaeological museum for the city is centered on the choice of the area known as the Madaba Archaeological Park West (FIG.



2. General plan of Madaba Archaeological Park West (courtesy of Robert Schick).

2) as the location for the new museum, given its visibility on one of the main touristic paths in the town, in close proximity to St. George's Church and the Visitors Center (see FIG. 1). Furthermore, the Archaeological Park boasts three important historical periods of the city of

Mādabā, from the Roman Period to the early 20th century (FIGS. 3-4). The large Roman road running east-west has been identified as part of the ancient *cardo* of the 2nd-3rd centuries AD city (Piccirillo 1985) (FIG. 4). On its northern side, there is a large building with beautiful



3. Aerial view of the Madaba Archaeological Park West (© APAAME, Robert H. Bewley).



4. Aerial view of the Madaba Archaeological Park West showing the large Roman road running east west and its connection with the stretch uncovered in the Archaeological Park East (© APAAME, Robert H. Bewley).

mosaics, used uninterruptedly during the Byzantine and Umayyad periods, from the 6th until the 7th century AD, when it was destroyed by a fire, possibly due to the AD 749 earthquake (Piccirillo 1989: 119-128) (FIG. 5). It seems that during the early Islamic Period both re-use of the Byzantine ruins and the construction of new structures on top of the remains occurred. Finally, on the western side of the Burnt Palace, outstanding examples of the late Ottoman traditional architecture of Mādabā are the remains of the houses (FIG. 6) of the first Christian families who immigrated to Mādabā from al-Karak

around 1880 (Harrison 1996: 8; Harrison, Foran and Graham 2007: 150), which were still used in the 20th century. Some of the descendants of those families still live in the houses that surround the Archaeological Park West today.

Following several years of discussion among the directors of archaeological expeditions in the region of Mādabā, and surveying and planning a proposal to use the property owned by the DoA in the Madaba Archaeological Park West for the new Madaba Archaeological Museum was submitted by Douglas Clark and Huda Kilani in 2014. The general idea of

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5. The “Burnt Palace” of the Byzantine Period, 6th century AD, with its mosaics (photo: MRAMP).



6. Madaba Archaeological Park West, examples of the late Ottoman traditional architecture of Madaba (photo: MRAMP).

the proposal was to move many of the archaeological artifacts from the museum’s current location to the Madaba Archaeological Park West, in order to enhance the display of these artifacts, organize them chronologically, center them around Mādabā, and display the wealth of the region’s cultural heritage. Subsequently, increasing Italian-American cooperative research in archaeological expeditions fostered a synergy that resulted in a new, broader proposal for the Madaba Archaeological Museum, put forward by Polcaro, Richard, Clark and D’Andrea, submitted to the DoA in May 2015. This new proposal pivots around the same general ideas of the previous one, but with a broader, more ambitious vision for the new museum, as we shall see, made possible by the cooperation

with Architects Guido Batocchioni, Laura Romagnoli, and Valeria Gaspari.

The MRAMP is a combined American, Italian, and Jordanian commitment to the renovation and restoration of the chosen area and the construction of new exhibition wings and the new set-up of the archaeological exhibitions from regional archaeological projects, realized within and integral to the rich heritage of monuments in the Roman – Ottoman periods.

Archaeological Research in the Area of Archaeological Park West

The area of the Madaba Archaeological Park West has been excavated by several archaeological expeditions, uncovering the main buildings in the area, the Burnt Palace of the Byzan-

tine Period and the remains of different Islamic buildings overlapping the earlier structures in the western area of the archaeological park (see FIGS. 2-3).

The early excavations in this area were carried out by the archimandrite Melezios Metaxakis, who uncovered some sectors of the Burnt Palace (Metaxakis 1905: 452-454). Several decades later, the area of the Madaba Archaeological Park West was intensively excavated by F. Michele Piccirillo on behalf of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum (1985-1994) and Cherie Lenzen (1992-1993), administered by Pierre Bikai, Director of ACOR, on behalf of USAID, and Ghazi Bisheh (1993-1995) on behalf of the DoA and ACOR (Bisheh 1994). F. Piccirillo extensively published his results (Piccirillo 1985, 1986a, 1986b, 1989: 119-128, 1994) and the final publication of the results of the DoA excavations is due to appear in 2017 in an ACOR publication by Robert Schick (Schick forthcoming), who agreed to share his pre-publication data with the team of the MRAMP 2016 Pilot Season.

Finally, a first step of preliminary survey, investigation, cleaning, and renovation of the area chosen as the location for the new museum in the Madaba Archaeological Park West was carried out during the two-week MRAMP 2016 Pilot Season in May, the results of which are reported below.

Results of the 2016 MRAMP Pilot Season

In a meeting of the sponsoring institutions and the co-directors of the MRAMP in May 2015 in Jordan, it was agreed that the essential first stage of the proposed revitalization of the Archaeological Park West was a season of archaeological investigation and cleaning. This season took place from May 7 to 21, 2016. It was the first step in a multi-stage effort to relocate the Madaba Archaeological Museum and make it an integral part of the stunning array of churches and monuments within the Madaba Archaeological Park in the heart of the city. The 2016 Pilot Season of Archaeological Investigation of the Madaba Archaeological Park West (FIG. 7) was intended to investigate monuments from the Roman through Ottoman periods in that spot and salvage data.

The focus of the MRAMP Pilot Season was a general cleaning of the area, down to the top of the archaeological layers where the past expeditions stopped their excavations, with no further digging. The aim of this operation was to enhance the presentation of the area and understand the superimpositions of the different architectural phases, as an essential first step to planning the construction of the new museum in the Madaba Archaeological Park West. We concentrated our work, in particular, in the north-western part of the park (Buildings 1-3; FIGS. 8-12), west of the already exposed rooms of the



7. The international team of the MRAMP Pilot season (photo: MRAMP).



8. Plan of three cleared buildings: Buildings 1, 2, and 3 (map courtesy of Robert Schick).



9. The area of the Madaba Archaeological Park West before the MRAMP 2016 Pilot Season (photo: MRAMP).

Burnt Palace. During the second week of work, a team of architects also joined the project in order to complete a new architectural plan of the area as well as a preliminary design of the museum.

Although the immediate goal of the pilot season was focused on cleaning and clearing post-occupational deposition, work followed

traditional, best practices of stratigraphic excavation methodology (FIGS. 13-14). All the objects and pottery sherds collected during the cleaning of the area have been drawn, photographed and entered into a relational database (FIG. 15).

A major accomplishment of our Pilot Season was the implementation of our engagement with



10. General photograph of Building 1, looking north, at the end of the MRAMP 2016 Pilot Season (photo: MRAMP).



11. General photograph of Building 2, looking south, at the end of the MRAMP 2016 Pilot Season (photo: MRAMP).

the local community. To that end, local specialists joined our team for cleaning and restoration of the mosaics (FIG. 17), and we trained two people from the Madaba office, which included field work (see FIGS. 13-14) as well as an orientation to our documentation system

(FIG. 18). Likewise, we initiated relationships with the Madaba Municipality and the Mayor of Mādabā and planned future interventions in the area with DoA District Director Basem Mahamid. We were also able to interview the third generation of descendants of the original own-

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12. General photograph of Building 3, looking west, at the end of the MRAMP 2016 Pilot Season (photo: MRAMP).



13. Cleaning and clearing operations in Building 1 during the MRAMP 2016 Pilot Season (photo: MRAMP).



14. Cleaning and clearing operations in Building 3 during the MRAMP 2016 Pilot Season (photo MRAMP).



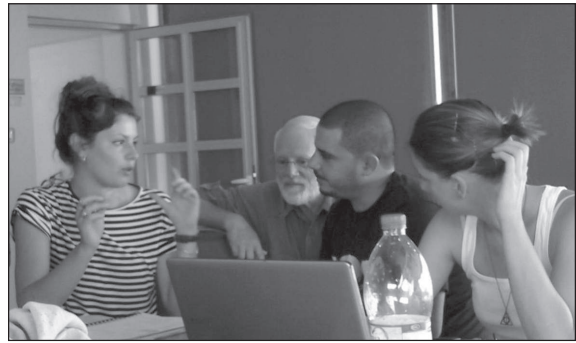
15. The international team of the MRAMP Pilot Season 2016 processing the materials collected after fieldwork (photo: MRAMP).



16. Recording the collected data into a relational database after fieldwork during the MRAMP 2016 Pilot Season (photo MRAMP).



17. Specialist from the DoA for the cleaning of the mosaics working in the Burnt Palace during the MRAMP 2016 Pilot Season (photo MRAMP).



18. D.R. Clark and two Italian staff members training the DoA staff during the MRAMP 2016 Pilot Season (photo: MRAMP).

ers of Ottoman houses built over the ancient ruins of the Burnt Palace and the early Islamic buildings –the Oweimrin Family– part of the groups of Christians who settled in Mādabā in the 1880s from al-Karak.

The Vision for the New Museum

The architectural project of the Studio Strati pivots around the connection between open and built-up spaces that will showcase the archaeological exhibition. Briefly, the plans drawn up creatively integrate exhibition space with passageways among the monuments. The architectural setup of the project is based on a functional, integrated system to organize flow of attendees, exhibition itinerary, plant designs, and a communication system, which is flexible and adaptable to different architectural settings.

The plan further envisions the readaptation of the Offices of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (FIG. 19) –a historical building that was the first hospital of the Late Ottoman town of Madaba– to introductory halls to provide visitors with an overview of the historical-archaeological timeline of the region.

New roofing to protect the remains of the Byzantine and Islamic structures is planned as well as foundational supports upon which the new museum will be built. In this manner, the ancient structures will be protected and their presentation enhanced. The foundations will support an upper story, conceived as a gallery with a balcony from which it will be possible to



19. The first hospital of the Late Ottoman town of Madaba, now occupied by the offices of the Ministry of Tourism (photo: MRAMP).

look down at the Byzantine, Early Islamic, and Ottoman remains. In this way, it will be possible to use the Byzantine, Islamic and Ottoman remains for the display of materials from those periods, while the gallery on the upper story will serve to showcase artefacts from earlier periods, such as the prehistoric to Roman periods, the town of Madaba itself, as well as from the numerous archaeological sites in the Mādabā district. Such a template for the exhibition complex will provide new exhibition spaces for a wider display of materials than is currently possible in the present museum. This architectural vision and exhibition concept has already been used successfully in some European museums that were built to protect archaeological sites by transforming them into museums. We may recall the Gallo-Roman site of Perigueux, in France, where the Vesunna Museum was built by Jean Nouvel (<http://www.perigueux-vesunna.fr/vesunna-site-musee-gallo-romain-perigueux/une-architecture-de-jean-nouvel/>), or the *Domus* dell'Ortaglia complex, in Italy, realized by an Italian firm (<https://divisare.com/projects/325681-gtrf-tortelli-frassoni-architetti-associati-musealizzazione-delle-domus-dell-ortaglia>).

As next steps for the MRAMP project we envisage further cleaning and consolidation, along with the stratigraphic analysis of build-

ing phases where these are not clear. Finally, the completion of the architects' project will include a new topographic plan of the area and a 3D virtual model of the new museum.

Ethical and Theoretical Concepts and Significance of the MRAMP

The four co-directors have conceived a long-term international project to create a regional museum in Mādabā. This project in community archaeology, *i.e.* archaeology as a common, public asset to be used for public education through collaborative projects, rests on three main objectives.

- 1) We hope to raise awareness of cultural and archaeological assets among local communities, by establishing a link between local communities and their cultural legacy and strengthening cultural identity. This is intended to minimize threats to archaeological sites and damage to cultural heritage and make it accessible and enjoyable for local communities to understand the potential of cultural heritage as a driver of economic growth.
- 2) Within the MRAMP Project, and in accordance with the DoA, we foresee a brand new set-up, which could showcase the richness and variety of the archaeological and historical background of the Madaba region

directional maps. In this way, visitors have the opportunity to see the best of the material remains from Mādabā and its regional sites, but also to travel to them as a series of related museums without walls.

- 3) Cooperative research with universities and cultural organizations is envisaged to support capacity-building and training of local specialists. The ultimate goal is to promote Jordan's autonomy in the management of cultural heritage and generate societal continuity between experts in the field and final "consumers" of cultural products and to generate employment through the economic potential provided by the museum's management.

Conclusion

We are particularly focusing on five different objectives, with the hope to promote civic pride in Jordan's cultural heritage and engage community stakeholders:

- 1) Establishing a committee infrastructure for developing and dealing with the wide variety of issues which will arise over the duration of this process.
- 2) Utilizing the planning, restoration, and construction processes as an immersive, collaborative educational tool for museum staff.
- 3) Repurposing of current Madaba Archaeological Museum facilities for research (library and labs), storage, conservation, maintenance of mosaics on site.
- 4) Defining the various communities with whom the museum will interact.
- 5) Planning for the various types of educational endeavors to be sponsored by the museum for communities (local and extended), including partnerships with universities and private organizations. We have likewise set up with DoA on-site coordinator Bassem Mahamid a number of day workshops provided by several American archaeological expeditions in the region.

While only a beginning of the MRAMP ini-

tiative, the progress we made in 2016 in collaboration with DoA and the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, the Madaba Municipality, the local home and business owners, and regional excavation projects has been exceptional. Building on this foundation, we sincerely hope the future will produce the desired outcomes of a new museum, digitized records, and a well trained staff.

Acknowledgements

The international team of the MRAMP Pilot Season included: *Co-Directors*: Douglas R. Clark, Marta D'Andrea, Andrea Polcaro, and Suzanne Richard; DoA: Basem Al Mahamid (on-site coordinator); Ahmed Ajarmeh: Nisreen Fouqahaà; Staff: Marco Benatti; Chiara Castiglia; Maira Kaye; Matthew Murdoch; Chiara Panicucci, Maddalena Scattini; architects: Guido Batocchioni; Valeria Gaspari. We wish to thank all our collaborators and staff.

We wish to thank Dr Monther Jamhawi, Director General of the DoA, and Samia Khouri of the DoA who oversees the development and sustainability of DoA museums in Jordan.

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Finally yet importantly, we would like to acknowledge and thank Robert Schick for his wonderful collegueship in sharing his pre-publication data and results with us. It has immeasurably helped the project and work of the architects.

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