

Khairieh 'Amr, Jihad Kafafi and Raeda Abdallah
The Jordan Museum
PO Box 831225, Amman 11183, Jordan
e-mail: kamr@jordanmuseum.jo

Khairieh 'Amr, Jihad Kafafi and Raeda Abdallah

The Jordan Museum: Exhibiting the Archaeology of Jordan

Development of a National Museum for Jordan

Ideas for establishing a National Museum in Jordan have been developing since the 1960s. Architectural plans commissioned by the Department of Antiquities for a National Museum at 'Ammān Citadel were ready as early as 1979 (Brawne and Associates 1979; see also Al-Azzawi *et al.* 1995: 330-331), but concerns about locating the proposed museum on such an archaeologically rich site prevented their implementation.

In 1980, HRH Crown Prince al-Hassan Bin Talal held the First Conference on the History and Archaeology of Jordan at Oxford. Conference papers recommended the establishment of a National Museum and, by 1989, a previously established committee of concerned individuals, government officials and university representatives had formed the "Society of Jordanian Culture", chaired by HRH Prince al-Hassan. This society worked on several topics that were eventually incorporated into the National Museum general concepts (Ibrahim 1991).

The main obstacle to the establishment of the National Museum was lack of funding. Between 1994 and 1996, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) conducted the "Study on the Tourism Development Plan in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan", which recommended the implementation of seven tourism development projects, including the National Museum. This was followed by funding from the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) for "Special Assistance for Project Formulation" and a detailed JICA study of the projects. In December 1999 these culminated with the signing of a Japanese loan agreement for financing the "Tourism Sector Development Project".

With the launching of the "Tourism Sector Development Project", work on achieving a National

Museum for Jordan was finally underway, with the aim of establishing a museum adhering to international modern standards that would present the history and cultural heritage of Jordan to Jordanians and visitors alike.

King Abdullah the Second Bin Al Hussein issued a royal decree on 16 May 2002 by which a National Museum, having financial and administrative independence, was established in Jordan. On 1 July 2003, His Majesty also accredited the National Museum bylaw (no. 71 for the Year 2003, issued according to Item 31 of the Law of Antiquities no. 21 for the Year 1988).

On 12 January 2005 the governing Board of Trustees, chaired by Her Majesty Queen Rania Al-Abdullah, held its first meeting. On 2 October 2005 Queen Rania laid the cornerstone of the Museum building, designed by Jordanian architect Jafar Tukan, and the Board decided upon the name of "The Jordan Museum" for the new institution.

General Concept, Mission and Objectives of the Jordan Museum

The general concept of the exhibition plan for the Museum is "A Story Telling of Jordan: Land and People", from the Palaeolithic to modern times. This general concept has remained unchanged since the summer of 2003, when the National Museum Technical Team started work on the upgrading of the exhibition (see Barghouti *et al.* 2007).

The mission and objectives of the Museum can be summarized in five main points:

1. To be a **cultural landmark** and symbol of pride for Jordan, reflecting its history and cultural heritage;
2. To serve as a facility for **creating awareness** among Jordanians of the importance of their national heritage;

3. To serve as a tourist attraction in order to **promote tourism** and to provide visitors with an overview of Jordan, land and people;
4. To serve as a **research and study base** for academics and scholars; and
5. To serve as an **educational facility** for school children from across the nation in order to establish in their minds the continuous cultural links of successive civilizations.

The educational role of the Jordan Museum is seen as one of its distinctive aspects, whereby programs are planned and designed to foster an understanding of the national heritage. Education is of course for all age groups, but children are perceived to be the main beneficiaries of these programs. Programs and interactive workshops, aimed at creating and broadening awareness and understanding of Jordan's heritage and history, started well before the opening of the museum in order to help foster a sense of national identity. It is hoped that this will help in the national effort to preserve our cultural heritage.

Building, Functions and Activities of the Jordan Museum

The Museum is currently under construction in downtown 'Ammān, within the present City Plaza at Rās al-'Ayn (FIG. 1). It is perceived as a major component of a cultural centre connecting east and west 'Ammān. The structure has a total floor area of 9500m², where five main interlinked functions will be carried out: 1. exhibition; 2. artefact collection and conservation; 3. research and archiving; 4.

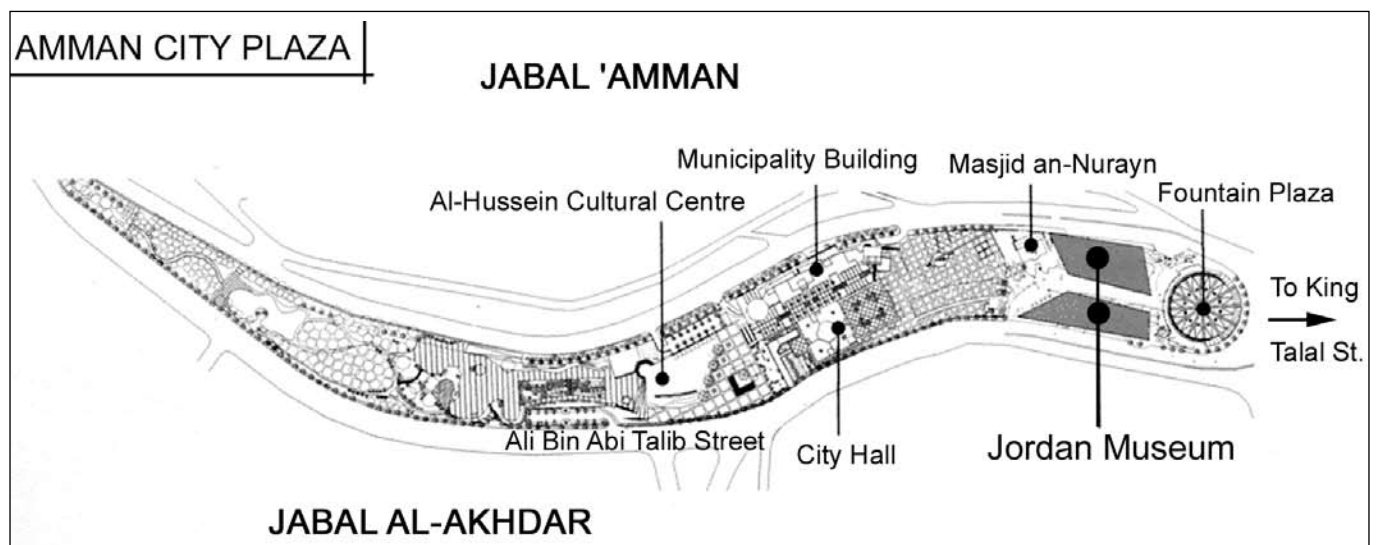
TABLE 1. Floor areas for the different in the Jordan Museum

Exhibition Galleries	2400m ²
Collection Management – storage and others	2400m ²
Research / Study Hall – including lecture hall	1200m ²
Administration & Operation / Maintenance	600m ²
Visitor Services	1000m ²
Auxiliary Services (circulation and mechanical rooms)	1900m ²
TOTAL	9500m²

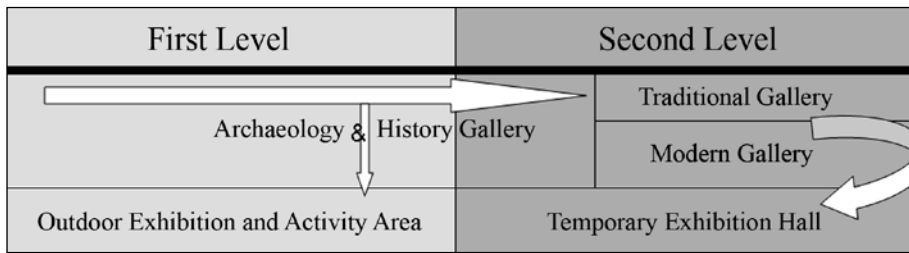
education; and 5. visitor services (see TABLE 1).

The first function, the exhibition, spans two floors of the building (FIG. 2). Its design is dictated by all other functions, especially research and education.

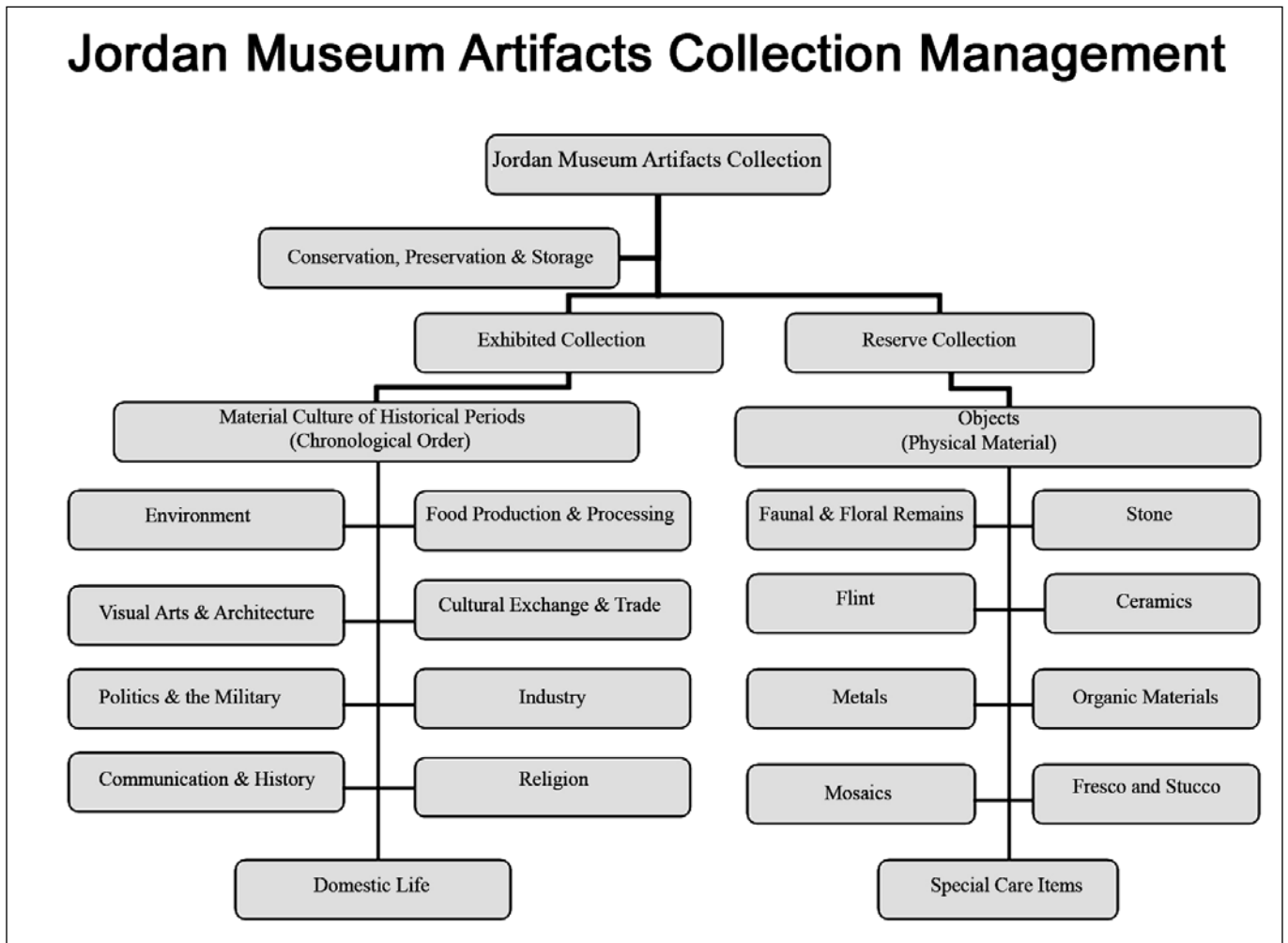
The Jordan Museum artefact collection is perceived as falling into two main categories, the exhibited and reserve collections, with a special emphasis on conservation and preservation. The exhibited collection is categorised according to the material culture of the various historical periods, in chronological order, and is presented in accordance with nine main themes that span and connect the periods. The reserve or storage collection is categorised by physical material in order to facilitate its preservation (FIG. 3).



1. Location of the Jordan Museum.



2. Jordan Museum exhibition layout.



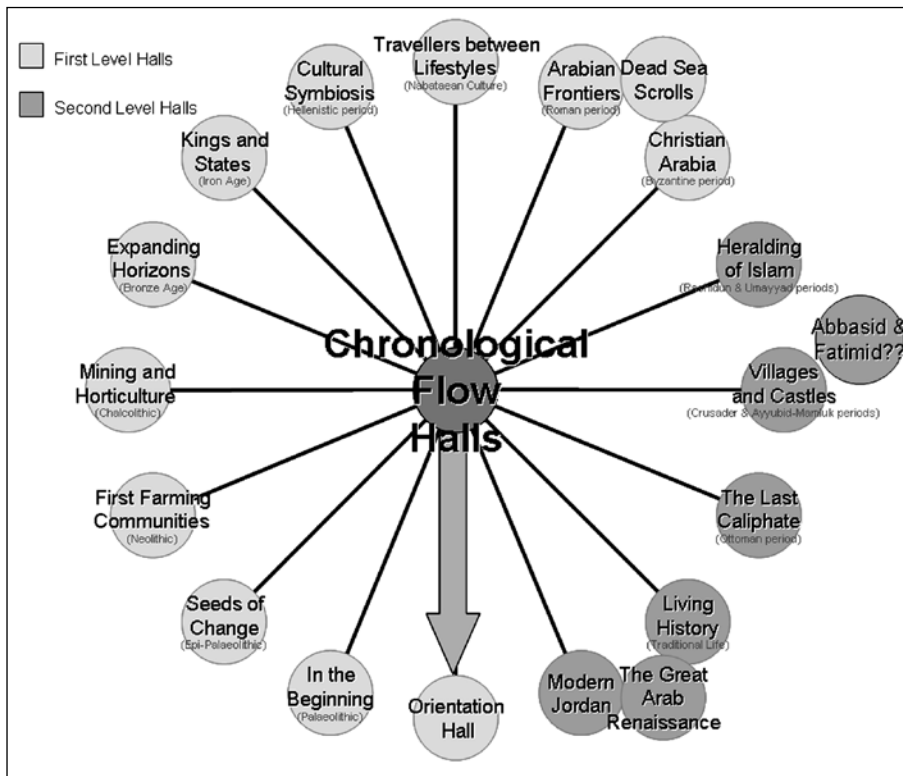
3. Jordan Museum collection management.

The Exhibition

The exhibition in the Jordan Museum is divided into two main parts: the *Chronological Flow Halls* and the *One-to-One Theatres*. These are preceded by an *Orientation Hall* that presents background information on Jordan’s geography and geology, and general guidance regarding the exhibition halls. Starting here, exhibitions are used to encourage visitors to explore not only the Museum, but also cultural sites in Jordan.

The *Chronological Flow Halls* are divided

into three main galleries: 1. The Archaeology and History Gallery; 2. The Traditional Life Gallery; and 3. The Modern Gallery. The main historical periods are presented in terms of socio-cultural development, a concept previously used in Jordan at the Museum of Jordanian Heritage, Yarmouk University. The names of the halls were chosen to reflect the periods they present and also to be attractive to visitors (FIG. 4, noting that no appropriate name is yet available for the Abbasid-Fatimid Hall).



4. Jordan Museum Chronological Flow Halls.

The concluding main gallery, the *Modern Gallery*, covers Jordan’s modern and contemporary history from the Great Arab Revolt of 1916 up to the present, and describes the collective efforts of the Hashemites and Jordanian people to build a modern and reformed country.

The *Traditional Life Gallery* overlaps and connects the Archaeological and Modern exhibits. It presents traditional heritage — Jordan’s “Living History” — with the aim of linking today’s generation of Jordanian youth with their national heritage, highlighting elements relevant to modern Jordanian society.

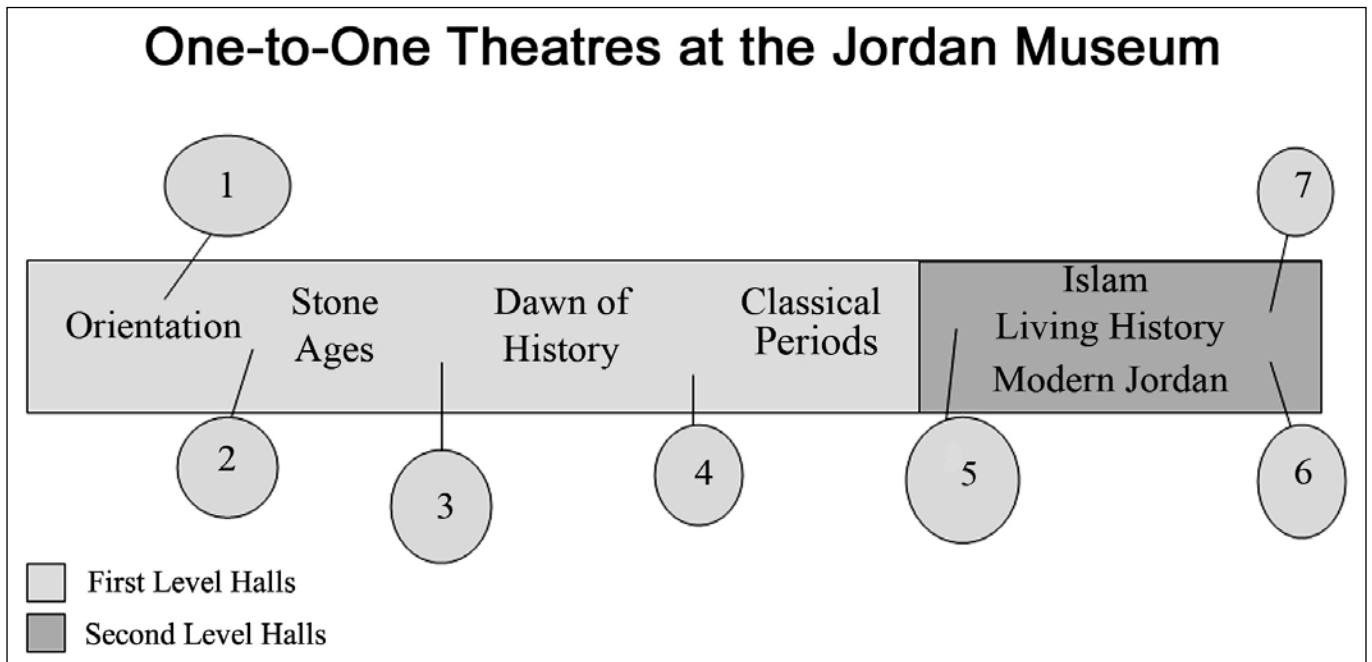
In terms of space, the *Archaeology and History Gallery* is the largest gallery in the Museum, presenting Jordan’s history and culture from the Palaeolithic until the end of the Ottoman era in four main sections: 1. The Stone Ages (Palaeolithic, Epipalaeolithic, Neolithic and Chalcolithic); 2. Dawn of History (Bronze and Iron Ages); 3. The Classical Periods (Hellenistic, Nabataean, Roman and Byzantine periods); and 4. Islamic Periods (Rashidun, Umayyad, Abbasid-Fatimid, Ayyubid-Mamluk and Ottoman periods), that is to say from the “In the Beginning” through to “The Last Caliphate” halls in FIG. 4.

Although the divisions described above have remained little changed in their essentials since we

introduced the notion of the *One-to-One Theatres* back in 2003, many details and concepts have been evolving over the years (for example, compare FIG. 4 to Barghouti *et al.* 2007: 144, FIG. 5). It is our vision that this *process of evolution* will continue even after the opening of the museum.

The Archaeological Exhibits

Thanks to the help of the Department of Antiquities and museum curators, we have been able to record thousands of objects from all time periods and regions of Jordan for potential display. These are on loan from the Department of Antiquities and include some of the treasures of Jordanian archaeology, including ‘Ayn Ghazāl statues, the Tulaylāt al-Ghasūl wall painting, the Pella ivory box, Khirbat adh-Dhariḥ Nabataean statues, and the bronze brazier of al-Fudayn, as well as others that are currently on display at the Jordan Archaeological Museum at ‘Amman Citadel. As for the regional archaeological museums, it is our policy not to weaken their exhibits so therefore the vast majority of artefacts requested for loan are from their reserve (storage) collections. All objects that are regarded as ‘icons’ of specific sites, such as the *Ilahat Hayyan* idol of Petra and the *Tyche* statue of Umm Qays, were not requested for loan but are represented at the Jor-



5. Jordan Museum *One-to-One Theatres*.

dan Museum by photographs in order to encourage people to visit the sites and to see these objects where they belong.

As for the development of the exhibition, we were guided by three main principles:

1. The museum experience should be holistic and reciprocal, for us and for our museum 'guests'. The museum is a home of our culture and people coming into this home are therefore our guests;
2. The objects on display were made and used by people like us and like our guests. They are special objects to care for and understand; and
3. Familiarity negates alienation, of the guests and of the exhibits. This can only be achieved by emphasising contexts and relations.

Thus, we regard the Museum as a place to enjoy learning as well as **communication**. For this purpose we use *interactive* devices and films in all halls, varying from the simple "See and handle how archaeologists date by stratigraphy and pot sherds" or "Engrave your own inscription", to elaborate computer programs that answer questions on archaeometry and dating techniques, allow you to dress up as a resident of 'Ayn Ghazāl or even write your name in Aramaic and Greek.

Objects are not displayed as mere *objets d'art* but are considered as words in a story. Objects for exhibition in each hall are *contextualized*, grouped and presented in accordance with the narrative

themes in FIG. 3. Of course, these 'words' have to be beautifully presented to make the story more appealing.

A main consideration in the exhibits is the *importance of size*. While plans and maps are used to represent large structures and regions, no small-scale models are used and all physical reconstructions are at a scale of 1:1. This means that no structures can be reconstructed in full within the museum, owing to space constraints. Instead, what is presented are 'cut-models' of structures with reconstructed elements that cannot be seen in their original natural settings, e.g. there are cut-model reconstructions of houses from Epipalaeolithic Wādī al-Ḥamma, Neolithic 'Ayn Ghazāl and Chalcolithic Abū Ḥāmid that show standing walls, and a reconstruction of the sugar cane crushing mechanism of mediaeval Ṭawāḥīn as-Sukkar.

A major innovation at the Jordan Museum are the *One-to-One Theatres* that compliment the main *Chronological Flow Halls*.

The One-to-One Theatres

1. Spaces that present special thematic exhibitions as 'time capsules', irrespective of historical period;
2. Dispersed among the *Chronological Flow Halls*, they complement the main exhibition galleries (FIG. 5, compare to Barghouti *et al.* 2007: 144,

Fig. 6).

3. The main interactive spaces in the museum, where emphasis is placed on interpretation and guest participation. They embody the principle of “please touch”, as opposed to the “DO NOT TOUCH” emphasis of the *Chronological Flow Halls*;
4. The exhibits address all age groups simultaneously, in simple terms that respect their intelligence.

The theatres start with *The Earth*, which explains the means by which we obtain archaeological data about the past and the major earth resources used by the people of Jordan to produce the artefacts on display in the galleries. They also describe the characteristics that differentiate *Humans* from other members of the animal kingdom, discuss the development of ways of life through *Nomadism* and *Writing*, the development of technology in *lighting* and, finally, bridge into the future through the *Children of Jordan* and *Exploring our future*.

Acknowledgements

The Jordan Museum is very much the result of cooperation between hundreds of individuals. First of all, we are grateful to the many scholars who generously gave us their time, effort and knowledge.

The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, the Ministry of Public Works and Housing, the “Tourism Sector Development Project” Management Unit, our technical advisors from JICA, our exhibition contractor “PICO International” and our consultants “Pacific Consultants International” are all directly and crucially involved in the accomplishment of the Jordan Museum.

Without the efforts and collaboration of Dr Fawwaz al-Khraysheh and the employees of the Department of Antiquities, our main partner, nothing would have been achieved.

The creative and non-conformist ideas of Yusuke

Namba were a significant help to us in the development of the exhibition.

We are also very lucky to have benefited from Jordanian talents, institutions and firms who, through our international contractor, are working with us on the creation of the exhibition, not forgetting the children of Jordan who shared their ideas with us by means of workshops held by the Jordan Museum and local educational institutions.

Special thanks to our driving force, Dr Faris Nimry, whose determination, concern and innovative thinking are making a real difference to the evolution of our work.

Last, but not least, we are grateful for the support of our Board of Trustees and especially to the Vice-Chairperson, Princess Sumaya Bint El Hassan, who devotes much of her time and insight towards the development of the Museum.

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