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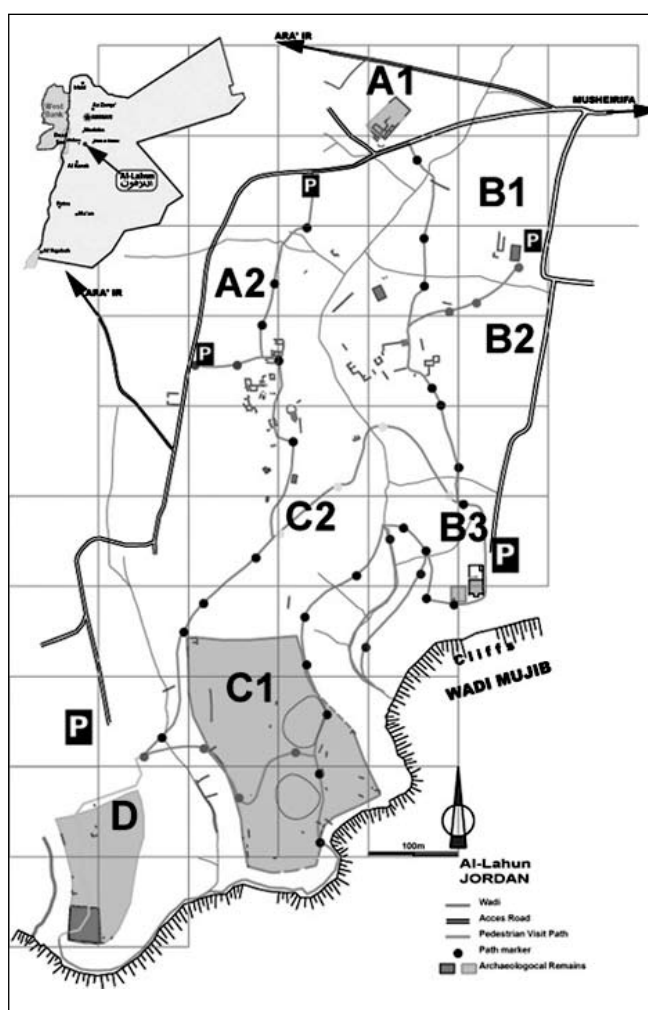
Archaeological Past and Tourist Future of Al-Lāhūn: A Geoarchaeological Park and Museums

Location (FIG. 1)

Al-Lāhūn, also referred to as al-Lāhūn or Khirbat al-Lāhūn in some publications, is located in central Jordan, 82km. south of ‘Ammān and nearly 30km. south-east of Mādabā and the Dead Sea ¹. Its strategic location near the Kings’ Highway, on an isolated spur dominating the broad panorama of the Wādī al-Mūjib — ancient Arnon (FIG. 2) — explains why the site has been continuously inhabited from prehistoric times until the modern day. Historically, it is part of the ancient Moabite kingdom, an important region in the history of Jordan.

Presentation

At the start of the al-Lāhūn excavations in 1977, it was decided, by mutual agreement between the Department of Antiquities ² and the Belgian Committee of Excavations in Jordan that a dig house would be built with common funds. The excavation team was to live in the house until the year 2000, when it would be converted into a regional Museum (FIG. 3) with convenient parking and footpaths to the site. In this way, the archaeological work would not be lost to future generations. The excavations, conducted between 1978 and 2000, extend over an area of 66 ha. on a hilly plateau³. The site is divided north — south by the Wādī al-Lāhūn and east — west by other seasonal streams, thereby separating the area into four natural sectors (labelled A to D on the map) which influenced the choice of settlement by the ancient inhabitants (FIG. 1).



1. Al-Lāhūn, location of the site and its different sectors (A to D).

¹ Al-Lāhūn can easily be reached by the King’s Highway (the historical north-south axe between Arabia and Syria), from *Dhibān* (ancient *Dhibōn*) or by the modern Desert Highway, direction Umm ar-Raṣāṣ (3,5km east of the site), turning to the south at Mushayrifāh (see the new road-panels).

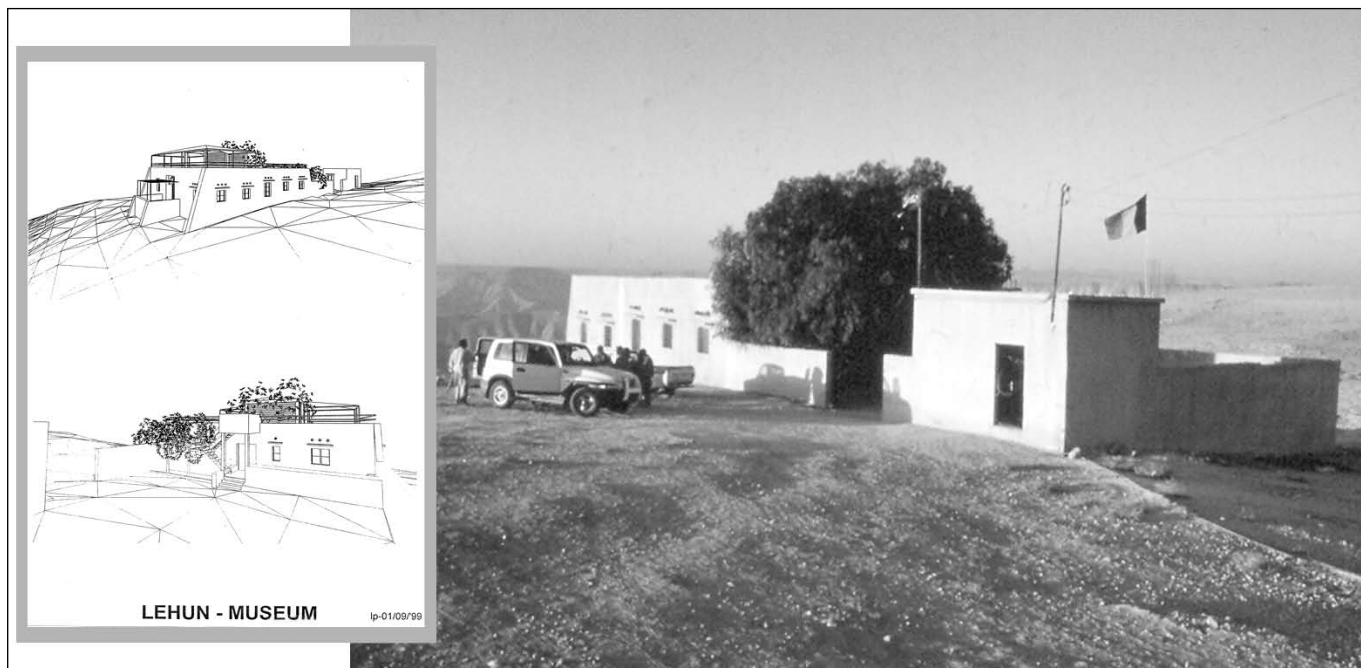
² We are very grateful to Dr Adnan Hadidi, former General Director of the Department of Antiquities, who suggested to build this

future Museum, as well as for the support he gave us during our work. May his successors, Dr. Safuan Tell, Dr. Ghazi Bisheh and Dr. Fawwaz al-Khraysheh be thanked here also specially for all the help and encouragements we received during our different excavation seasons.

³ The altitude ranges between 748 to 714m according to the official Jordanian survey (Aqaba).



2. Panoramic view to the southern Moabite plateau and Wādī al-Mūjib from the terrace of the archaeological museum.



3. The Belgian dig house and the project of transforming it into an archaeological museum.

It is obvious that in Antiquity, the southern part of al-Lāhūn, which is naturally protected by the steep cliffs of the Wādī al-Mūjib, was inhabited in periods of war or upheaval. In the Early Bronze Age⁴, a large fortified town covering nearly 6 ha. was built, with its necropolis on the opposite side of

the Wādī al-Lāhūn⁵, which allowed for observation of the valley and southern Moabite plateau. In the Late Bronze Age / Iron Age I transitional period⁶, a well-strengthened village was built, overlooking the whole area (FIG. 2). In Iron Age II, a fortress (see FIG. 8) was constructed above the ancient vil-

⁴ The Early Bronze II-III town (sector C1), built above Early Bronze I oval houses, was well protected by a wall of 5,5m thickness. Different houses, a street and two large water reservoirs were excavated.

⁵ Belonging to the Early Bronze I Necropolis (sector B3), a family tomb (three women and a young child) has been excavated, next to the dighouse. More than 130, often well preserved vessels have

been found.

⁶ Temporarily abandoned, the southern plateau will be resettled around 1300-1200BC by an agricultural population. Contemporary with the trouble period when the Moabite kingdom was created, they planned their village very carefully: a double precinct wall, 33 houses and a cistern were excavated.

lage by the Moabite kings⁷ to overlook and protect the region and, probably, to store grain harvested nearby for the royal troops living in barracks at Aroër and at the capital Dhibôn.

On the other hand, the northern part of the site — near the commercial roads — was favoured during times of peace. This is attested to by a Nabataean temple⁸ (FIG. 5) and dam, a Byzantine⁹ and Mamluk settlement¹⁰ with a mosque dated to the 15th century AD, four Ottoman cave houses¹¹ and, most recently, the modern village. This multi-period site gives an overview of the history of Jordan.

In 1994, a lecture on al-Lāhūn was delivered at the Royal Museums of Art and History in Brussels. One of those attending, Mr Cool — a member of the European Delegation¹² — became interested in the region and its heritage. He proposed to include al-Lāhūn into a Jordan — European Project.

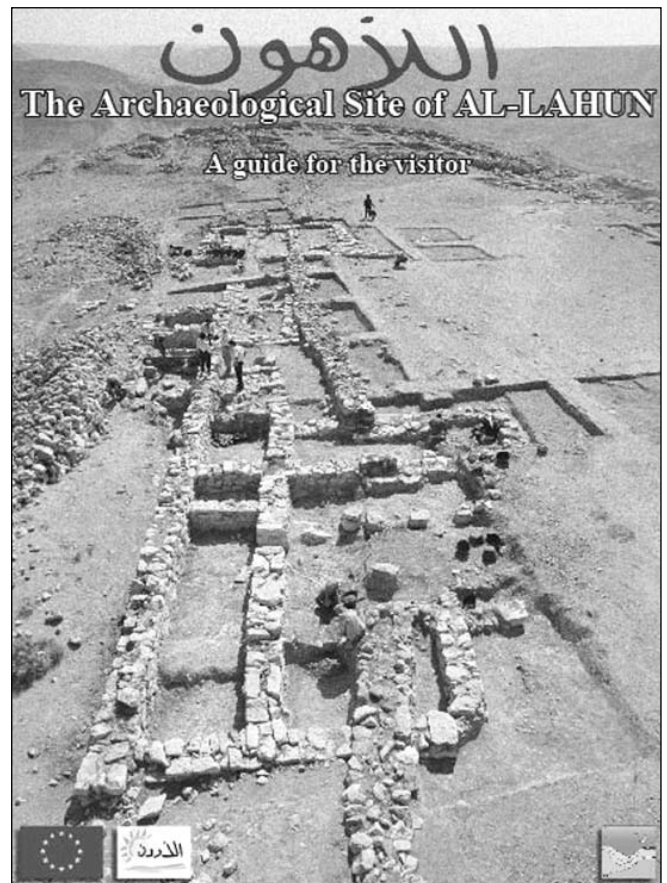
The Pilot Project

Since the year 2000, al-Lāhūn has been part of a pilot project for the “Protection of cultural heritage in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan — archaeological and tourist promotion of the Mādabā region”¹³, which has been run in association with the Umm ar-Rašāš development. Al-Lāhūn and Umm ar-Rašāš are located 3.5 km. apart. They complement each other, despite being very different. Historically, Umm ar-Rašāš is a good example of urban and religious archaeology, well-known for its Byzantine and Umayyad remains on a wide plateau. Al-Lāhūn, in contrast, was alternately inhabited by nomads and city-dwellers, thereby illustrating the history of Jordan around the great canyon of the Wādī al-Mūjīb. Linking both sites within one project enables the diversity and richness of Jordan’s past to be presented.

When al-Lāhūn was discovered in 1977, the modern settlement consisted of just four houses, without a school, water, electricity or good access road. During the period of the excavations, al-

Lāhūn grew tremendously. Now it is a village with more than 40 houses, two schools, good access roads, bus links with other villages and all modern comforts, including water and electricity.

The problem was now to transform this archaeological site, situated in an isolated place, into a tourist attraction. To make the site accessible and appealing to visitors, the European Commission sponsored the project in close collaboration with the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, who gave logistical assistance. The Belgian Committee was tasked with producing a detailed preliminary design for the physical works to be done at



4. Cover page of the “Guide for the visitor”: Al-Lāhūn, sector D (fortified village and Iron Age fortress).

⁷ Possibly by King Mesha’ when rebuilt Aroër and made the highway at the Arnon (Jackson K.P., *The Language of the Mesha’ Inscription* = DEARMAN A., *Studies in the Mesha Inscription and Moab*, Atlanta, Scholars Press, 1989).

⁸ During this period of international trade, Lahun must have been a prosperous village. A temple, a dam and a tomb were found.

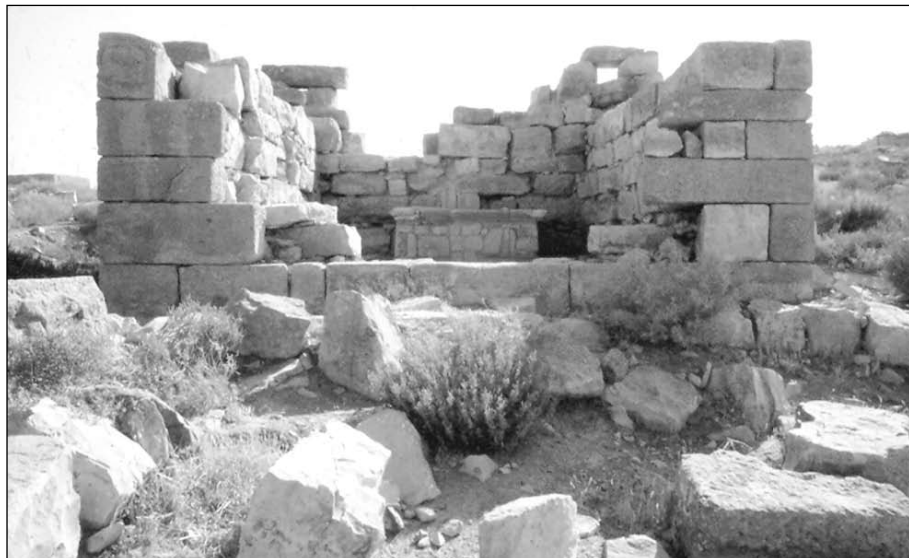
⁹ The Byzantine period is represented by Late Roman/Byzantine pottery and perhaps a church

¹⁰ A Mamluk settlement comprises a “caravanserai”, a dam near the Nabataean one, and a church (see photograph, for restorations).

¹¹ Four Ottoman cave houses, used as granary are now restored.

¹² We want to express our thanks to the European Union and specially to Mr Cool, and H.E. J. Moran and all the members of the European Union who helped us in this project.

¹³ D. HOMÈS-FREDERICQ, *Lehun (Al-Lehun) Site subproject. Commitment NR S 12-100240- Preliminary design, Brussels 2002, Final Report*, Brussels 2002 (112 p. 44, figs. 27 drawings, plans and Annexes). This report gives all the information for the transformation and restoration for the Archaeo-Geological Park and the Museums.



5. The Nabataean temple.

al-Lāhūn¹⁴, as well as the plans required to transform the site into a National Geoarchaeological Park, with a regional archaeological museum, folklore museum and handicraft centre. Special footpaths through the excavations had to be designed. Trails along the more dangerous cliffs of the canyon were also planned for hikers and nature enthusiasts, leading to the Wādī al-Mūjib and newly constructed dam. A handy Arabic and English guide¹⁵, edited by the European Union, has been produced, explaining the excavations, National Park and museums (FIG. 4). Leaflets and handouts are provided for schoolchildren, as well specially facilities for the visually and physically handicapped.

In order to transform the archaeological site into a National Park, the following infrastructure had to be taken in consideration to permit a comfortable and safe visit to the archaeological remains of the different sectors. Easy circulation around the site is a primary necessity so good access roads for cars are required as well as convenient parking which allows disabled people to visit the archaeological remains. Footpaths (FIG. 7), orientation arrows and explanatory panels (FIGS. 6 and 7) had to be designed, taking also in account maintenance costs, future adaptations and the need to periodically update the text on the panels.

It is impossible to discuss all of the different

aspects we had to look into here: we only give a few examples. The existing access roads have been repaired and upgraded to allow easy access to the museum and archaeological remains. We have suggested that the roads and car parking are constructed of permeable, compacted and stabilised limestone gravel, as asphalt is not recommended owing to the high temperatures experienced in the region.

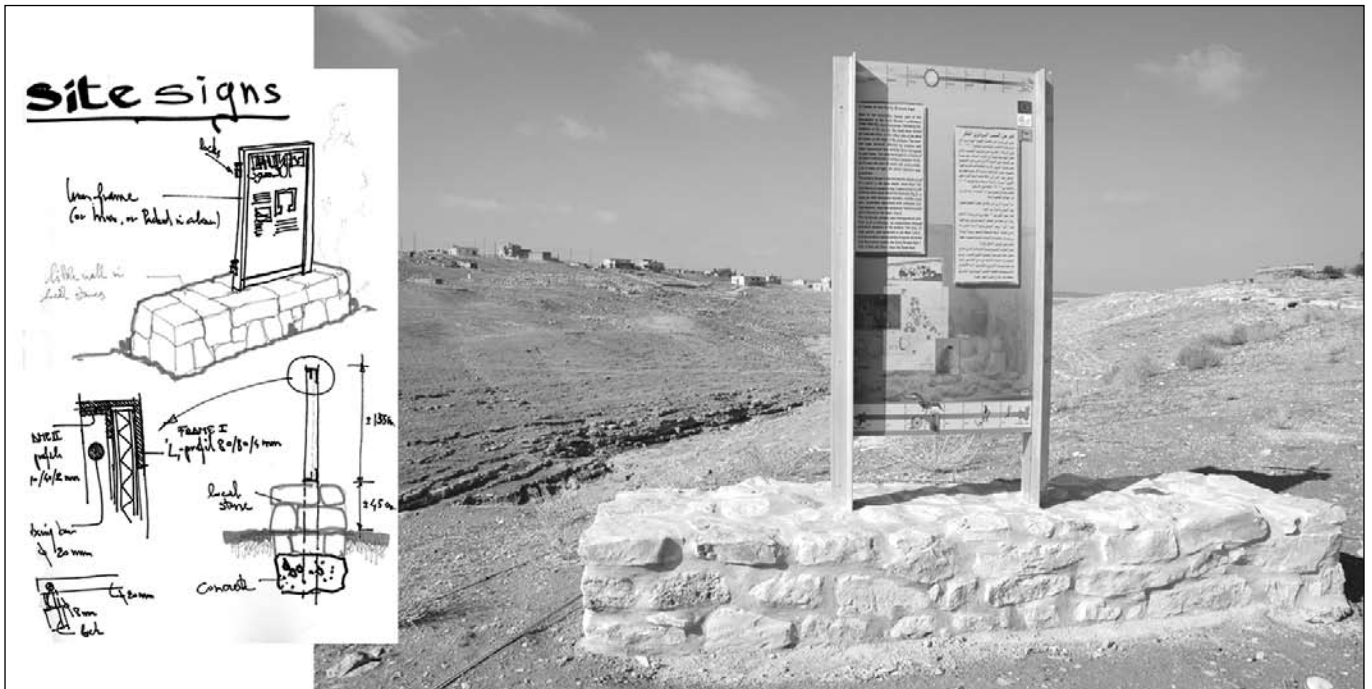
Circulation arrows have been placed along the footpaths, especially at main junctions in order to guide visitors towards the different sectors. All over the site, large orientation panels (FIGS. 6 and 7)¹⁶, measuring 120 x 90cm., have been erected at each of the main archaeological features, giving detailed information in Arabic and English, with plans, drawings and photos to explaining the chronological and general significance of the remains. The centuries are indicated by numbers on the upper part of the panel for the adults, whereas for youngsters a timeline is found on the lower part of the panel. Chronological dates have been replaced with objects familiar to children, such as a flint for prehistory, a wheel and vase for the beginning of history, a camel for Nabataean trade and a Mobile phone for the modern period. The back of the panel (FIG. 7) provides a global plan of the site, with the locations of the different sectors (A to D) and their archaeological remains, footpaths, site facilities

¹⁴ The plans and the technical work have been realised by Architect Luc Paul, I would like to take this opportunity to thank him for his collaboration and valuable suggestions.

¹⁵ D. HOMÈS-FREDERICQ, *The Archaeological Site of al-Lehun. A guide for the visitor*, Amman (in press).

¹⁶ These panels have been placed near the Islamic farmstead/cara-

vanserai (sector A 1), the Mamluk settlement and Mosque (sector B2), the Folklore Museum (sector B1), the Nabataean Temple (sector B2), near the archaeological Museum (sector B3), the Early Bronze settlement (sector C1), the Handicraft House (sector C2), a parking lot (sector D), the Iron Age I village (sector D) and the Iron Age II fortress (sector D).



6. Explanatory panel at the site.



7. Rear of the explanatory panels, showing location of car parking, roads and footpaths, plus chronology, drawings and photos.

and car parking, as well as the opening hours of the museum and the names of sponsors. The panels are placed approximately 6m. from the archaeological remains, and have a bench upon which tired visitors, children or disabled visitors can rest. Trees will be planted to provide some shade.

All the footpaths have been integrated into the existing village and its natural environment. Most of them correspond with existing ones used by the villagers and their herds, as we did not want to change the traditional way of life in this quiet village. Each walk is marked with coloured numerals, corresponding to a circuit of particular duration or related to the specific interest(s) of the visitor. Different types of visit are proposed: for example, it is possible to go from the dig house to the folklore museum by car (blue markers), or via the footpaths, first visiting the Nabataean temple (green markers). The explanatory panels use the same colour coding and specify the length of time required to complete the circuit.

Protection of Some Areas

To minimise destruction by wind, erosion or human agency, we restored and consolidated the excavated areas each season. However, the most important monuments need further protection, for which a fence is suggested. It would make no sense to en-

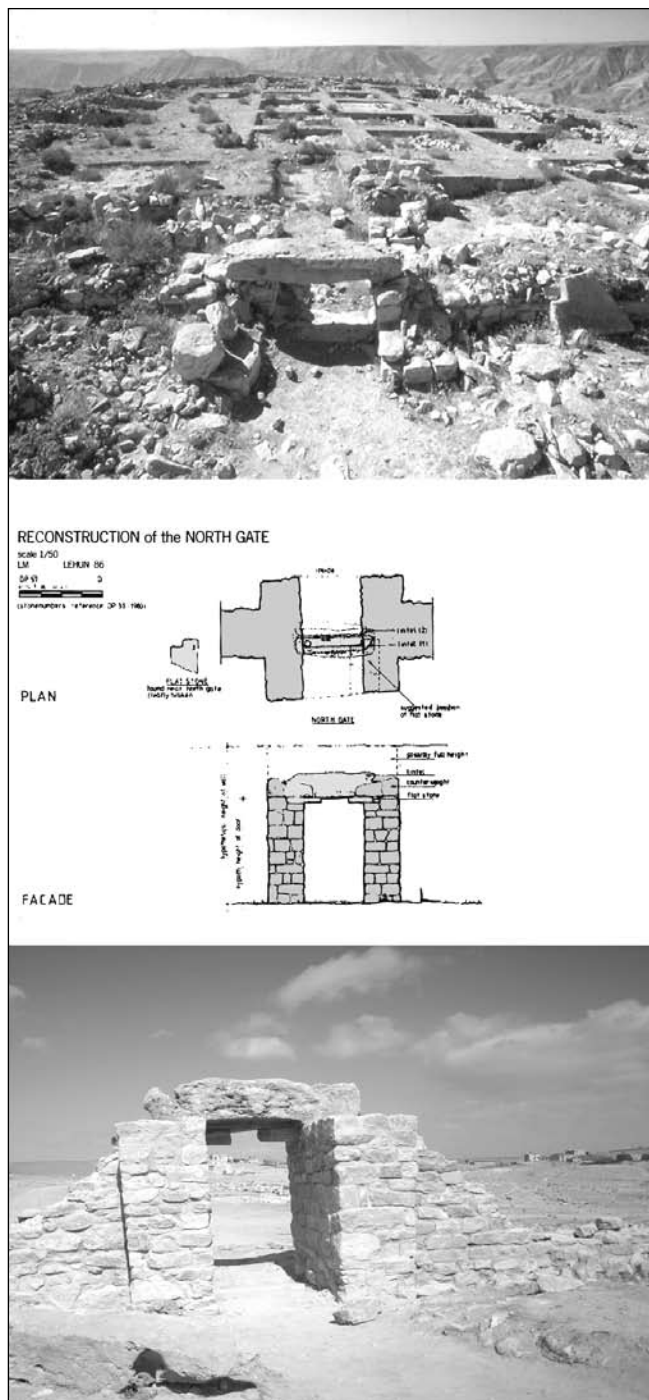
close the entire site of al-Lāhūn as has been done elsewhere. The site is too extensive and the village still growing. The local inhabitants regularly make their way across the site with their herds or when visiting relatives. Fortunately, the cliffs of the Wādī al-Mūjib provide natural protection to the southern part of the excavations. It was therefore decided to fence only the most sensitive locations: the Nabataean temple (sector B2), Mamluk mosque (sector C2) and Early Bronze Age settlement (sector B3).

Some other areas had to be consolidated and / or reconstructed. Taking sector D as an example, near one of the explanatory panels, a metal bridge to the Iron Age ruins allows the excavated houses to be seen from above. It is also the best place to explain the architecture and complexity of Moabite history to the visitor. The monumental gate (FIG. 8) at the north of the Iron Age II fortress has also been reconstructed, giving a good impression of a Moabite fort in central Jordan. In the same area, near the “scarab house”, digging methods are illustrated for children, showing the progress of an excavation. Metal pegs and red ropes delineate 5 x 5m. squares; blue ropes define the 1m. benches — used to ease the circulation of workers and wheelbarrows — along the southern and eastern sides. Six stages of excavation are visible: (1) the natural surface before the dig, (2) after removing plants and topsoil, (3) the first excavated layer, (4) emerging walls, (5) excavated walls and (6) soundings and sondages.

The Archaeological Museum: Transformation and Future

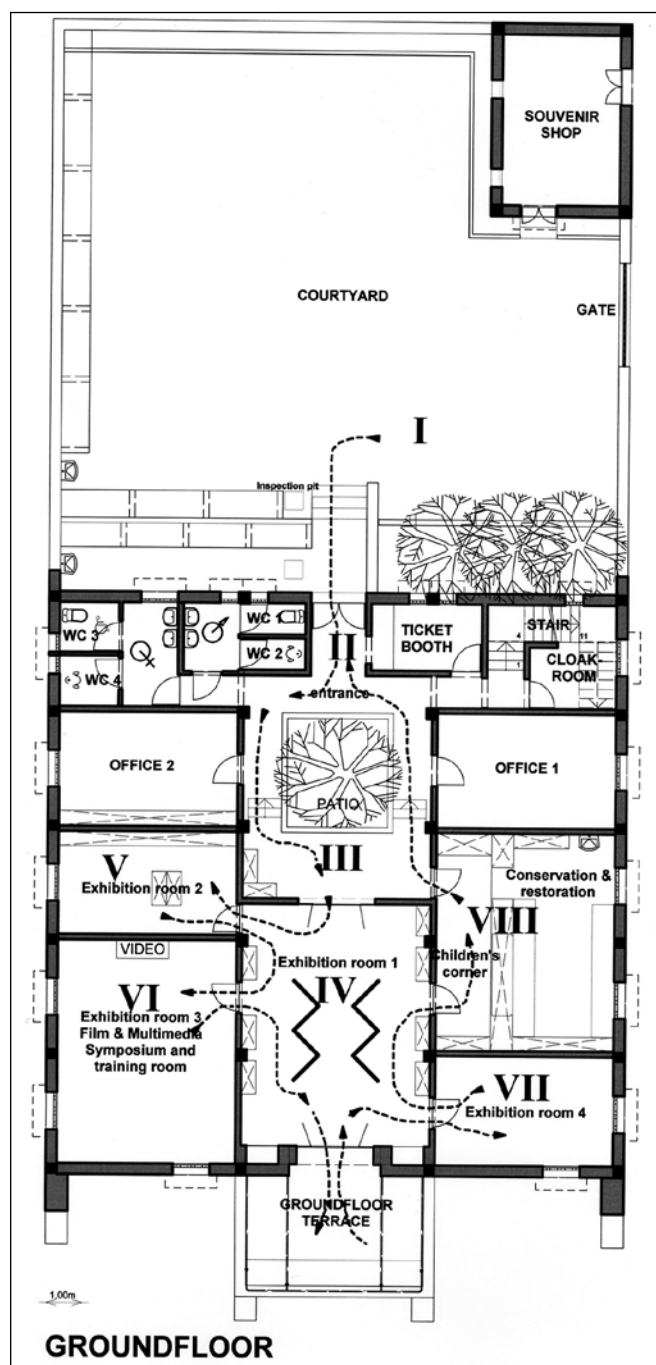
As mentioned above, when planning the dig house back in 1978, every space was designed with a dual purpose in mind: practical for the dig and functional for the future museum. The transformation of the dig house into a museum, which is easy for children, the blind or the handicapped to visit and enjoy is nearly complete. The building is also conceived as a regional centre in which to display excavated objects from Al-Lāhūn, Umm ar-Raṣāṣ and other sites in the region. Several issues had to be taken in consideration whilst transforming the dig house into a museum.

Major changes (FIG. 9) included the conversion of the tool shed into a souvenir shop and the paved courtyard, with its garden and benches where pottery was washed, into a cafeteria and rest area. The former kitchen, dining room and architects' rooms



8. Iron Age fortress after excavation, artist's reconstruction of the monumental gate and its present reconstruction.

have been transformed into a ticket booth, offices for the curators and exhibition rooms. The pottery room became a conservation lab., which can be used by the Mādabā museum conservators or by excavation teams to show their work to visitors on open days. A children's corner, where youngsters can learn how to restore vessels, is also included.



9. Plan of the interior of the archaeological museum.

The former office and two small sleeping rooms have been combined to create a large multi-functional space, which can be used as a symposium or exhibition room, with photographs showing the progress of a dig. Other activities can also take place here, including films, multimedia presentations, video, archaeological computer games and a small library for children. The educational programme is well-developed.

Last but not least, the ground floor terrace, which has a beautiful view of the Wādī al-Mūjib, is to be shaded with vines to provide some protection from the heat. On the roof, from where the view of the landscape is an unforgettable experience, a panoramic relief map designed with children and the disabled in mind points the way to the most important towns, villages and rivers of the region. Both traditional and braille writing are used here, as is indeed the case throughout the museums.

Layout of the museum

For this purpose, we can only suggest the following items, which were tried out at the “Discover al-Lāhūn and the King’s Highway”¹⁷ exhibition held in ‘Ammān in October 2002¹⁸.

1. White-painted, standardised panels in wood with iron frames, displaying significant photographs, reconstruction drawings, plans and explanatory texts (FIG. 10)¹⁹.
2. Objects excavated at or around al-Lāhūn to be exhibited in showcases, which can be opened. These items can be touched by children or the handicapped under the supervision of a Museum guide²⁰.
3. Two casts, one of the site and the other of the Nabataean temple, complete the exhibition material that was given to the future museum of al-Lāhūn by the Belgian Committee of Excavations.
4. An overview map of Jordan should be placed at the entrance of the museum, to show the strate-

¹⁷ D. Homès-Fredericq, *al-Lahun and the King’s Highway. Exhibition under the protection of Her Majesty Queen Rania Al-Abdullah*, Amman 2002. (Manuscript at the Registration, Department of Antiquities in Amman). A publication in French and Dutch has been published when the exhibition took place in Brussels between 1997 and 2000. D. Homès-Fredericq, *Lehun et la voie royale. les fouilles belges en Jordanie / Lehun en de Kooningsweg. De Belgische opgravingen in Jordanië*, Brussels 1997.

¹⁸ The exhibition was organised in the City Hall, Municipality of Greater ‘Ammān, in the centre of the town. It was inaugurated by Her Majesty Queen Rania al-Abdullah on October 13th 2000. It was visited by many private and governmental schools.

¹⁹ The Belgian excavations have given the archaeological material, now in the Museum of Mādabā, comprising more than 250 beautiful excavation photographs, plans, maps, casts of the principal monuments, texts and labels in Arabic and English. The objects are for the moment stored partially in the Mādabā Museum and the ‘Ammān storerooms of the Department of Antiquities.

²⁰ E-muze (stichting voor erfgoededucatie), specialised in Museology and activities for blinds and handicaps in the Royal Museums of Art and History, Brussels, have made a special circuit for them, something not known until now in Jordan. We thank especially Mrs Greet van Deuren and Ans Behring who are responsible for this aspect of the al-Lāhūn Museum.



10. Possible layout of the interior of the al-Lāhūn museum as suggested in the exhibition “Al-Lāhūn and the Kings’ Highway”, City Hall, ‘Ammān, 2002.

gic position of al-Lāhūn along the ancient caravan and military routes, thereby locating the site in its geographical and archaeological contexts.

5. Educational programme — as children are the future of the country, special educational programmes with various activities have been conceived. Some were tested at the ‘Ammān exhibition, whilst others are innovations for Al-Lāhūn. They are always indicated by a drawing of a trowel on the panels (FIG. 12).

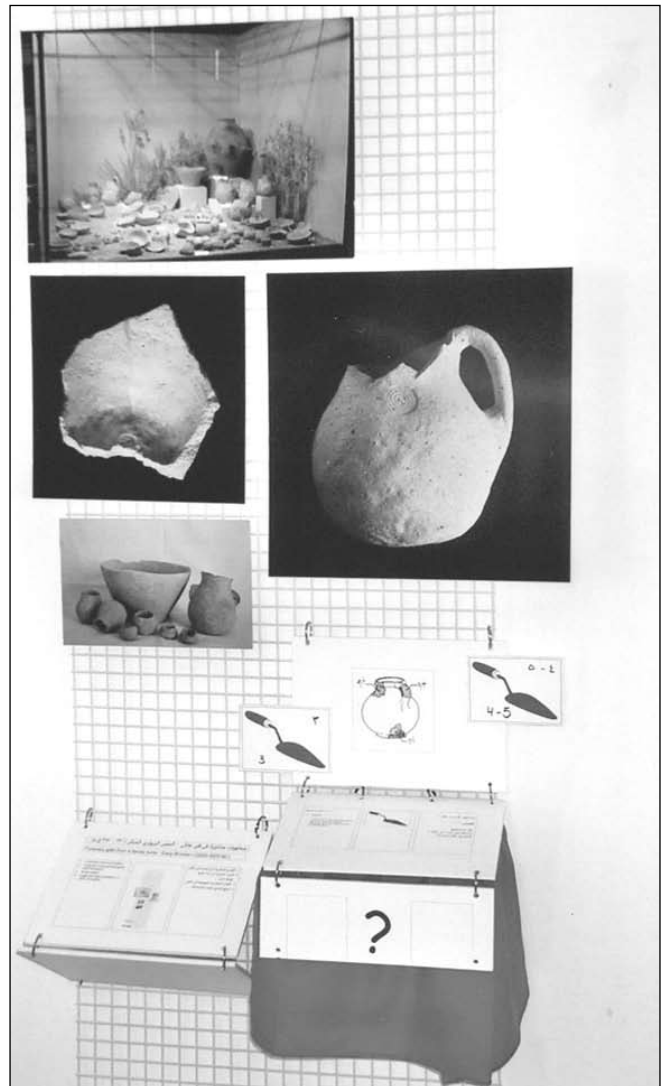
Excavation square: although it is possible to visualise the different stages of an excavation in the field, it is necessary to have an “excavation square” in either the museum or courtyard, where school-children can make their own experiences. The equipment used during the dig should be at their disposal: brushes, trowels, field book, pencils etc.. Replicas of walls, pottery, coins, flints or objects they can see in the showcases are put in the sand. The children enjoy pretending to be real archaeologists, playing the role of director, architect, photographer or archaeologist, noting their finds, taking measurements and discussing the results with the guide.

Do-it-yourself station: the visitor, whether young or old, can walk through the museum and experiment at his own pace with activities such as filling in a booklet with small, amusing activities, pictures or drawings (FIG. 11); different activities take place in the different rooms.

Guides are essential in a museum: They have to be active, adjusting themselves to the needs of their group and interacting with the teachers. They have to play with the children to catch their attention ²¹.



11. Educational programme for the exhibition “al-Lāhūn and the Kings’ Highway”, City Hall, ‘Ammān, 2002.



12. Example of “mystery box” relating to an Early Bronze Age tomb, as used at the exhibition “al-Lāhūn and the Kings’ Highway”, City Hall, ‘Ammān, 2002.

The guides have *Edu-cars* (FIG. 13) — *educational cars*²²: which are special boxes on wheels containing modern replicas of the archaeological objects in the showcases, e.g. flint, pottery, dagger, cosmetic palettes etc.. Made of the same material as the original artefacts, children and the visually-impaired will therefore experience the same feeling as having the originals in their hands.

Educational leaflets: (A4-format) for “young detective-archaeologists at the site of al-Lāhūn” are provided to children aged between 9 and 13 years, in order to introduce them to the fascinating archaeological work being undertaken in Jordan and to invite them to hone their sense of observation. They have to answer questions about daily life in Antiquity, examine objects in the museum and discover answers to the “mystery boxes” (see below). Many other games can be invented, such as colouring in outline drawings of artefacts, which is appreciated by both young and old (FIG. 11).

“*Mystery boxes*”: or closed boxes containing material to be touched and, with the help of drawings, identified as, for example, a juglet (FIG. 12). Experiences can also be made with smell; for example, a small hidden flask containing oil or perfume has to be identified by the children.

Jigsaws are always a success: reconstructing a



13. “Edu-car”; all objects in the drawers are replicas of real artefacts (Velzeke Museum, Belgium).

²¹ Once the children have seen the guide making fire with flints they want to try by themselves and will never forget this experience.

²² We have projects with the Ename and the Velzeke Museums in Belgium, where the curator P. van der Plaetsen has conceived these Edu (catioan)-cars.

²³ In the ‘Ammān exhibition, a multi Media corner was made possible thanks to the generosity of H.R.H. Ptincess Sumayya who has

platter or trying to put the work of a dig into the right order can be amusing for parents as well as for children. Having answered the various questions contained in the booklet, the young visitors can be congratulated by being asked to put their names and drawings on a special panel and by signing the visitors’ book.

6. A film and computer corner²³, with video games, are envisaged, as well as a small library where children from the village of Al-Lāhūn and visitors alike can consult educational material. All texts will be available in Arabic and English.

Many other ideas have been developed as part of our project, but space precludes us from describing them all.

The Folklore Museum

A typical old village house, close to the Nabataean temple and archaeological museum has been restored (FIG. 14) and converted into a folklore museum. Its architecture is representative of the region as a whole and is important in showing younger people, especially those coming from the cities, how the agricultural and nomadic population were living fifty years ago. It is devoted to the popular traditions of the region, including home furnishings, agrarian tools, musical instruments and oral and intangible traditions dating back to the 19th and 20th century. Three mannequins illustrate the daily life of this village of the Saleitha tribe²⁴. Here too an educational program is planned and the



14. Folklore Museum during restoration works.

lent a computer allowing to visit the web-site of al-Lāhūn (www.lehun-excavations.be) and give more information about the site.

²⁴ To have more information about the tribe of al-Lāhūn, see the article of R. Abujaber, *al-Salaitah clan of the Beni Sakhr Tribe*, in the Newsletter 1 (2002), of the website www.lehun-excavations.be

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guide can help visitors to try on local clothes or to play music instruments.

The Handicraft House

This is intended to sell products made by the villagers. Some of the older women can demonstrate the work of spinning, weaving etc. using traditional techniques and can market their work; tourists are always eager to buy local products.

We have still many other projects in hand, but I will conclude by recommending the Lāhūn website ([HYPERLINK “http://www.Lahun-excavations.be”](http://www.Lahun-excavations.be) www.Lahun-excavations.be) ²⁵, the hike (FIG. 15) to the new al-Mūjib dam and the discovery of the daily life of the village, plants, stones, fantastic landscape and kindness of the Jordanian people and their rich heritage. We hope many visitors will come and enjoy their visit, as we have enjoyed excavating the site and preparing its future.

Illustrations



15. For hikers: the possibility of walking to the Wādi al-Mūjib and new al-Mūjib dam.

copyright Belgian Committee of Excavations in Jordan; drawings, maps and plans by L. Paul.

Photography: mainly by W. De Lauwer and members of the team; thanks also to M. Duff, J. Demeulemeester, M. Haobbsh and E. Montchamp for permission to publish their photographs.

²⁵ Webmaster: I. Swinnen.