

Douglas R. Clark
La Sierra University

Marta D'Andrea
Sapienza University of Rome

Andrea Polcaro
Perugia University

Suzanne Richard
Gannon University

Basem Mahamid
Department of Antiquities of Jordan

**Douglas R. Clark,
Marta D'Andrea,
Andrea Polcaro,
Suzanne Richard,
and Basem Mahamid**

Community Engagement in Downtown Mādabā: The Mādabā Regional Archaeological Museum Project (MRAMP) 2016–2018

Introduction

The Mādabā Regional Archaeological Museum Project (MRAMP), formally initiated in 2015 by the authors of this article (FIG. 1) as a joint American, Italian, and Jordanian endeavor to establish a new state-of-the-art regional archaeological museum in Mādabā, Jordan, built on previous efforts of regional dig directors in cooperation with the Department of Antiquities of Jordan (DoA).

Initially, at the request of then Director General of the DoA, Dr. Fawwaz Al-Khraysheh in 2006, directors of regional excavations along with other specialists vested in the archaeology of the area were asked to assist in renovating the Mādabā Archaeological Museum, training its staff, and digitizing its records. Several meetings of this group resulted in a major pivot away from the current Mādabā museum as the best venue for displaying the wealth of central Jordan's archaeological legacy to a space located in the heart of historic downtown

Mādabā. In 2012 Huda Kilani, then director of museums in the DoA, and Douglas Clark, representing regional dig directors, visited and agreed on the establishment of the new regional archaeological museum in the Mādabā Archaeological Park II (West), location of the 2nd century Roman *cardo*, the 6th century Burnt Palace and Martyr's Church, and the late 19th-century Jordanian traditional settlement.

The location, already mostly owned by the DoA, seemed a perfect fit for the needs of the proposed new museum (FIG. 2). It opened onto the Heritage Trail, a line of red bricks inlaid in sidewalks with adjacent touristic shops, conveying tourists from the Mādabā Visitors Center primarily to St. George's Greek Orthodox Church. The church housed the famous 6th century mosaic floor map of the Holy Land and represented the most important tourist destination in the city. Situated across a side street from St. George's, the proposed



1. In-country coordinator Mahamid and co-directors D'Andrea, Clark, Richard, and Polcaro (courtesy of MRAMP).



2. Mādabā Archaeological Park West, looking east, museum location over ruins at bottom (courtesy of MRAMP).

site for the new museum created a unique opportunity for visitors to Mādabā to see the region's rich material culture from thousands of years of human occupation, thus extending their stay in the city and, in

the process, providing a more sustainable means of protecting the region's cultural heritage in addition to improving the economic condition of Mādabā's businesses and citizens.

This review of MRAMP progress in the years 2016–2018 outlines: 1) support for the project, 2) objectives of the project, 3) objectives achieved, and 4) objectives anticipated. Reports and analyses can be found in numerous online venues (see bibliography under 2016–2017) and publications (Clark *et al.* 2018; D’Andrea *et al.* 2018; 2019; Richard *et al.* 2019).

Support

Support for this endeavor, mostly logistical, came from affiliated academic institutions and the Department of Antiquities. For financial backing, we are indebted to a Harris Grant from the American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR), a major USAID grant through the Sustainable Cultural Heritage through Engagement of Local Communities Project (SCHEP), implemented by the American Center of Oriental Research (ACOR), which took us through 2017 and most of 2018. A second USAID/SCHEP grant cycle will support this endeavor in 2019–2021. Added to these sources is a major grant from the US Ambassador’s Fund for Cultural Protection/the Cultural Antiquities Task Force (US Department of State) dedicated to repurposing the current museum. Other grants came from MAECI (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy), participant fees, and private donations, as well as in-kind contributions from the Studio Strati architectural firm in Rome, CAMNES (Center for Ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern Studies) in Florence, as well as the Istituto per le Tecnologie Applicate ai Beni Culturali (ITABC-CRN), Impresa Alessandrini Peppino Restauri Monumentali e Scavi Archeologici, and the Cultural Association C.E.S.A.R. (Centro di studi di eccellenza e ricerca archeologica di Roma). In addition, MRAMP entered into a formal Memorandum of Understanding with the DoA, marking out parameters of the project

and guaranteeing mutual commitments to see it through.

Objectives

From the beginning, MRAMP set out to accomplish three major general objectives. As with all archaeological endeavors in Jordan (and elsewhere in the Middle East and across the world), the project was intent first on saving the past by protecting, preserving, and conserving the cultural heritage of the Mādabā region. This represents a geographical area defined by southern Amman in the north, the Dead Sea to the west, the Wādī al-Mūjīb in the south, and the eastern desert, where scores of excavations have been mounted over the decades, of which more than a dozen are currently active. Second was the goal of enhancing the present by developing and enlarging economic opportunities for the citizens of the region, the country, and in particular, of Mādabā in ways connected to their archaeological heritage. The third objective sought to secure a positive and sustainable future both for the region’s archaeological patrimony and for its citizens. To accomplish these goals, MRAMP has long committed itself to sustainable “Community Archaeology,” which views archaeology as a public asset, placing “ownership” of cultural heritage in the hands of the community.

Specific objectives for the years 2016–2018 were numerous, varied, and interwoven. They included:

Excavation and Conservation represented by 1) clearing and cleaning (and keeping clean) the entire park, with special attention devoted to the late 19th century traditional settlement which had been excavated 20 years previously but then left to accumulate debris and wind-blown loess and the resulting overburden of weeds, shrubs, and trees; 2) excavating a number of areas in the park, including soundings in several locations in search for data which could affect the placement of pillars to

support the superstructure of the museum; 3) undertaking mosaic and stone-wall conservation and consolidation.

Employment of Technology in 4) using 3D laser scanning equipment to obtain digital models which can be manipulated for educational, aesthetic, publicity, and architectural purposes; 5) utilizing sub-surface geotechnology to provide structural engineers with pre-construction data.

Removal/Repurposing of Buildings as seen in 6) removing a late and poorly built cinderblock domestic structure from space dedicated to part of the ground floor of the museum; 7) renovating and repurposing two early 20th century buildings to serve as welcome center and introductory building to the museum complex | *Artifact Curation* shown by 8) repurposing the current Mādabā Archaeological Museum as a venue for storing and studying the thousands of regional artifacts housed in the facility; 9) continuing the tedious work of entering digital data on the region's 14,000 excavated artifacts.

Educational Activities such as 10) developing, offering, and assessing workshops for short-term training exercises and

longer training courses for more in-depth exposure to best practices in excavation, conservation, and museum management; 11) building capacity for various constituencies in techniques of excavation, conservation, curation, and museum management.

Stakeholder Development illustrated by 12) expanding and enhancing the development of various stakeholder groups; 13) collaborating with local university architecture students in the development of emerging architectural plans; 14) continuing efforts to engage the community (at several levels) in the project's ultimate vision for protecting the past and ensuring a prosperous future; 15) developing effective communications and publicity to raise awareness of the importance of cultural heritage conservation and protection to sustainable development.

Objectives Achieved

Excavation and Conservation: 1) clearing and cleaning, 2) excavation, 3) mosaic and stone-wall conservation and consolidation

The first excavation season in the Mādabā Archaeological Park West occupied two weeks in May of 2016 and hosted 18



3. 2016 MRAMP Team (courtesy of MRAMP).



4. Archaeological Park BEFORE (courtesy of MRAMP).



5. Archaeological Park AFTER (courtesy of MRAMP).

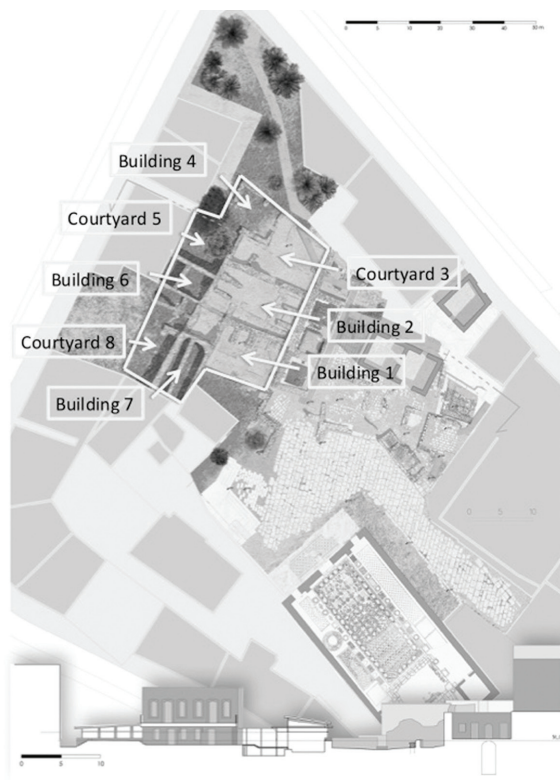
participants, including staff, volunteers, and local laborers (FIG. 3). Before-and-after images (FIGS. 4–5) demonstrate graphically not only how much debris and vegetation can accumulate at an archaeological site over 20 years since previous excavations, but also how transformative two weeks of work can be on the landscape. The team cleared the eastern and earliest half of the exposed late 19th century settlement, an area boasting two buildings and one large courtyard (Buildings 1 and 2 and Courtyard 3; FIG. 6). The structures were built over and into the Byzantine and Early Islamic strata on and near the surface of the tall by migrant Christian families arriving in the 1880s (see Richard *et al.* 2019). These “traditional” Jordanian houses incorporated arches to divide interior space into rooms and to support the roof, those in Building

1 ca. 5 m in radius and those in Building 2 ca. 8 m.

A second May season, involving three weeks in 2017 and 21 participants (FIG. 7), opened the way for continued cleaning and clearance beyond the two houses and one courtyard cleared in 2016 to include also Building 4 and part of Courtyard 5 (see FIG. 6). Results from 2017 included further exposure of the late 19th century buildings and courtyards, but also the beginning of the process of unearthing structures most likely from the early to mid-20th century in the western half of the settlement area. In addition, this season saw the first scientific interventions on the deteriorating Byzantine/Early Islamic(?) mosaics, with support from CAMNES.

The third May season, 2018, involving 33 participants (including the consolidation team; FIG. 8), completed the clearance of Buildings 6 and 7 and Courtyard 8 (see FIG. 6). This left only one room to clear, but the walls surrounding it were too unstable to work inside. Also accomplished during the May 2018 season was a stone-wall consolidation effort in the central part of the settlement, affecting Buildings 6 and 7, as well as an arch support wall and springer for Building 2. Building 6 also underwent several interventions affecting mudbricks, plaster, and paint.

During the time intervals between annual May excavation seasons, ongoing onsite cleaning and conservation activities continued apace with support from USAID/SCHEP funding. Site Steward Qusay Alshwabkeh, along with several long-term local laborers, maintained control over persistent weeds, regularly cleaned the park of ever-new deposits of wind-blown dirt and dust, and kept an open, if irregular schedule of group visits to the site.



6. Topo of museum ground floor structures (courtesy of MRAMP and Studio Strati).



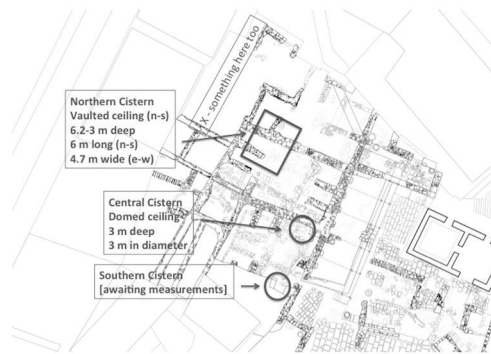
7. 2017 MRAMP team (courtesy of MRAMP).



8. 2018 MRAMP team (courtesy of MRAMP).

They were also engaged in cleaning three water cisterns, likely from the Byzantine Period, which provided water for Buildings 1 and 2. Already apparent from four stone openings in the ground, these three cisterns

were explored and cleared. Two were silo-shaped and the other a large rectilinear cistern (FIG. 9). The team also worked with the Mādabā Municipality to remove soil overburden, sack it up for transport,



9. Cisterns in park (courtesy of MRAMP and Studio Strati).

and deliver the trash to a local landfill. Occasionally they would participate in an MRAMP-sponsored workshop on mosaic or stone-wall conservation.

Employment of Technology: 4) 3D laser scanning and total station, 5) subsurface geo-technology

The use of new technologies, standard on most modern projects, provided important data for the MRAMP team in documenting extant remains with the goal of recording and illustrating them for use in preparing for the new museum. A 3D laser scanner (FIG. 10), operated by Roberto Gabrielli of ITABC-CNR, recorded in detail the entire area of the traditional settlement, as well as other parts of the archaeological park, producing a 3D model; unfortunately, the equipment failed before we could laser-scan the three cisterns. Survey data, while scarce for the site, was geo-referenced by use of a total station from benchmarks around the city. And, in order to map any subterranean anomalies which could affect the structural integrity of the

proposed museum, specialists from Italy utilized a georesistivimeter (FIGS. 11–12). This was accomplished in October 2017 by a small team consisting of Andrea Polcaro (MRAMP co-director), Marilena Cozzolino (geo-physicist from Italy), and Maddelena Scattini (assistant and two-time former member of our May expeditions). Their report indicated anomalies which were reported to the architects and structural engineer of the project.

Removal/Repurposing of Buildings: 6) cinderblock domestic structure, 7) two early 20th century buildings

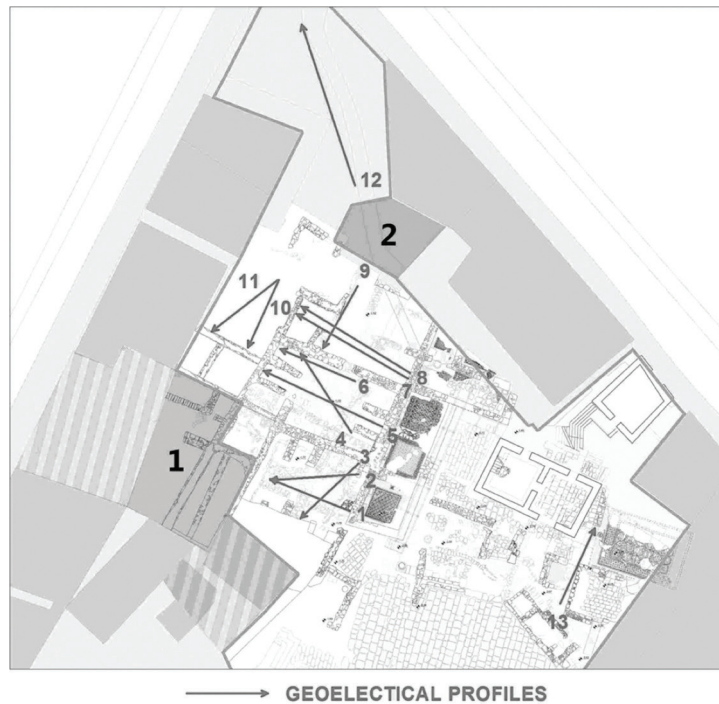
Three structures in the archaeological park, once modified, will play significant roles in the continuing development of the museum and its setting. At this point, only goals exist for intended transformations, but the buildings have been under considera-



10. Laser scanner (courtesy of MRAMP).



11. Georesistivimeter analysis (courtesy of MRAMP).

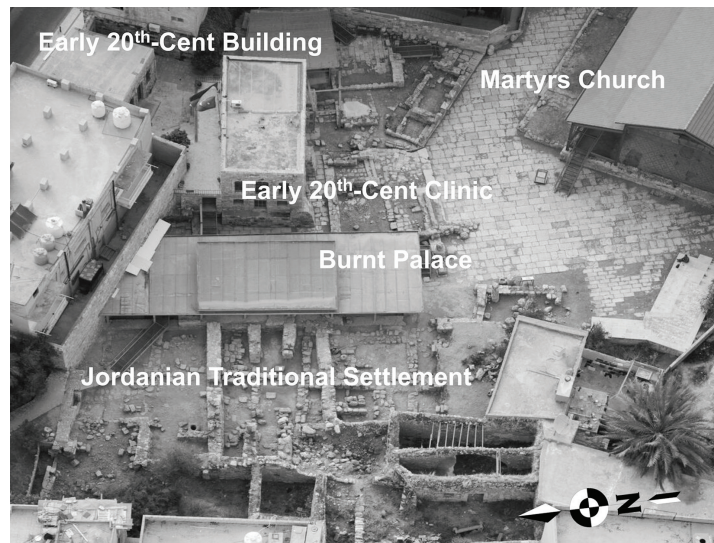


12. Georesistivimeter grid (courtesy of Studio Strati).

tion, with plans for their new functions, for several years. Essential to maintaining the proposed footprint of the museum is the removal of a late, poorly built cinderblock building presently being rented out to laborers. The land and the building are being purchased by the DoA, and once

the structure is removed, excavation can take place beneath it before allowing construction of the new museum over it.

Two other buildings, both from the early 20th century, stand near the current entrance to the archaeological park (FIG. 13). One, consisting of a single room, forms



13. Early 20th-century buildings (courtesy of MRAMP).

part of the row of buildings and tourist shops fronting on the Heritage Trail and will ultimately serve as the museum's main entrance; its large traditional wooden doors are quaint and welcoming. The other, a two-story, four-room, former health clinic, the earliest in Mādabā, will be repurposed into an introductory hall for the park and the new museum. Plans call for remodeling and refurbishing the structure to create a timeline of archaeological history in the Mādabā region, complete with chronological panels and period artifacts. As well, this hall will provide information, digital (downloadable apps for smart phones, for example) and hard-copy, to help visitors find information on regional archaeological sites and navigate their way to these nearby sites.

Artifact Curation: 8) current Mādabā Archaeological Museum 9) digital data management

Given the decision of regional dig directors in the late 2000s to recommend relocating the museum to another and more central location than its present crowded

and out-of-the-way venue, the situation now required discussion and decisions about how to utilize space in the current museum. One option quickly rose to the top of the list: repurpose the current museum into a storage and research facility for the 14,000 artifacts discovered in the region and stored in its two small and totally inadequate rooms. Space limitations and decrepit storage equipment made it impossible to keep thousands of objects organized and accessible, but moving present displays to the new museum once it is completed and then reusing these spaces for storage and curation would not only open up space for the organized and accessible storage of artifacts, but it would also allow for reassignment of the current museum as a state-of-the-art research facility for use by DoA staff, regional dig directors, and visiting scholars.

A strategic part of the overall regional museum endeavor, curating the 14,000 regional artifacts has always been a key component. While some artifactual data had been digitized in the past, most records



14. MRAMP/DoA data entry staff (courtesy of MRAMP).

were in hard-copy format. It was clear that any hopes of achieving best practices in the care of these artifacts required systematic data collection and data storage. This is true in part because the records were incomplete, but also because due diligence and best practices required as complete records as it is possible to obtain and sustainably preserve.

To achieve this monumental task, USAID/SCHEP funds were used to employ two local women, Najwa Al-Fuqaha and Suha Al-Zen, who came to the project with archaeology degrees and who demonstrated the ability and commitment, working alongside the DoA curator Amal Al-Rawahneh, to perform the demanding, tedious task of curation and data storage (FIG. 14). With additional tutoring from Adeb Abu Shmais, retired Jordanian archaeologist, they entered comprehensive artifactual data first into Excel spreadsheets, then, with help from Bob Bates of Andrews University, posted the

data to FileMaker Pro. Ultimately, these data will be migrated to and hosted by a newly developed online database created by Jutta Häser of the German Protestant Institute of Archaeology for use at the Jordan Archaeological Museum (or Citadel Museum) in Amman and then likely at other regional DoA museums. The process has been labor-intensive and time-consuming, lasting from the beginning of MRAMP's involvement to the present. With support from a recent grant award from AFCP/CATF to repurpose the current museum, data management will continue as a basic component of the project, resulting in a system that will be sustainable long into the future.

Educational Activities: 10) workshops and training courses, 11) building capacity

Workshops for small groups of DoA employees with the addition of others from Mādabā and sometimes from other parts



15. Stone wall conservation with Bettina Lucherini (top center; courtesy of MRAMP).



16. Artifact photography training session with Jillian Logee (center; courtesy of MRAMP).

of Jordan have characterized MRAMP's immersive and experiential educational approach to community archaeology from the beginning. The year 2017 saw two workshops, both directed by Bettina Lucherini of CAMNES in Florence, Italy. One in May focused on mosaic conservation, utilizing *in situ* examples from the Burnt Palace and from excavations in the area of the traditional settlement. This was followed in September by a workshop on stone-wall consolidation (FIG. 15). Two more intensive workshops in the spring of 2018, this time on museum curation and museum management, were offered by Fadi Balawi of Hashemite University. Given the positive responses to and outcomes of these workshops, MRAMP plans to continue utilizing them on a regular basis.

The employment of more extensive training courses also constitutes part of MRAMP's strategy to educate local stakeholders and contribute to building professional capacity. Several of these have been and continue to be offered as well, two of which occurred in the autumn of 2018. The first, a hands-on introduction to Artifact Photography, was conducted by



17. Artifact organization and display workshop with Fatma Marii (left center; courtesy of MRAMP).



18. Two interpretive signs (courtesy of MRAMP).

Jillian Logee, a professional photographer from Calgary, Canada, who has several years of experience photographing artifacts for archaeological projects in Jordan (FIG. 16). The second training course featured Artifact Organization and Display and was directed by Fatma Marii of the University of Jordan, with assistance from Qais Tweissi from Petra and Jack Green of ACOR (FIG. 17).

Both workshops and training courses, while intended for participants from various locales and backgrounds, were based on a commitment to enhance professional capacity. Capacity-building, especially for local DoA staff members, lay at the heart of these endeavors in order to prepare participants for engagement with and potential employment in the new museum. Building capacity by means of this project

also encompasses the work force of Franco Sciorilli through his conservation and consolidation interventions onsite, as well as the general local laborers whose job skills have been expanded in the work they have done with MRAMP.

An additional onsite educational feature has been realized in the installation of two interpretive signs (FIG. 18), created and mounted in the archaeological park in 2018 (with plans for more).

Stakeholder Development: 12) stakeholder groups, 13) local university architecture students, 14) continuing efforts to engage the community, 15) effective communications and publicity

At the very heart of the establishment of a new regional archaeological museum

in Mādabā lies community engagement. Nothing is more central than community archaeology if we expect to protect the region's past while at the same time promote sustainable economic benefits. For this reason, MRAMP from its inception has focused on a rich, diverse, robust assemblage of potential stakeholders in the museum project.

Stakeholders include several broad categories, as currently organized: 1) policy makers at the levels of international, national, regional, and local governments; 2) business support organizations; 3) business and industry; 4) academic research institutions/projects; 5) public and private organizations (cultural, religious, educational); 6) the tourism sector; 7) international organizations; and 8) families and citizens (see a more complete treatment in Clark and D'Andrea in this volume). Each of these general groupings encompass numerous subcategories. For example, "policy makers" include U.S. and Italian embassies and related entities, the Jordanian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, the Department of Antiquities, the Mādabā Governorate, and the Mādabā Municipality, and Academic Research Institutions/Projects involve foreign research centers; international universities (Gannon and La Sierra in the US and Perugia and Sapienza of Rome in Italy); and regional archaeological excavation projects at 'Aṭarūz, Dhībān, Ḥisbān, Khirbat Iskandar, Jalūl, al-Mukhayyat/Nebo, Lāhūn, Mukawir (Machaerus), Mādabā, Ṣafra, Wādī Thamad, al-'Umayrī, Umm ar-Raṣāṣ, and al-Murayghāt.

These stakeholder groups vary in terms of the levels and nature of their commitment. They stand to benefit in different ways and to benefit the project in different ways. It is without question extremely fortunate for MRAMP to be operating in an urban context like Mādabā and, in the process, to partner with such a wide array of committed

players in a project like this one. As part of developing these relationships, MRAMP has facilitated stakeholder meetings numerous times since its beginning. Even before the project had external funding support, in December 2016, several co-directors and around 15 interested parties met to discuss the museum project about to be launched in their back yard. On 17 May 2017 MRAMP, along with ACOR, SCHEP, MOTa, the DoA, representatives from the Italian and American embassies, and several local stakeholder groups, numbering around 200 people, met onsite for the official MRAMP launch. Other stakeholder events punctuated 2017 and 2018, often held on the campus of the Mādabā Institute of Mosaic and Art Restoration, involving a variety of partner groupings. In addition, MRAMP presented the museum project to a group of business leaders and others at the Talal Abu-Ghazaleh Organization in Amman (FIG. 19).

Of particular interest to the project were university (undergraduate and graduate) architecture students and engaging them with Studio Strati architects in the design of the museum. The University of Jordan (UJ), Hashemite University (HU), and the American University of Mādabā (AUM) offered several opportunities for student participation and student projects focused on the museum. In 2018, five AUM students (FIG. 20) participated in a term-long internship which resulted in a final project on integrating the new museum into its urban setting.

Publicity and PR materials figured strongly in the project's efforts to raise awareness and encourage partnerships. Of special value were many iterations of an MRAMP brochure (in Arabic and English) which have been distributed widely. In addition, MRAMP developed two websites, one of them basic but live and functional (mramp.org) and the other, currently being developed in conjunction with a company



19. Stakeholders meeting at Talal Abu-Ghazaleh organization (courtesy of MRAMP).



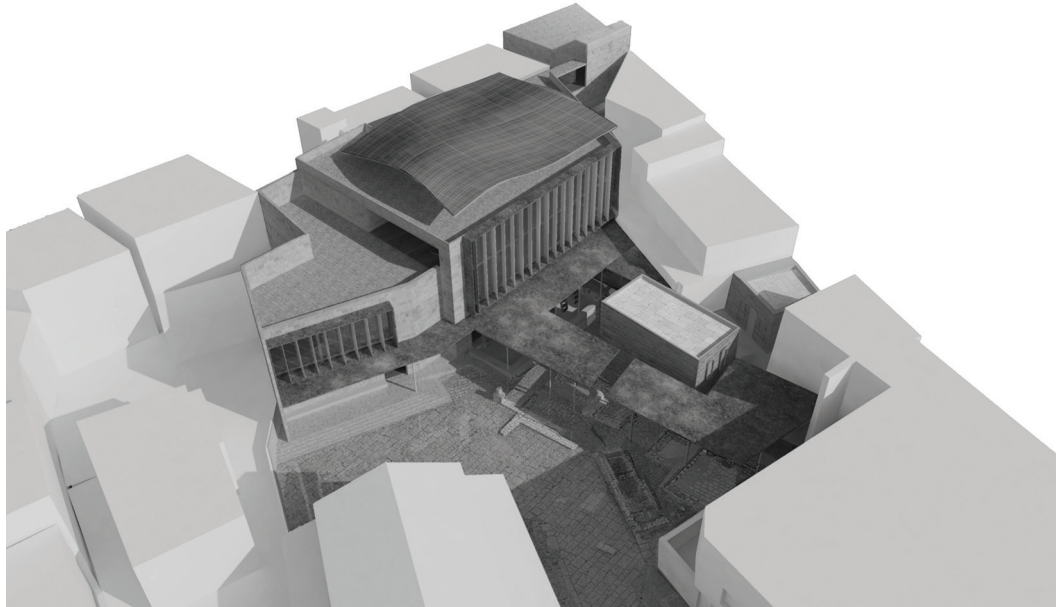
20. Onsite visit by AUM Architecture interns (courtesy of MRAMP).

in Amman, Imagine Technologies, which will provide the entire range of services needed in a robust museum website.

Objectives Anticipated

This all leads to a consideration of future hopes and trajectories for MRAMP. Objectives for the foreseeable future include continued development of the overall museum project onsite and repurposing of the current museum. A new Master Plan, completed recently, maps out next steps through to museum construction. Several pre-construction onsite projects still await completion: stone-wall conservation inter-

ventions and consolidation in the settlement that will become the museum's ground floor; removal of the recent cinderblock building which lies within the footprint of the museum, repurposing of the two early 20th century buildings which will become the entry and introductory halls, and core-drilling as required by the municipality for construction permits. And central to the next few years is broad-based training in a variety of cultural heritage fields and sub-fields, primarily through fostering and facilitating extended training courses and Open Learning Environments; these are absolutely crucial to informed sustainability.



21. Museum rendering by Studio Strati (courtesy of MRAMP, SCHEP, and Studio Strati).

While most of MRAMP's efforts at publicity and stakeholder development have been geared to making various publics aware of the cultural heritage and economic benefits of a partnership like this one, fund-raising will also begin to play a larger role. The project has been awarded significant grants for its work of preparing the site for the museum and repurposing the current museum, but will need to move more and more toward fund-raising for the museum itself in order to realize the desired results.

Future projections for the museum have been emerging over the past two years and address: 1) pre-construction phases (use of consultants, architects, specialists, and the local work force to excavate and clear the settlement, the intended ground floor of the museum, and the repurposing of the current museum); 2) construction phases (the new building and displays, in addition to the development of programs and technologies); and 3) post-construction phases (implementation of museum education and outreach programs

and community engagement, publicity, augmented-reality programs and other technologies, and continued website development). Timelines for these phases and their cost estimates, while calculated with input from the architects, are tentative. Combined with further development of the current museum as a storage and research facility, the realization of a new regional archaeological museum will complete the project as a whole (FIG. 21).

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