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## **Jordan Cultural Landscapes: Making Significant Experience at the Folklore and Popular Traditions Museums (‘Ammān)**

### **Introduction**

This research addresses the valorization of Jordan’s cultural landscape, introducing a strategy to make visiting the Folklore and Popular Traditions Museums in ‘Ammān a significant experience. How can we reveal through a set of installations the lifestyle of nomadic populations that characterize the Jordanian identity? This research addresses the representation of the Jordanian cultural landscape, in particular expressions and facts rooted in centuries-old Bedouin culture, an economic and social tradition of adaptation to the Middle Eastern habitat. The aim of the research is also to increase the understanding of the collections exhibited at the Museum of Folklore and Popular Traditions at the archaeological site of the Roman Theatre in ‘Ammān. This paper reports on the creation of a research and practical program including objects, places, and techniques beyond the collections

exhibited in museums to valorize Jordan’s living heritage.

The project aims to create new installations that represent the culture and environment of Jordan. The installations will reflect the diverse landscapes and habitats found across the country. The purpose of the museum should not be a frozen-in-time collection overloaded with material contents, as it is currently. The workflow here provides a design for a multi-layered experience with the digitalization of museum contents that allows visitors to switch from passive perception to an active reading of Bedouin traditions and way of living, thus rethinking involvement and hidden narrations.

The project also introduces visitors into an immersive space, designed to evoke the black tent, where different interactive storytelling tools engage people regarding Bedouin traditions, habits, and ceremonies. The digital

environment is a space where visitors can focus on the intensity of information and its meaning by integrating physical collections with videogames and AR/VR solutions for creating interactive results. The final goal is to foster an innovative and participatory museum strategy, analyzing user preferences and adjusting the contents based on strategies connected with visitors inside and outside the exhibit.

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### **Promoting Cultural Landscapes within Museums**

The project fosters the renewal of the museums located at the Roman Theatre as a place of cultural experience. As recommended in the *Charter of Siena 2.0 on Museums and Cultural Landscape*, “museums must contribute to becoming an open place where the flows of people, generations, ideas, and experiences are manifested and

crossed.” (Bertollini *et al.* 2019).

Bedouin culture and tradition are expressed symbolically through a few material objects carried by nomads and used in social rituals. Aside from the tent, which is a concrete symbol of a dual Bedouin society, there are utility objects and animals. These determine a tribe’s survival and tell the story of a fragile intangible natural and cultural heritage. The tent’s handcrafted construction and the building techniques used reflect the habits and customs of these community members’ nomadic lives, and have been approved as a universal and authentic symbol of humanity. Only by carefully studying and reproducing these symbols that establish the unique and dual relationship between the people and the land can Bedouin cultural heritage be understood and thus enhanced. Their shelter consciously combines traditional knowledge through its design (FIG. 1).

A milestone occurred in 1992 when the UNESCO *World Heritage Convention* became the first international legal instrument to recognize and protect cultural landscapes through the adoption of guidelines concerning their inclusion in the World Heritage List. These cultural landscapes are defined as “combined works of nature and of man” because “they express a long and intimate relationship between peoples and their natural environment.” In 2003, UNESCO released the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (henceforth *Convention*), feeling the urgency to protect oral traditions and living heritage given their intrinsic intangible heritage elements.

Indeed, given the rapid speed of contemporary life, technological and economic advancement, and globalization, the world’s cultural expression—as portrayed through traditions, rituals, and events—is in danger (Alivizatou

<sup>1</sup> Giuseppe Amoruso is the scientific coordinator of the program; he is also the designer in chief of all the scientific and multimedia projects. For the Department of Antiquities, Director Prof. Fadi Bala’awi and Leena Bakkar; for the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation, Director Emilio Cabasino and Alessandra Blasi. This contribution is the result of collective research; for academic purposes, Giuseppe Amoruso is the author of all the text and Claudia Carioni was assistant to design. Leena Bakkar provided technical assistance and references to the research.

2011; Podara *et al.* 2021).

Cultural heritage, according to the *Faro Convention* (Council of Europe 2005), is a collection of resources inherited from the past that people identify as an expression of their ever-changing values, beliefs, knowledge, and traditions. The evaluation by the communities of which are the symbolic elements of their identity, which it would be appropriate to support and transmit, represents the link between historical studies, knowledge, heritage, and the future economic development of a territory that wants to be attractive. Protecting that heritage, as a mosaic of different domains of human expression, is a process of the inclusion of new generations; their creative and imaginative abilities will allow them to authentically regenerate popular values and collective meanings and to contribute to maintaining the collective memory of humanity.

According to the *Recommendation on the Protection and Promotion of Museums and Collections, their Diversity and their Role in Society* (UNESCO 2020), some primary functions are attributed to museums, including conservation, research, communication, and education: “Museums engage in formal and non-formal education and lifelong learning, through the development and transmission of knowledge, educational and pedagogical programmes, in partnership with other educational institutions, notably schools. ....*omissis*.... Museums can also provide knowledge and experiences that contribute to the understanding of related societal topics.”

During the twentieth century, the concept of cultural heritage developed from a tangible manifestation of the past to a representation of the cultural landscape (Amoruso and Salerno 2019) and cultural values that can interact with memory. In this sense, memory has

to be considered the pivotal point on which the community’s identity is built (Amoruso 2017). As well expressed by Marilena Vecco (2010: 324), this conceptual development has led people and international institutions to gradually concentrate on “the capacity of the object to arouse certain values that led the society in question to consider it as heritage.” In this framework, the need to protect intangible cultural elements as an expression of human memory and identity is of primary importance (FIG. 2).

The main goals are to strengthen awareness of local identity and traditions and connect people to heritage by 1) developing skills in the representation of cultural heritage with particular attention to new languages and technologies to improve accessibility and communication; and 2) experimenting with smart applications for museums and archaeological sites to be able to enhance the representation of heritage through exhibitions and interaction strategies for an effective multi-user experience. Richard Sandell describes the concept of the social responsibility of cultural and museum institutions, where these actively exercise the role of social inclusion within a community: studies have highlighted how often museums are “exclusive places” of access to culture, creating psychological, economic, material, and social barriers, and not positively stimulating communities and their individuals (Sandell 1998). This research project, which works toward the digital transformation of the museum collections of two Jordanian museums currently exhibited without any technological devices, therefore supports curators in acting responsibly. Museums can thus become agents of social transformation by overcoming the causes of

exclusion (representation, participation, and access, according to Sandell) and favoring those of inclusion through the different cultural dimensions of interaction: models, illustrations, tactile experience, storytelling, and interaction.

### **Making Significant Experience**

Intangible cultural heritage includes practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills—as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts, and cultural spaces associated therewith—that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. The *Convention* addresses those lifestyles which demonstrate belonging to a society and its context, intended as a cultural and economic landscape: traditions, oral expressions, performing arts, rituals, festive events, crafts, traditional agricultural practices, that are a “living” expression of the communities’ identities and the populations that recognize themselves therein. This extension of the concept of culture on the one hand to all manifestations of social existence, on the other to any human group, has created the regulatory framework that today allows us to map the episodes of humanity’s development. The *Convention* therefore refers to expressions, manifestations, representations, and symbolic elements and therefore requires a specific narrative, descriptive, and documentary approach that provides for appropriate and often unconventional forms of recognition and transmission (UNESCO 2020) (FIG. 3).

This research project promoted the representation and dissemination of Jordanian living heritage through interactive design to make possible the experiential understanding of museum contents; experience is a collective tool to

restore memory, and the cultural process of knowledge transmission creates the right engagement. The new museum can be envisioned as going beyond the tangible and common sensorial environment in order to communicate and share heritage through a process of re-appropriation and extension of the meanings into the intangible dimension.

Cultural landscapes and intangible heritage are the subjects of the new exhibition strategy starting from the objects and the artifacts that belong to the two museums. Intangible cultural heritage is traditional, contemporary, and living at the same time and because it is passed from generation to generation is also inclusive and representative: it “thrives on its basis in communities and depends on those whose knowledge of traditions, skills and customs are passed on to the rest of the community, from generation to generation, or to other communities” (UNESCO 2020).

Knowledge is gained through direct personal and social commitment rather than mere transmission. The art of memory is a practice that, by associating a series of “places” and “images” with memory, intends to preserve and use information for the benefit of society and citizens by complying to a strict set of rules. Memory and living traditions are deeply connected to sensory experience which can be direct transmitted with an effective storytelling environment. Audiovisual storytelling brings oral history to life and makes it accessible by experimenting with languages and media. It explores the artisans’ ways of life, including their techniques, tools, practices, and glossaries. The new design represents Bedouin and artisan handicrafts and objects, as well as rituals and symbolism, domestic settings, regional customs, and tent-building methods, to offer new ways of interaction between

the visitor and the museum experience, supported by audiovisual storytelling contents.

Technologies have transformed the exhibition spaces within museums and places for culture learning; rooms have been transformed using virtually amplified perspectives on the paths, interaction with collections is designed based on personalization (users can select contents), participation and sharing is permitted (users can create new cultural contents and share it with other users), and we are moving towards new forms of active and participatory learning. Thus, technologies in museums are recognized as opportunities for heritage conservation, study, and communication, as well as heritage and common value creation, knowledge sharing, and dissemination. As a result, technologies are altering the relationship between users and the utilization environment and cultural content in museums, libraries, and educational institutions.

Participation and sharing mediated by the user can also create new cultural content by blazing a path to new forms of active and participatory learning. The cultural actions that are related to new media and their language include the creation and sharing of information and knowledge, as well as accessibility to heritage through digital artifacts that represent ideas, identities, and values of belonging.

To these, Manovich (2002) also adds interactive cultural experience, the opportunity for visitors to enjoy experiences and cultural products, as well as ways to recreate the displayed objects using textual, vocal, and/or visual communication and participation in a type of information that “ecologically” regenerates knowledge and its diffusion. Knowledge technologies offer multiple opportunities and challenges to cultural

and scientific practitioners; the challenge of involvement and experience is not only one of technology and design, but also, and perhaps more importantly, a mental and imaginative one. In this regard, Manovich has also distinguished some specific cultural actions that are mediated by the new digital tools: creation, sharing of information and knowledge; creation, sharing, and accessibility of digital artifacts representing aesthetic ideas and values; interactive cultural experience; textual, vocal and/or visual communication; and participation in a sort of ecological information online.

Envisioning such experiences within the museums, through representation and communication, makes it possible to imagine multiple forms of communication and interaction and to make them sensitive towards the learning environment. Drawing also shapes the experience of goods or spaces (an experience economy) but introduces an advanced vision of things and systems and stimulates a shared vision of material culture (FIG. 4). As Laura Marcolini reminds us, “It is clear that the configuration of the space and the design of the path of approach to the moment of interaction are not only part of the narrative but are fundamental for a sensitive environment to produce the interactions just described, because they facilitate that ‘sensitive imagination’ (*phantasia aistethiché*) of which Aristotle already spoke. Indeed, designing environments requires more than technical preparation, a great sensitivity for the existing space and its possibilities, to be combined with just as much ability to imagine that space transformed by the presence of a narrative, of a dramaturgy that produces an experience” (Marcolini 2020).

The Bedouin tent is the type of dwelling typical of the desertic nomadic

lifestyle because of its adaptation to the habitat and the materials from which it is made (Amoruso and Conte 2022). Rugs and carpets are part of the tent environment and are made by weaving hair from their animals (such as goats, sheep, and camels). Food and drink consumption, as well as music and storytelling, are all part of the Bedouin culture's hospitality rituals, where nomadism and the harsh climatic conditions of the desert constantly guide people's choices and habits (FIG. 5).

### Reflections on Digital Museology

The word *memento* (Latin, literally "remember," future imperative, second person singular) in English commonly indicates any object used to remember something, including Post-It and (visual) notes such as those seen in the film itself.

The 2006 Nobel Prize-winner Orhan Pamuk, in his *Museum Manifesto*, addresses the future of museums: "Large national museums such as the Louvre and the Hermitage took shape and turned into essential tourist destinations alongside the opening of royal and imperial palaces to the public. These institutions, now national symbols, present the story of the nation—history, in a word—as being far more important than the stories of individuals. This is unfortunate because the stories of individuals are much better suited to displaying the depths of our humanity" (Tokofsky 2015).

According to Pamuk, the real challenge is to use museums to tell the stories of the individual people who live in these countries with the same brilliance, depth, and power. If objects are not removed from their surroundings and streets, but rather placed with care and ingenuity in their natural habitats, they will already tell their own stories. The ability of a

museum to represent a state, nation, or company, or a specific history, should not be used to determine its success. It should be its ability to reveal people's humanity. These resources should also be used to inspire and support people in transforming their own small homes and stories into "exhibition" spaces (FIG. 6).

*Significant Objects*, a literary and anthropological experiment devised by Rob Walker and Joshua Glenn (Glenn 2012), demonstrated that the effect of narrative on any given object's subjective value can be measured objectively. The project used eBay to auction off thrift-store items, with short stories written by over 200 contributing writers serving as item descriptions. Computer graphics and digital imaging are transforming the relationship between designers, users, the environment, the cultural and educational content of cities, physical and virtual public space, and archive, library, and museum collections. The urban and architectural environments must be reimagined and transformed, considering their virtual extensions, and allowing for a variety of customizations linked to content selection. Participation, interaction, and sharing of information mediated by users and synthesized through drawing, rendering, mapping, and modeling should also result in innovative solutions for environmental wellbeing, safety, and ergonomics, as well as increased access to high-quality cultural contents.

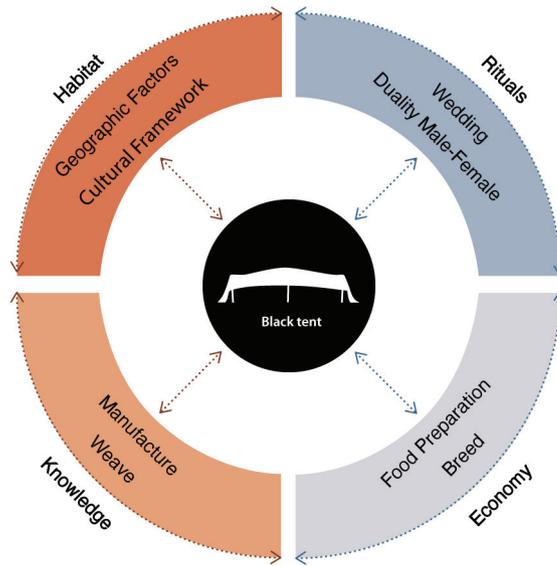
Narrating heritage is a real challenge for intangible cultural heritage, and telling stories effectively can drive audience engagement. For this purpose, digital media are a strategic tool for preserving and transmitting memories. People, places they live, and rituals and practices are the elements of that intangible heritage that international bodies recognize as a cultural landscape (Amoruso

and Salerno 2019).

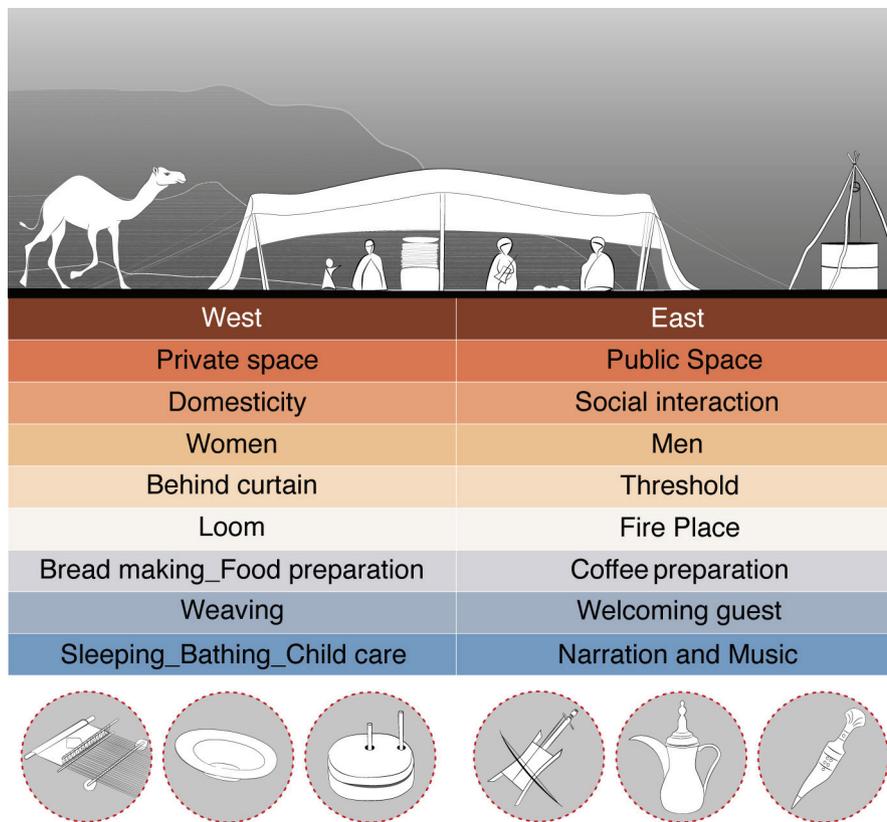
Case studies and best practices introduce critical issues to address when capturing and designing a physical space or imagining a cultural space equipped with cutting-edge information and communication technologies. Three-D data, archives, projection, modeling, sensors, light, digital representation, interaction, and responsive surfaces necessitate multidisciplinary methodologies that cover a wide range of topics, including places for culture, digital heritage, access to culture and education, and the design of urban environments and interiors. As a result, knowledge technologies present numerous opportunities and challenges to cultural and scientific operators; the challenge of engagement and experience is not only driven by technology or design skills but is also and above all a matter of mind, imagination, and drawing as experience (FIG. 7).

The case study presented here delivers multimedia applications to understand the objects exhibited at the Folklore and Popular Traditions Muse-

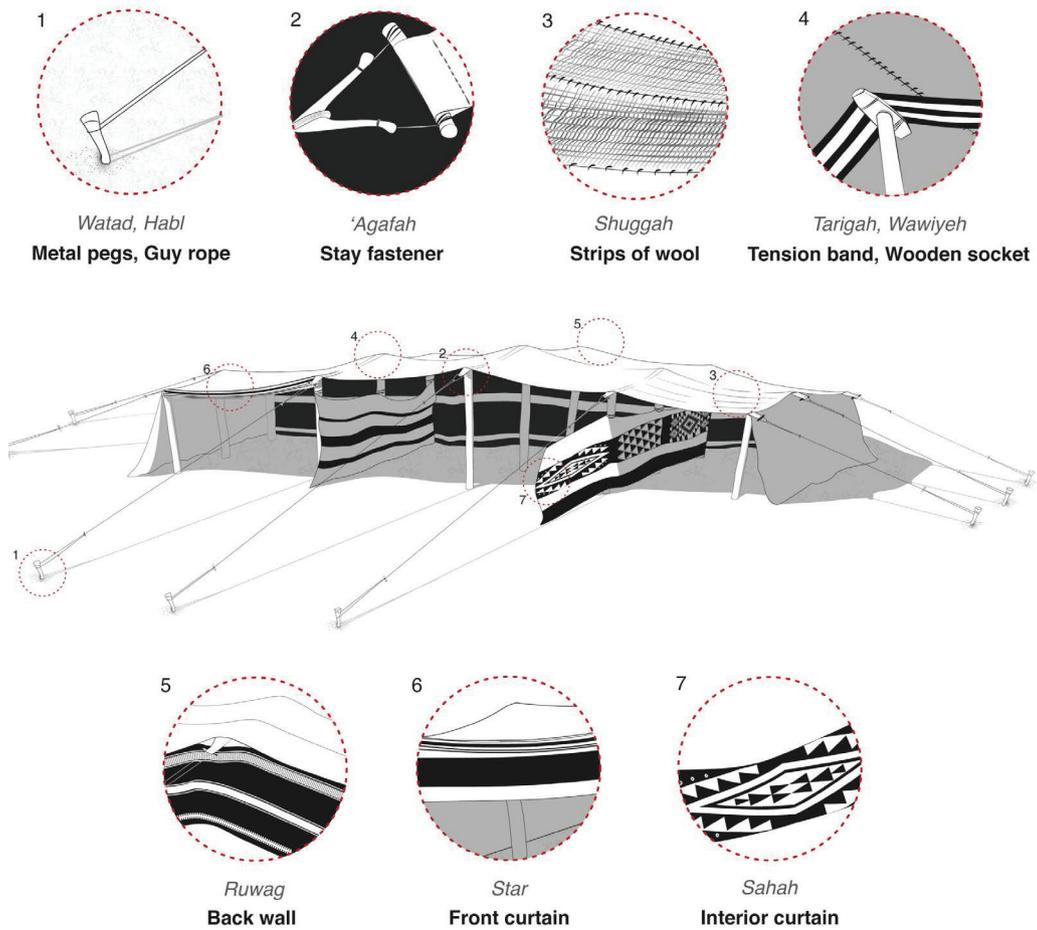
ums of ‘Ammān, to show not just their appearance but also their significance. The study promotes a methodological framework for experiencing intangible heritage and learning about the cultural landscape associated with Bedouin culture. The process aims to strengthen museum institutions’ roles in reducing or eliminating barriers to social inclusion. To portray a culture, it is necessary to map and identify its codes, as well as describe the knowledge with drawing tools as a testimony of a living cultural tradition to entrust its custody to future generations. This study proposes a methodological model for reading, interpreting, and narrating local identity by establishing an articulated link between knowledge and material expressions using the most recent generation of digital systems. The project at the Roman Theater in ‘Ammān shows how scientific studies and digital technology can help in the de-construction and reconstruction of a cultural site, offering high potential in environmental design and the communication of living heritage through interactive design (FIG. 8).



1. The cultural system of the Bedouin community develops from the physical object of the black tent, 2022 (image by Giuseppe Amoruso).



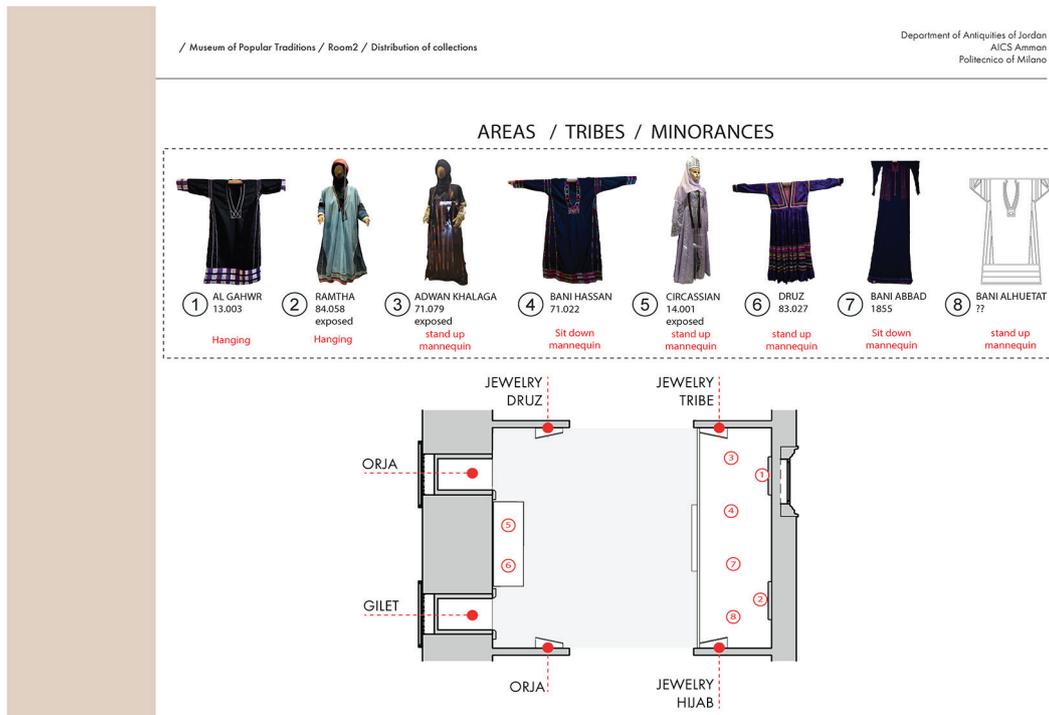
2. The Bedouin social dualism: environment, orientation, space, meanings, sociality, actions, and material objects, 2022 (image by Giuseppe Amoruso).



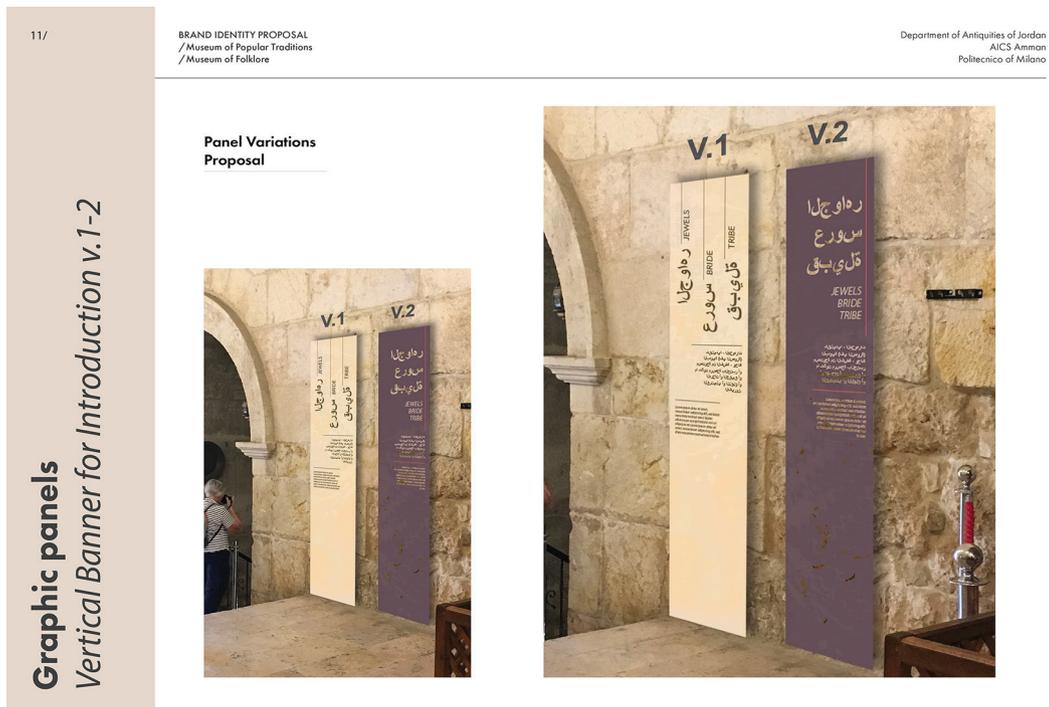
3. Black tent, typological and functional study, 2022 (image by Giuseppe Amoruso).



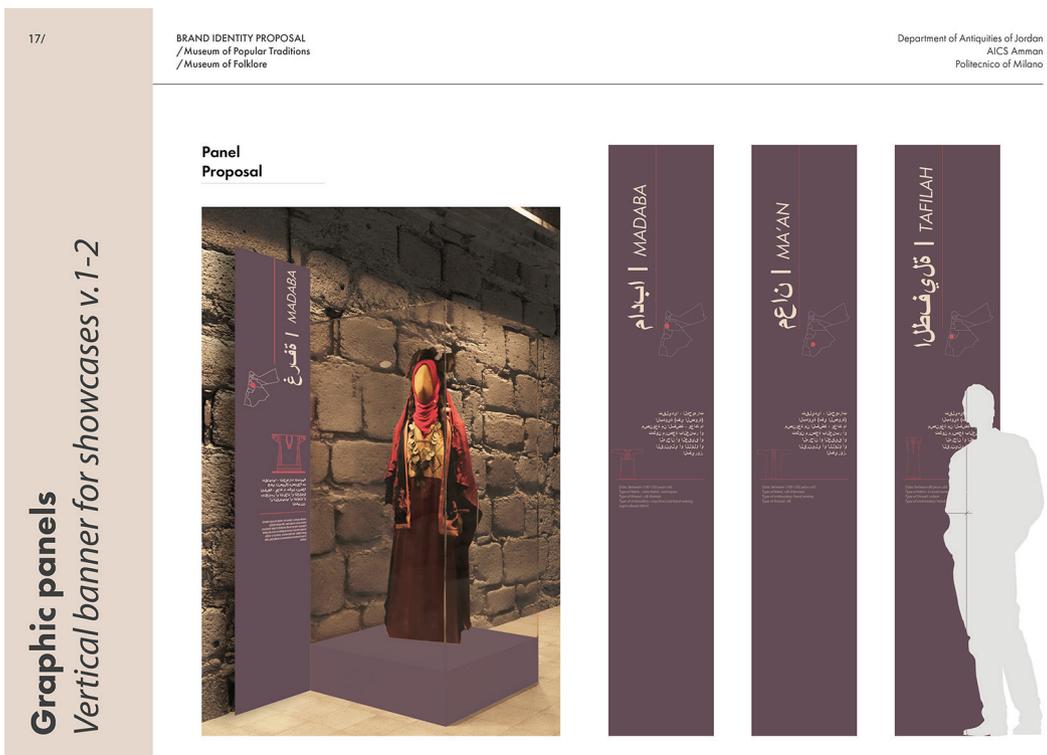
4. Installation inspired by the black tent and devoted to the Bedouin cultural landscape and its intangible heritage, 2022 (image by Giuseppe Amoruso).



5. Communication and exhibition design for the improvement and enhancement of the Folklore Museum and the Museum of Popular Traditions, 2023 (image by Giuseppe Amoruso).



6. Installation set and showcase for the town traditional dresses, 2023 (image by Giuseppe Amoruso).



7. Installation set and room design for the traditional tribe and minorange dresses, 2023 (image by Giuseppe Amoruso).

**Graphic panels - Folklore**  
*Crypta Bedouins Jewels*



8. Installation set and showcase for the Bedouin jewels, 2023 (image by Giuseppe Amoruso).

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