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AMERICAN CENTER OF RESEARCH  
ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA | AMMAN, JORDAN

# أخبار أكور NEWSLETTER

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for July–December 2025

## Anti-Illicit Trafficking Training and Coordination

*Results of a Cultural Property Agreement  
Implementation Grant from the  
U.S. Department of State*

*John Shearman and Faris Saadeh*

In September 2024, the U.S. Department of State awarded ACOR a Cultural Property Agreement Implementation Grant (CPAIG), the goal of which is to improve the capacity to fight illicit trafficking of cultural property in Jordan. During the program development, interviews and a needs assessment determined that Jordan Customs and the Department of Antiquities were the groups who could benefit most from additional support and training. Consequently, we developed not only a training program as specified by the grant (and described in *ACOR Newsletter* 37.1, p. 10) but also a draft of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the customs agency and the DoA. An MoU helps to formalize proactive engagement, points of contact, and support the formation of good habits in this joint fight. The agreement outlines each agency's role and formal points of coordination in the fight against illicit trafficking of cultural heritage. In late 2025, both parties revised and approved the MoU, which is expected to be signed in the coming month.

The project completed all its intended training by the end of December 2025. In the last half of the year, ACOR trained six customs officers who then went on to train 150 others, including some DoA employees. Train-the-trainer models are effective, as they perpetuate the skills and information long after a grant ends. ACOR, with the assistance of an international group of experts, developed and distributed a manual that will guide trainers and trainees as they seek to prevent the illicit trafficking in cultural material that passes through customs. From this, we also devised a quick reference guide, available as a PDF and a poster, that outlines steps, tips, and resources for customs officers. These are being distributed at airports, border crossings, and the port. The CPAIG-funded project has been received well within Jordan Customs and the DoA, and it has gained attention from other sectors in Jordan, as well as neighboring countries.

The results of the various training sessions held at ACOR's headquarters in Amman and at the customs offices in Aqaba have been impressive. The customs officers trained were highly successful in conveying their knowledge to their colleagues, as evidenced by the practical results we witnessed both during the training and at their workplaces. The Customs Directorate informed us of



Jordanian Customs officers and U.S. Embassy personnel: (left to right): Capt. Nuha Al Ayasrah (Supervisor, Jordan Customs); Hanan Ghannoum (Public Engagement Specialist, U.S. Embassy in Amman); Brig. Gen. Manal Nsair (Director, Training and Development Center, Jordan Customs); Jed Dornburg (Director of Public Engagement, U.S. Embassy in Amman); Col. Dr. Ghandi Al Smadi (Vice President of Legal Issues, Jaber Border Center, Jordan Customs); and Maj. Khaled Bawaneh (Inspector, Aqaba, Jordan Customs). (Photo by Ibrahim Rantissi.)



Discussion of the memorandum of understanding. Among the attendees are Dr. John Shearman (Deputy Director, ACOR), Faris Saadeh (CPAIG Project Manager, ACOR), Col. Dr. Ghandi Al Smadi (Vice President of Legal Issues, Jaber Border Center, Jordan Customs), Prof. Dr. Fawzi Abudanah (General Director, Department of Antiquities), Aktham Oweidi (Technical Assistant to the Director General, Department of Antiquities), and Mohammed Nasser (Director, Antiquities Smuggling Control Directorate). (Photo courtesy of the Department of Antiquities.)

an increase in seizures related to cultural heritage and various smuggling attempts during the term of this grant as a direct result of its activities. Discussions among customs officers also clarified a number of legal and practical matters for many employees, especially the younger staff members who participated extensively in the trainings.

Coordination between the DoA and the Customs Directorate—crucial to preventing the smuggling of cultural heritage across Jordan’s borders—has been transformed as a result of the training and coordination efforts undertaken by both parties over the past year. Communication between the two directorates is regular and energetic in this shared fight. Furthermore, the new Antiquities Smuggling Control Directorate has officially commenced operations, with a director formally appointed by the Department of Antiquities; Mohammad Nasser assumed this role on January 1, 2026. This will contribute to greater efficiency, especially with the imminent signing of the MoU.

With CPAIG funding from the U.S. Department of State, ACOR has helped bring together the expertise of Jordan Customs and the Department of Antiquities with that of the Jordanian experts and security experts from the United States and Spain. U.S. leadership and ACOR’s efforts have catalyzed cooperation with the international community. This led to a greater understanding of illicit trafficking of cultural heritage, and Jordan’s role in helping to prevent it, at the regional and global level.

The comprehensive manual developed by ACOR to serve as a fundamental training resource and guide for Jordan Customs. Printed copies are distributed to customs offices and senior officers, and all trainees receive a PDF of the book. (Photo by John Shearman.)



Given the practical results that the Customs Directorate has witnessed at land, air, and sea border crossings, further training for its in-house trainers and staff will be provided (under a new grant; see p. 3), as well as increased cooperation, even as the work funded by CPAIG has come to completion. The project has also allowed ACOR to connect with other Jordanian government departments who are actively participating in the success of the program—including the Public Security Directorate. ACOR is continuously working to ensure the integrity and value of project outcomes and to frame them within a sustainable structure that will yield benefits for Jordan, the region, the United States and the American people for many years to come.

This article was funded by a grant from the United States Department of State. The opinions, findings and conclusions stated herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Department of State.



U.S. Embassy Amman



## Syria and ACOR

Pearce Paul Creasman

Dr. Anas Haj Zeidan, Nour Kadalem, Nisreen Abu al-Shaikh, Dr. Pearce Paul Creasman, and Jihad Abu Kahla. (Photo by Matthew Vincent.)

Since our foundation in 1968, ACOR in Amman was intended to be a permanent center to “serve as a staging ground for field projects in Syria, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and other neighboring countries” (P. M. Bikai, *ACOR: The First 25 Years* [ACOR, 1993], p. 16). For decades, ACOR actively conducted and supported projects in Syria, particularly from our founding through 1989. Due to war and other conflicts, we then focused our core field efforts within Jordan for a time; however, we have continued to support the study of and intellectual exchange about Syria and its cultural heritage, including through regular lectures ([syria.acorjordan.org/events](http://syria.acorjordan.org/events)) and the award of dozens of fellowships ([syria.acorjordan.org/projects](http://syria.acorjordan.org/projects)) from 1989 to present.

In 2025, as the dynamics of the world around us changed,

ACOR endeavored to reach back to its original mission and rebuild direct links in and with Syria. Associate director emeritus Jehad Haron was welcomed in Damascus mid-year by the Directorate-General of Antiquities and Museums (DGAM; the official governmental entity responsible for such matters in the Syrian Arab Republic). In response, ACOR was pleased to invite the DGAM to Amman to visit us and discuss the possibilities further. In December, ACOR was honored to receive Prof. Dr. Anas Haj Zeidan (Director General of the DGAM), Nour Kadalem (head of the Department of Antiquities of Damascus), and Jihad Abu Kahla (Director of the Antiquities Department of Rural Damascus Governorate) for four days of conversation and planning at our center. During this time, H.E. Dr. Emad Hijazin, Jordan’s Minister of Tourism, and H.E. Prof. Dr. Fawzi Abudanah, Director General of the Department of Antiquities, met with and received the DGAM in Amman as well.

With the inaugural Prof. Thomas W. Davis Annual Lecture (see pp. 7, 12), Dr. Zeidan offered a well-attended talk, “Illicit Trafficking of Syrian Cultural Properties: Trading Methods and Challenges of Restitution,” outlining the challenges and successes currently faced by the Syrian people and state related to this subject. That same evening, we were honored to help facilitate the signing of an agreement between the DGAM and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security regarding the repatriation of dozens of heritage objects to Syria.

With productive meetings in hand, ACOR and the DGAM have planned monthly workshops, trainings, and other events through 2026 to further foster the relationship and, collectively, advance knowledge of the past and present.

## Preservation and Protection of the Holy Land in Jordan at the Dead Sea

Pearce Paul Creasman  
& Noreen Doyle

In September 2025, ACOR was awarded a significant grant through the U.S. Department of State's Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP) grants program. Totalling \$1.6 million over two years, the project titled "Preservation and Protection of the Holy Land at Herod's Ain az-Zara Palace and Port to Mukawir" comprises three distinct aspects: excavation, enhanced anti-illicit trafficking trainings, and ensuring that the American public has access to and information about the Holy Land in Jordan.

The principal effort of the project is to excavate, conserve, and create visitor access to Hellenistic and Roman-era remains at Ain az-Zara, the port and seaside palace (or *villa maritima*) that provided the neighboring citadel of Machaerus (Mukawir) with a tether to the rest of the ancient world (see *ACOR Newsletter* 35.2, pp. 1–4, for our earlier excavations). This hilltop fortress is famed as the location where, according to biblical sources and the historian Josephus, King Herod ordered the beheading of John the Baptist around 30 CE. The archaeological remains in this area witnessed events critical to the development of the modern world.

In addition to this fieldwork, a series of new trainings are covering more complex issues of anti-illicit trafficking, with specific efforts to engage security and the courts in Jordan, directly supporting the bilateral cultural property agreement between the U.S. and Jordan that entered into force on January 14, 2026. The grant also ensures that stories of the Holy Land in Jordan will be made directly and freely available to the American people.



Ain az-Zara and the Dead Sea in December 2025. (Photo by P. P. Creasman.)

American leadership, innovation, and shared values are key to all aspects of the grant, in collaboration with multiple entities of the Jordanian government. The grant activities serve to make American and Jordanian citizens safer, stronger, and more prosperous.

Fieldwork began in November 2025, including another season of underwater research in the Dead Sea. Excavations on land are ongoing. Discoveries and analyses will be shared widely with the public.

This article was funded by a grant from the United States Department of State. The opinions, findings and conclusions stated herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Department of State.



U.S. Embassy Amman



From left to right: Mr. Shalva Sabauri (Counselor); Mr. Vazha Shatberashvili (Head of the Cultural Heritage Department, Ministry of Culture of Georgia); Mr. Paata Gaprindashvili (Deputy Director General, National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Georgia); Ms. Zovi Mananian (ACOR); Ms. Tea Oniani (Director General, Head of Delegation, National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Georgia); H.E. Mr. Archil Dzuliashvili (Ambassador of Georgia to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan); Ms. Tamar Ketiladze (Senior Specialist, Intangible Cultural Heritage and International Relations Unit); and Jihad Haron (ACOR). (Photo by Zovi Mananian.)

## Visit by the Georgian Delegation

Zovi Mananian

A Georgian delegation accompanied by H.E. Mr. Archil Dzuliashvili, Ambassador of Georgia to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, visited ACOR on November 20, 2025.

During the visit, the delegation received a presentation by Jihad Haron, associate director emeritus, and a tour of the center, as well as a copy of our latest publication, *The Story of the Land of Jordan from Prehistory to the Persians*, by Prof. Dr. Zeidan Kafafi (p. 6). Emphasis was placed on the importance of establishing cooperative relationships with Georgia in the field of heritage protection. Both parties expressed readiness to collaborate on any such future joint projects. H.E. Ambassador Archil Dzuliashvili and the delegation members very much enjoyed the visit and thanked ACOR for its hospitality and the rich information shared with them.



The Roman bath hall with new pavement. (Photo by Hanadi Al Taher.)



This Byzantine gold solidus, dating to the reign of Emperor Anastasius I (491–518 CE) was found during the cleaning of a layer of semi-compacted soil above the church floor. It was fully documented, photographed, and submitted to the Madaba Antiquities director.

(Photo by Yara Alkhatib.)

Byzantine architectural element. (Photo by Hanadi Al Taher.)

## Tall Dhiban Update

*John Shearman*

The current phase of the Dhiban contract with the Department of Antiquities, announced in the last newsletter, is coming to a close and will have been substantially completed by the end of January 2026. Focus has been on three major tasks.

### Clearance Operations

Activities concentrated on the Roman bath, Roman bath hall, and the Byzantine church. With the clearance operations completed, project staff were able to assess and prepare for the conservation and restoration program. Several decorative fragments from the Byzantine church were found, as was a gold coin (solidus) dating to the time of Anastasius I (491–518 CE).

### Conservation

In collaboration with the Department of Antiquities, a conservation and restoration plan was agreed upon. Heightening the walls of the Roman bath created a uniform elevation. Sections of the walls were stabilized and the flooring area was leveled. The Roman bath hall had been paved in ancient times, but clearance revealed that the pavers were entirely missing, so the hall was repaved with new stone slabs. Surrounding walls were installed with stones available on site. Clearance of the Byzantine church revealed that much of the stone flooring, as well as walls and other structures, were missing. Accordingly, by utilizing on-site stones, the apse and the northern and southern external walls were rebuilt to a level corresponding to three courses. Future plans include repavement of the church flooring and installation of a viewing platform.

### Visitor Preparation

The installation of the walkway is currently underway. Trail posts and concrete walkways will allow for safe visits to the



ancient structures. A viewing platform has been built overlooking the Palace of Mesha area, as has a wheelchair ramp at the site's entrance stairway. This will make the site accessible to those with impaired mobility. Final drafts of narratives have been submitted to the Department of Antiquities for the fabrication and installation of site signage.



Patricia excavating the North Ridge Church, Petra.  
(ACOR institutional collection.)

in memoriam

## Patricia Maynor Bikai (December 14, 1943–August 4, 2025)

Patricia M. Bikai was involved for more than four decades in archaeological projects in Lebanon, Egypt, Cyprus, and most extensively in Jordan. She moved to Amman in 1991 when her husband Pierre Michel Bikai (whom she had met in 1970, while both were doing fieldwork in Lebanon) became ACOR's fourth long-term director, succeeding Bert de Vries. She took on many roles in their 15 years in Amman, including associate director, and wrote major grants that to this day have had a beneficial impact on the center. Patricia earned her PhD in biblical studies from the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley. In the 1980s, her archaeological focus was on Cyprus, where she had a Fulbright Fellowship from 1984 to 1985.

From 1991 to 2006, the Bikais, while running ACOR, undertook myriad projects in Jordan—excavation, restoration, and conservation, as well as important publications. Patricia initiated ACOR's major monograph series as the series editor with the 1992 volume *The Mosaics of Jordan* by Father Michele Piccirillo. The multi-authored *The Petra Church* (2001) and, in 2002, the first of the five volumes on the Petra papyri followed.

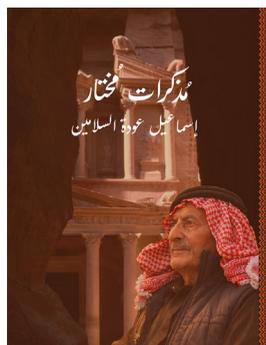
Shelters were a concern for the Bikais, and work in Madaba in the 1990s resulted in the protection of several buildings. ACOR also undertook major work in Amman in the 1990s, including excavation of the so-called Temple of Hercules on the Amman Citadel and the resurrection of the columns there, now an iconic image for the city. In 1999, she turned her attention to the area on the hillside above the Petra Church and there excavated the North Ridge Church and then, below it, the Blue Chapel. This would later become the subject of her last major publication, *Petra: The North Ridge* (2020), co-authored with Megan Perry and Chrysanthos Kanellopoulos. She initiated a project in Bayda within the Petra Park, and in May 2005 an amazing cache of architectural sculptures dating to the late 1st century BCE was found in a hilltop building that the excavators identified as a Nabataean royal banqueting hall. Some of her later fieldwork was done after their move to Aqaba in spring 2006. Pierre and Patricia lived there until 2011, when they returned to California and settled in Emeryville, with a view of the San Francisco Bay.

Upon her retirement from ACOR, H.M. King Abdullah II ibn Al Hussein awarded Patricia the Al Hussein Medal for Distinguished Service of the Second Order. Her efforts in protecting the heritage of Jordan were manifest in so many ways, and this award was very well deserved. The Bikais fostered the ACOR fellowship program from the outset of their tenure; thus it was fitting that one was established in their names when they retired.

—Barbara A. Porter

## Other Publication News

ACOR's staff helped to design and typeset a book published by the Department of Antiquities: *Mukhtar's Memories* (*Muthakrat Mukhtar*), written by Ismail Odeh Al Salamin and researched, edited, and annotated by Dr. Adeeb Musa Al-Salamin, director of the Princess Basma Bint Talal Center for Intangible Cultural Heritage.



Through stories, descriptions, and reflections, the author documents both the material and intangible aspects of local life in Wadi Musa, preserving vanishing customs, values, and experiences.

Also, three new essays appeared on our blog, *Insights*:

- “The Midianite-Kenite Hypothesis and the Qur’an: A Salute to ACOR” by Kareem Rosshandler (Pierre and Patricia Bikai Fellow, 2025–2026).
- “Under the Jordanian Sun: Summary Reflections of a

Student Archaeologist at the Humayma Archaeological Field School” by Rachel Carroll (Jennifer C. Groot Memorial Fellow, 2025–2026).

- “Stone Tools on Repeat: Exploring Prehistoric Recycling Practices” by Osama Samawi (S. Thomas Parker Memorial Fund Fellow, 2025–2026).

### Online

[publications.acorjordan.org/insights](https://publications.acorjordan.org/insights)

## EMPLOYEES OF THE YEAR!



**Sahar Abu Laila,  
Senior Accountant**

&

**Ghassan Adawi,  
Chef**



## Launch of Zeidan Kafafi's *The Story of the Land of Jordan*

Noreen Doyle & Lina Shara'an

On August 25, 2025, the debut of Zeidan Kafafi's *The Story of the Land of Jordan from Prehistory to the Persians*, published jointly by ACOR and the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, was honored in an event at the Jordan Museum sponsored by His Royal Highness Prince El Hassan bin Talal in his role as president of the Arab Thought Forum. This substantial volume presents for the first time the country's most ancient archaeological history written in English by a single Jordanian author. Prof. Kafafi's long career in the field—during which he concentrated on the Neolithic and also worked at sites dating to other periods—and deep understanding of the material and publications situated him perfectly to produce this work. He was, until September 2020, president of Yarmouk University, where he is now professor emeritus of archaeology.

In his speech, His Royal Highness noted the timeliness and importance of an interdisciplinary work that synthesizes and brings attention to the interconnected geographical and ancient historical contexts of Jordan's heritage.

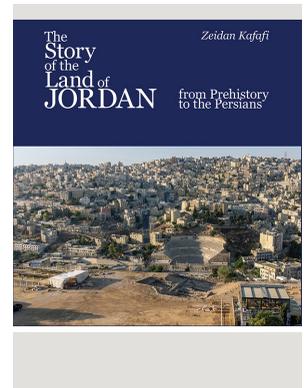
The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, Al-Hassan Science City, and ACOR organized the launch. Among the approximately one hundred attendees were HRH Princess Dana Firas, president of ICOMOS Jordan and UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador; H.E. Dr. Fadi Bala'awi, Secretary General of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities; H.E. Prof. Fawzi Abudanah, director general of the Department of Antiquities; two former prime ministers; many other current and former government officials of Jordan; foreign ambassadors and attachés; and numerous other notables drawn from Jordan's governmental, HRH Prince



From left to right: Prof. Zeidan Kafafi, HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal, and Prof. Pearce Paul Creasman at the ceremony. (Photo by Ibrahim Rantissi.)

El Hassan bin Talal academic, and business sectors. *Alrai*, the *Jordan Times*, and Roya TV covered the event.

The book was edited and typeset by Dr. Russell B. Adams, with assistance from ACOR staff. It is available for purchase on Amazon in a hardcover edition. For the link, visit: [publications.acorjordan.org/books/story-of-the-land-of-jordan](http://publications.acorjordan.org/books/story-of-the-land-of-jordan).



## New Fellowship: The Amman Prize

Thanks to the generosity of our donors and friends, ACOR was pleased to announce in October 2025 the availability of a new fellowship program for the 2026–2027 cycle: The Amman Prize. The Amman Prize is available in two categories, one for ABD doctoral students and the other for postgraduates who have completed their formal course of study. Both support four months of research and residence in Jordan. Awardees will be provided with a monthly stipend, room/board, and a private workspace at ACOR. Three awards of \$25,000 are expected to be made in 2026, including \$5,000 for travel and research expenses. ACOR is very grateful to all who made these awards possible.



The Amman skyline, viewed from the Amman Citadel. (Photo by China Shelton.)

## Summer 2026 Ceramics Courses

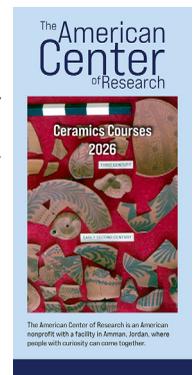
Sarah Wenner

ACOR is renewing its long tradition of educating archaeologists on ceramic analysis through two courses in the summer of 2026. The first, an advanced course open to students with previous ceramic experience, will occur in conjunction with the Humayma excavation project in order to demonstrate field techniques (May 16–June 3). The second, an introductory-level course, will explore the basics of southern Jordan's classical-period ceramic chronologies in a classroom setting, with a select assemblage (July 12–30). Both courses are offered free to Jordanians, and four seats are reserved for Syrian archaeologists working for the Directorate-General of Antiquities and Museums.

You can find more information on the website. The application deadline is March 15, but late inquiries may be considered for the introductory course. If you have questions, please contact Sarah Wenner ([swenner@acorjordan.org](mailto:swenner@acorjordan.org)), or if you would like to be considered for 2026 or future course offerings, please email [reservations@acorjordan.org](mailto:reservations@acorjordan.org).

### Online

[acorjordan.org/ceramics-field-schools-2026](http://acorjordan.org/ceramics-field-schools-2026)



in memoriam

## Thomas William Davis (1956–2025)

Dr. Thomas William Davis, husband of 45 years to Jennifer Davis, died on September 28, 2025. Tom was a prominent scholar of the eastern Mediterranean and western Asia, author of numerous articles and *Shifting Sands: The Rise and Fall of Biblical Archaeology* (2004). He served on ACOR's Board of Trustees (2020–2025) and as chair of the Publications Committee during our most prolific publishing era. As a professor of archaeology at Lipscomb University, and previously at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, he specialized in the Eastern Roman Empire and early Christianity. He led excavations in Cyprus, Egypt, Jordan, Kazakhstan, and Sudan. He also served as principal investigator and field director at dozens of archaeological projects in the United States, when he worked at Goodwin & Associates, baptizing an immense number of early career scholars and students in field archaeology. Previously, he served as director of the Cyprus American Archaeological Research Institute (2003–2011) and in other prestigious roles. Prof. Davis earned an MA and PhD from the University of Arizona in Syro-Palestinian archaeology (1983 and 1987, respectively) and a BA in history and archaeology and Near Eastern studies from Wheaton College (1979). He did part of his archaeological training at Jordan's Tell el-Hayyat site while earning his graduate degrees, returning often throughout his career.

—Pearce Paul Creasman



Tom excavating at Nuri, Sudan.

(Photo by Stephanie Denkowicz/Nuri Archaeological Expedition.)

### Lecture Highlights

The vigor of the spring 2025 lecture season carried on through the fall season, beginning on September 24 with “Urban and Economic Activities in the Hinterland of Petra.” H.E. Prof. Dr. Fawzi Abudناه summarized archaeological evidence that he has collected since 2023 as director or co-director of fieldwork projects in this region.

On October 19, Dr. David Vila, Distinguished Professor of Religion and Philosophy at John Brown University in Siloam Springs, Arkansas, delivered “Archaeology and the Promise of a Better World,” a lecture that ACOR cosponsored with Fulbright Jordan, which hosted the lecture at their offices in Amman.

Prof. Dr. Nabil Ali, head of the Department of Archaeology at the University of Jordan, gave his presentation “The Results of Archaeological Excavations at Tell Es-Sukhnah, Zarqa Area” on November 30.

The season ended on December 14 with the inaugural Professor Thomas W. Davis Annual Lecture (this page). Prof. Dr. Anas Haj Zeidan, director general of the Directorate-General of Antiquities and Museums (DGAM) of the Syrian Arab Republic gave a lecture, in Arabic, titled “Illicit Trafficking of Syrian Cultural Properties: Trading Methods and Challenges of Restitution” (see pp. 2 and 12).

These and other lectures can be watched on ACOR's YouTube channel, and our website provides current and past schedules.

#### Online

[acorjordan.org/events](http://acorjordan.org/events)

[youtube.com/@ACORJordan1968](https://youtube.com/@ACORJordan1968)



### The Professor Thomas W. Davis Lecture

In honor of trustee, scholar, and long-time supporter of ACOR Tom Davis, in 2025 the Board of Trustees created the “Professor Thomas W. Davis Lecture.” Designated as the most prestigious lecture of ACOR's annual series, the topic presented should focus on the “interconnections” aspect of our mission and reinforce our role as regional hub for advancing knowledge.

### Daytime Emmy for Jordan and Friends

In October 2025, the Discovery Channel series *Expedition Unknown* won the Daytime Emmy for Outstanding Travel and Adventure Program for its 2024 series, which was led by two episodes featuring some of ACOR's research: “Petra's Secrets Revealed” and “Hunt for Petra's Lost Tombs.” Congratulations to all involved for bringing Jordan to the fore and for recognition by their peers in doing so.

Want to learn more about the research? Start here: [acorjordan.org/exu-learn-more](http://acorjordan.org/exu-learn-more).

## Library and Archive Update

*Ibrahim Rantissi, 2026 Brilliance Librarian & Archivist*

The second half of 2025 marked a period of major change for the ACOR Library. After serving the library with dedication for twenty five years, associate librarian Samya Khalaf Kafafi concluded her long tenure and officially stepped down from her role. Her years of service saw extensive cooperation with universities, institutions, and official bodies, and her contributions left a lasting impact on the library's identity and its relationship with the local community. Following her departure, Ibrahim Rantissi (digital curator and archivist) assumed responsibility for overseeing the library's operations and activities, ensuring continuity while supporting the new stage of transition.

A major challenge emerged toward the end of the year when a critical funding source allocated to support the library was officially halted. Fortunately, an anonymous donor stepped forward with a generous financial contribution that fully covered the

library's operational needs for one year. This support was given under the name Brilliance 2026, ensuring that services, programs, and access for researchers and students would continue uninterrupted. Thanks to this timely intervention, the library will remain open and active, preserving its mission and enabling staff to maintain the momentum of change and enhancement throughout the upcoming year.

The ACOR Archive also experienced funding difficulties. The Title VI grant to ACOR from the U.S. Department of Education was terminated. Over two iterations this grant funded eight years of work in which staff and interns digitized more than 80,000 images and multimedia sources for the digital archive. With the conclusion of the grant, the digital archive will undergo no further development for the time being. However, the archive website ([archives.acorjordan.org](http://archives.acorjordan.org)) will remain online, preserving the collections and continuing to serve researchers and the public. We thank all those who contributed to and supported the project throughout its duration.



### Diwan Conference for Juniors

*Participants in the 9th Heritage and Archaeology Diwan (Youth Voices for Heritage Protection), July 2025. At this conference, many students presented their research papers on various topics related to architecture and antiquities. The papers carried the spirit of youth in terms of their focus on sustainability and the use of modern technologies from a new perspective and demonstrated rigorous scientific research. (Photo by Bara'ah Alshorman, courtesy of the Council for British Research in the Levant.)*

## ACOR Participation at the ASOR 2025 Annual Meeting

*China Shelton*

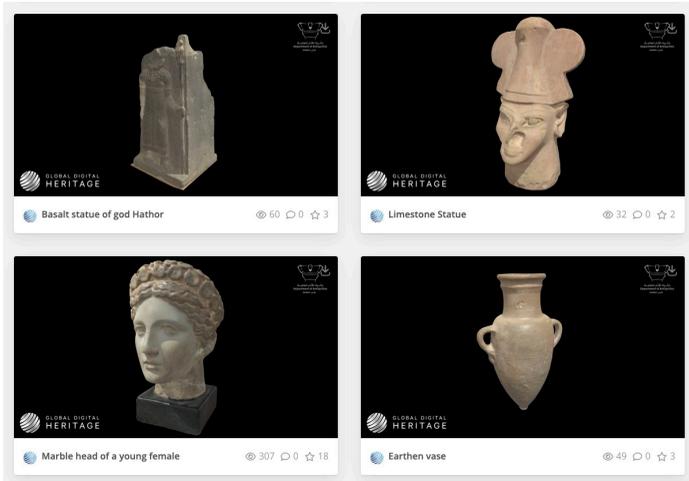
The Annual Meeting of the American Society of Overseas Research (ASOR) took place in person in Boston, Massachusetts, November 19–22. Once again, many Center board members, staff, and fellowship alumni participated in various sessions, including Archaeology of Jordan, Archaeology of Islamic Society, and Archaeology of Petra and Nabataea. Trustees made several contributions. Debra Foran presented “Communities in Transition: Exploring the Relationship between Secular and Religious Settlements at Khirbat al-Mukhayyat during the Byzantine Period,” and Bethany Walker spoke on “Socializing Terraces: Tall Hisban and Its Agricultural Fields in the Islamic Era.” Jennifer Ramsay and Björn Anderson shared their recent project results in “Exploring Cultural Continuity and Change in the Petra Region (600 BCE–200 CE).” Morag Kersel participated in the Culture in Crisis: People Oriented workshop by speaking on “Cultural Heritage and U.S. Foreign Relations: Cultural Policy Is Secu-

rity Policy.” Andrew Smith also took part in a workshop, Community Archaeology: Decolonizing Field Research, with his “Reflections on the Bir Madkhur Incense Route Project.” Sarah Wenner, who joined the American Center of Research staff as assistant professor in fall 2025, co-authored “The 2025 Survey Season at Humayma, Jordan (Nabataean Hawara, Roman Haurra).”

Øystein LaBianca co-hosted (along with friends of ACOR Douglas Clark and Randy Younker) a special reception at which the researchers of the Madaba Plains Project celebrated the publication of their 50th anniversary volume.

We were also pleased to observe the extent to which former ACOR fellows shared their research—eleven of them authored or co-authored papers and/or chaired sessions, including two recent fellows: Tucker Deady (2024–2025 Harrell Family Fellow) and Joel Burnett (2024–2025 ACOR-CAORC Post-doctoral Fellow).

The Board of Trustees and friends gathered for a festive dinner at The Banks Seafood and Steak Restaurant on the Friday evening before the board meeting. A good time was had by all as they looked forward with optimism to new opportunities for ACOR in 2026.



Screenshot of 3D models created by GDH and ACOR from artifacts in the Amman Citadel Museum.

## The GDH-ACOR Partnership Continues

Matthew Vincent

Since 2024, Global Digital Heritage (GDH) and the American Center of Research have been collaborating to digitally document the extraordinary cultural heritage in Jordan. So far, we have documented most of the heart of Petra, several of the desert castles (these results are still being processed), and quite a few museum collections, such as the Jordan Archaeological Museum, the al-Tafilah Museum, the Petra Museum, and even ACOR's own museum. See the project webpage for links.

The work does not stop once we leave the field. Processing the massive datasets we collect—sometimes hundreds of gigabytes of imagery and laser scans from a single site—requires careful attention and specialized workflows. Each monument captured digitally is transformed through photogrammetry and point cloud processing into high-resolution 3D models that can be measured, analyzed, and shared. We are currently working through data from previous seasons while simultaneously planning our next major campaigns. On the horizon: expanding our coverage of Petra to document additional monuments and lesser-known areas and launching comprehensive documentation at Umm Qais (ancient Gadara), one of Jordan's most spectacular Greco-Roman cities. These upcoming projects will push both the scale

## Staff Updates and Interns

Lina Shara'an

ACOR was pleased to welcome three new employees in the second half of 2025. Yara Al Khatib joined on July 1 as a 3D imaging and photogrammetry specialist for the Global Digital Heritage project (this page). Samah Al Shunnar became ACOR's administration and operations assistant on July 28. Sarah Wenner took up a post as assistant professor in September. These arrivals were accompanied by some departures. Samya Khalaf Kafafi, who had been with ACOR for nearly 25 years, resigned as associate librarian on October 14 to take a new position at the Royal Institute of Inter-Faith Studies. Nilda Onsing (housekeeping) and Hanadi Al Taher (project manager of the Tell Dhiban Project; see p. 4) departed ACOR at the end of their contracts on December 31, 2025.

Additionally, China Shelton, assistant director (U.S.), formally received a new role as co-editor of the *ACOR Newsletter*.

and sophistication of our work, applying lessons learned from years of documentation while exploring new ways to make this digital heritage accessible and useful.

At the same time, planning is well underway for the next season of fieldwork, scheduled to begin in March. Building on last year's successes, the upcoming campaign will expand documentation efforts, integrate new technologies, and continue developing standardized workflows that link 3D data directly into heritage management and research systems. This ongoing cycle—capture, process, publish, and apply—ensures that the digital heritage created through the GDH-ACOR collaboration is not only visually impressive but also scientifically robust and practically useful.

As the partnership with GDH moves forward, its core mission remains clear: to safeguard Jordan's cultural heritage through cutting-edge digital documentation, open access to data, and close collaboration with local institutions and specialists. The coming months promise both exciting new fieldwork and the continued release of high-quality digital heritage resources for researchers and the public alike.

### Online

[acorjordan.org/acor-gdh](http://acorjordan.org/acor-gdh)

Call for Submissions! New Co-editors!

## ARCHAEOLOGY IN JORDAN 5

The deadline for AIJ 5 (covering work in 2024–2025) is March 31, 2026.

For details, visit:

[publications.acorjordan.org/how-to-submit-aij](http://publications.acorjordan.org/how-to-submit-aij)

Marta D'Andrea, Andrew Danielson, Natalia Handzuik, Craig Harvey, Sarah Wenner, and Holly Winter have joined Pearce Paul Creasman and China P. Shelton as co-editors of *Archaeology in Jordan*.

ACOR had several interns between July and December, including students from a high school, Jordanian universities, universities abroad, and a recent graduate. The interns came from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds. Ma'ab Amin Elstaty, a recent graduate of the Heritage Resources Management and Conservation Program with the Faculty of Archaeology and Tourism from Jordan University, was with us from July to October. Sara Naser, a second-year M.A. student from the Archaeology Faculty at Jordan University, assisted us from January 26 to July 23. Jawad Alazzeah, a high-school student from King's Academy, completed an internship with the library (November–December). Maryam AlZoubi, a student in English language and literature from the Hashemite University, was with us in October and November. Two students joined us from Haverford College in Haverford, Pennsylvania, for June to August: Ethan J. Kang, a history major with a concentration in Latin American, Iberian, and Latinx studies, and Harry Cottrel, pursuing a double major in classical and Near Eastern studies and linguistics.

## Donations (July–December 2025)

### ANNUAL FUND

Anne H. Aarnes; Susan Ackerman; Mohammad Al-Asad; Jawad Alazzeq; Catherine Alexander in honor of her work at the Petra Church Project in the 1990s; Betty Anderson; Björn P. Anderson; Lina Annab; Anonymous; Anonymous; Talitha Arnold in honor of Barbara A. Porter; Lois Aroian; Roger S. and Whitney Bagnall; Abigail Balbale; William G. Bardel; Jim Barnhart; Robert M. and Mette O. Beecroft in memory of H. M. King Hussein Bin Talal; Paul Bergsma; Roger S. Boraas; Laurie A. Brand; Alexander Brey in honor of Dr. Barbara A. Porter; Joseph A. Bruder IV; Joel S. Burnett; Chelius Carter; Briann Clark; Douglas R. Clark and Carmen L. Clark; Pearce Paul Creasman; Thomas Davis; Nita Logan Dawson in honor of Dr. Barbara A. Porter; Jane G. Dekle; Nina Dodge; Paul Donnelly; Elisabeth Dudley; Patricia Fall and Steve Falconer; Debra Foran; Michael Gervers in memory of Veronika Gervers; Claus Gielisch; Anna Gonosová; Joseph A. Greene; Reem Atalla Habayeb; Prudence O. Harper; Debbie Harper in honor of Dr. Phillip C. Hammond and Dr. Jack Green for work on the Temple of the Winged Lions; Timothy Harrison; Craig Harvey; Robert F. and Sarah P. Hayman; Doris Borthwick Heinemann in memory of Bruce M. Borthwick; Ellen Herscher in honor of Barbara A. Porter; Hasif Hijazi in honor of Zovinar Mananian; Valerie Hird; Randall L. Hoffman; Charles O. and Ellen Porter Honnet; Linda K. Jacobs; Abdelelah Al Khatib; Sara M. Knight; Cheryl Koos in honor of Dr. Lawrence T. Geraty; Donald Keller and Margaret Sablove in memory of Nancy Lapp;

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### Solar at ACOR

In 2024, ACOR received funding from the American Schools and Hospitals Abroad grant program, which was intended to provide for the installation of solar panels on the roof of our center in Amman (among other improvements). The grant was terminated by the U.S. government in early 2025, before such works could be completed. Obligated to move forward, ACOR funded the installation of the solar panels directly, which was completed in August 2025. With a 20-year net metering rate agreement with our utility provider, we expect to cover most of our annual electrical usage from the panels for the foreseeable future, representing significant economic and environmental benefits.

*The solar-panel installation on the roof of the center. (Photo by P. P. Creasman.)*



## Donations (July–December 2025)

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Annette Frykman; Larry T. Geraty in honor of Zeidan Kafafi; Carol and Drew Luten; Margaret S. Pickering in memory of Jim Sauer; Raymond and Mary Carol Poynter; Allen E. Rogge in honor of *The Story of the Land of Jordan*; Anne & Charles Roos Advised Fund of The Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee in memory of C. E. Roos; Jerry Carl Rose in honor of Prof. Zeidan Kafafi; Susan A. Sauer in memory of James A. Sauer; Thomas and Theresa Whetstine in memory of Dr. Donald Wimmer

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### IN-KIND DONATIONS

Mohammad Al-Asad; Hashim Ali Al-Rawashdeh; Pearce Paul Creasman; Directorate General of Antiquities & Museum (DGAM), Syria; David Dunn; The Embassy of the Czech Republic in Jordan; Michael D. Fulton; Aaron Magid; Zovinar Mananian; Randy Old; Randall Parker; from the library of the late Professor Dr. Shaher Rababeh (via his daughter Asma Rababeh); Robert Schick; Justin Schneider; Noor Ziadat

## Fellowship Awardees

CENTER FOR ARABIC STUDY ABROAD I/ACOR FELLOWSHIP: Nuha Abbasi (Independent Study); Celeste Abourjeili (Independent Study); Samar Al-Saleh (Graduate Student, New York University, History and Middle Eastern & Islamic Studies); Alimata Bah (Independent Study); Bryn Barr (Independent Study); Elio Bensusan (Independent Study); Makana Brooks (Independent Study); Ava Burr (Edwards) (Williams College); Valerie Carver (Emory University); Lela Casey (Washington and Lee University); Joshua Chertok (Independent Study); Connor Ehl (Independent Study); Eli Greenstein (Independent Study); Pauline Gregory (Independent Study); Garrett Higgins (Brigham Young University); Fatima Hmada (Swarthmore College); Vishal Jammulapati (Independent Study); Benjamin Jones (Georgetown University); Roland Jose (Independent Study); Luke McMahan (Georgetown University); Giovanni Riad (University of Southern California); Mackenzie Rice (University of Arizona); Ryan Saadeh (Independent Study); Sama Shah (Independent Study); Matthew Stecher (Brigham Young University); Mary Taylor (University of Arizona); Ana Vombergar (Independent Study); Madeleine Walker (Independent Study).

## Fellows in Residence July–December 2025

ACOR-CAORC PREDOCTORAL FELLOWSHIP: Eliza Marks (Graduate Student, CUNY Graduate Center, Anthropology), Experimentation and Betweenness: The Formation and Mobilization of Sound Collectives in/between Amman, Outside, and Online. CENTER FOR ARABIC STUDY ABROAD I/ACOR FELLOWSHIP: Celeste Abourjeili (Independent Study); Samar Al-Saleh (Graduate Student, New York University, History and Middle Eastern & Islamic Studies); Bryn Barr (Independent Study); Ava Burr (Edwards) (Williams College); Joshua Chertok (Independent Study); Eli Greenstein (Independent Study); Fatima Hmada (Swarthmore College); Vishal Jammulapati (Independent Study); Roland Jose (Independent Study); Giovanni Riad (University of Southern California); Ryan Saadeh (Independent Study); Sama Shah (Independent Study); Ana Vombergar (Independent Study); Madeleine Walker (Independent Study). PIERRE AND PATRICIA BIKAI FELLOWSHIP: Kareem Rosshandler (Graduate Student, Emory University, Islamic Civilization Studies), Developing the Midianite-Kenite Hypothesis in Light of the Qur'anic Account of Midian. HARRELL FAMILY FELLOWSHIP: Sophia de Schiffart (Graduate Student, University of Connecticut, Anthropology), Investigating Environmental Variability Across the Badia Region of Jordan.



## November 2025 Board Meeting

The American Center of Research Board of Trustees meeting took place in person on November 22, 2025, at the Boston University Department of History (with some members attending remotely via Zoom). Edward (“Skip”) Gnehm called the meeting to order and stated that a quorum was present. He called for a moment to pay tribute to Professor Thomas Davis. The Board voted to establish the Professor Thomas W. Davis Annual Lecture. Executive director Dr. Pearce Paul Creasman gave his update to the board, recognizing that the situation continues to be difficult and unpredictable. The publication of *The Story of the Land of Jordan from Prehistory to the Persians* by Prof. Dr. Zeidan Kafafi was a major achievement, and the launch event was attended by HRH Prince El Hassan, who spoke positively about ACOR. ACOR hosted 12 lectures in 2025, attended by over 1,000 people. ACOR may soon assist Jordanians to train Syrians in cultural heritage work. Solar panels have been installed on ACOR’s roof. The DoA project at Dhiban is nearing completion and the anti-illicit trafficking project is going well. There is a plan to complete the last legacy publication, on the Petra Roman Street. ACOR is now the fiscal host for the Center for Arabic Study Abroad, and we hope this collaboration will bring more fellows to stay at ACOR in the future. Treasurer David Nickols reported on the center’s financial situation, which continues to be strong. The Board approved the 2026 budget. The Board approved the establishment of the Douglas R. and Carmen L. Clark Travel Scholarship. The Board elected four new members whose terms will begin in 2026: Prof. Hani Hayajneh, H.E. Ms. Lina Annab, Mr. Larry McIlvain, and Prof. Danielle MacDonald. The next board meeting will take place at ACOR in Amman on June 20, 2026.

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## The Inaugural Professor Thomas W. Davis Lecture

On December 14, 2025, Prof. Dr. Anas Haj Zeidan, Director General of the Directorate-General of Antiquities and Museums (DGAM) of the Syrian Arab Republic, presented “Illicit Trafficking of Syrian Cultural Properties: Trading Methods and Challenges of Restitution.” In addition to addressing the role of the DGAM in documentation processes for cultural properties, this lecture covered penalties for trafficking under the current Syrian Antiquities Law, the status of antiquities outside Syria, and the roles of Customs and the Ministry of Interior in the protection of cultural property. This lecture also helped to mark ACOR’s return to direct links in and with Syria (see p. 2).

(Photo by Matthew Vincent.)

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