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Conserving the Roman Western Theater at Umm Qais

Baptiste Hanquart

Left: View of the theater from the northwest, showing the ima cavea (lower tiers of seating), the praecinctio (walkway), media cavea (or secunda cavea; middle seating), and the ruined summa cavea (or ultima cavea; upper seating) with the exterior northern wall at the top. To the left is the northern vomitorium (egress/exit) and aditus maximus (main exit). Above the aditus maximus, the tribunalia (seating for those of high rank) is visible.

(Photo by Baptiste Hanquart.)

Below: View through the northern aditus maximus toward the scaenae and pulpitum (architectural backdrop and stage). The southern tribunalia can be seen above the southern aditus maximus.

(Photo by Baptiste Hanquart.)

The American Center of Research, in close partnership with Jordan's Department of Antiquities and in coordination with the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, is implementing Conservation of the Roman Imperial (2nd-Century A.D.) Western Theater in Umm Qais (Ancient Gadara), a major conservation project funded by the U.S. Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation. The 24-month project, running from April 2026 to April 2028, aims to safeguard the monument, address structural risks, improve visitor safety, and facilitate its continued use as a cultural venue for the community of Umm Qais and the wider population of northern Jordan. By supporting the sustainable use of the theater, the project will also contribute to local cultural life, tourism activity, and economic opportunities for the surrounding community.

Known in antiquity as Gadara, Umm Qais was an important city of the Decapolis and a major cultural center during the Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine periods. The Western Theater was constructed from locally quarried black basalt in the 2nd century CE, probably during the reign of Emperor Trajan. Built into the western slope of the acropolis, it originally accommodated approximately 3,000 spectators and was central to the artistic, civic, and social life of the ancient city. The auditorium, or *cavea*, was divided into seating tiers served by stairways and vaulted passages known as *vomitoria*. The monument is one of only a small number of surviving Roman theaters built predominantly from basalt in the region.

The theater and the surrounding ancient city were severely affected by the major earthquake of 749 CE, which damaged numerous monuments across Gadara and the wider region. Parts of the Roman urban fabric were subsequently adapted, reused, or covered by later occupation. The modern village established on the ancient acropolis during the Ottoman period incorporated architectural elements from earlier structures, creating the distinctive archaeological and living-heritage landscape visible at Umm Qais today.



ACOR has an established history at Umm Qais, including archaeological documentation and the development of the site's rest house, which opened in 1991. The current theater project is therefore part of a much broader and longstanding program of cooperation between ACOR and the Department of Antiquities across Jordan, including previous conservation work at sites such as the Amman Citadel, Petra, Karak, Dhiban, Madaba, and Aqaba.

Proposed activities in the northern section of the Western Theater include the stabilization of vulnerable arches, vaults, walls, and entrances; conservation and partial reinstatement of the upper seating and access stairs; anastylosis using securely identified original stones; improved visitor circulation and inter-

pretation; and discreet infrastructure supporting safe cultural use. The approach prioritizes minimal intervention, archaeological supervision, detailed documentation, and the preservation of the monument's historic character. The project is expected to return a safer and more accessible cultural space to the people of Umm Qais, strengthen their connection to the site, and support locally rooted cultural events and sustainable heritage tourism.

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.



View of the port at Kallirhoe at the conclusion of the field season, looking southwest. (Photo by Holly Hughes.)

Kallirhoe ('Ain az-Zara) Archaeological Fieldwork Update

Aktham Oweidi & Holly Hughes

In the spring of 2026, ACOR conducted a season of archaeological fieldwork at the site of Kallirhoe ('Ain az-Zara) as part of the "Preservation and Protection of the Holy Land at Herod's Ain az-Zara Palace and Port to Mukawir" project, which is funded by a grant through the United States Department of State's Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP). The site of Kallirhoe, established no later than the late Hellenistic period and active through the early Roman period (and possibly longer), is one of the most significant archaeological sites on the eastern shore of the Dead Sea. The site comprises two principal components: a harbor complex, which functioned as the port for the nearby citadel of Machaerus, and a *villa maritima*, a seaside villa/palace.

The project employs a multidisciplinary approach incorporating archaeological excavation, GIS mapping, drone-based aerial survey, geophysical investigations, and underwater archaeological research. The land-based archaeological fieldwork at Kallirhoe was conducted by ACOR from January through May 2026 and focused on investigations at both the port and villa sites, progressing from initial survey and site preparation to targeted

excavation, architectural exposure, and detailed documentation. At the port, excavations were initiated to determine the character of the eastern area and evaluate its relationship to the broader site. At the villa, excavations commenced in the southwestern portion of the villa interior to expose architectural features and better understand the layout and organization of the structure. Materials recovered during the spring 2026 field season have been undergoing detailed post-excavation analysis. Ceramic analysis is refining the site's cultural and chronological framework, while the study of the remaining material classes (see, for example, p. 6) will provide further insight into site activities and patterns of occupation.

This field season has established the groundwork for continued archaeological research and heritage management at Kallirhoe. The excavations—combined with geophysical survey, drone imagery, and comprehensive documentation—have begun to clarify the organization and development of the site. Future research at the site will further contribute to the understanding of the site's chronology, function, and relationship with nearby Machaerus and the broader eastern Dead Sea landscape.

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NYU Webinar

Continuing ACOR's commitment to international discourse on cultural heritage, on Wednesday, April 8, 2026, Ibrahim Rantissi, 2026 Brilliance Librarian and Archivist, contributed to a segment of the Archives in Dialogue Webseries, "The Gendered Lives of Photographic Archives." Roxana Maria Arăș, PhD, Faculty Fellow at the Hagop Kevorkian Center for Near Eastern Studies, New York University (NYU), organized this

session. During the webinar, Ibrahim shared his recent research in a presentation titled "Jane Taylor: The Woman Behind the Lens." He detailed Taylor's extensive work and her profound contribution to ACOR's archive, focusing specifically on her documentation of Jordanian historical sites. His presentation furthermore explored the essential role of women in archiving, providing a critical perspective on how archival collections are historically shaped, curated, and maintained.



H.R.H. Prince Raad Speaks at the Board Dinner

H.R.H. Prince Raad Bin Zeid gave a moving speech about ACOR and its importance to Jordan and history. We are grateful. (Photo courtesy of Reem Atalla Habayeb.)

in memoriam

Pierre M. Bikai (1941–2026)

From 1991 to 2006, Pierre M. Bikai served as the director of ACOR, with all of the responsibilities that position entailed. He oversaw major archaeological, conservation and tourism development projects in Jordan, including at Petra, the Amman Citadel, and Madaba, and he raised approximately \$1 million a year in each of the 15 years he was there. Simultaneously, he led the Byzantine Church at the Darat al Funun excavation in Amman and the Black Desert Rajil Project, which documented the inscribed stones in that area.

He had been born in Beirut, Lebanon, in 1941 to Michel Rizk Bikai and Wardeh Francis. Thus he came to ACOR with an accordingly long history in the region and a PhD in Near Eastern studies from the University of California, Berkeley, where he wrote his dissertation, "The Cedar of Lebanon: Archaeological and Dendrochronological Perspectives."

From 1967 to 1976, he worked for the Department of Antiquities of Lebanon as manager of the excavations at Tyre, including uncovering hundreds of Roman and Byzantine burials as well as the salvage work at a Neolithic site, the restoration of two medieval churches and excavation of one of the largest hippodromes in the Roman Empire. Additionally, he supervised the construction of the Tyre Museum. During that time, in 1974, he trained at the excavation of a Roman ship lying 160 feet deep at Yassıada, Turkey, undertaken by the Institute of Nautical Archaeology.

Two years earlier, he and Patricia Maynor had married in a church that she had excavated in Tyre. Fieldwork in the 1980s took them together to Seila, Egypt, to the island of Corvo in the Azores, to Lebanon, Syria, and Cyprus to sample cedars, and to Nineveh, Iraq. Patricia, who predeceased him (see *ACOR Newsletter* 37.2, p. 5), would go on to serve as associate director at ACOR.

For his work in Jordan, Pierre received the Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation (Arab Bank) Award, and H.M. King Abdullah II awarded him the Independence Medal, 2nd degree, in 2006.



Pierre and Patricia wed in Tyre, 1974. (Photo courtesy of the Bikai family.)

—Courtesy of the Bikai Family

Since 2006, ACOR has offered a fellowship in Pierre and Patricia Bikai's name. For details, please visit: acorjordan.org/named-fellowships/bikai-fellowship



Sally and Bert de Vries at ACOR's 40th anniversary celebration, 2008.

(Photo by Barbara A. Porter.)

Sally amassed a remarkable museum collection of antique costumes, which she exhibited and lectured on for decades, preserving a culture at risk of disappearance. Bert and Sally, working as a team, created the impetus for the eventual inscription of Umm al-Jimal as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

She was also an accomplished musician, best known for her skill as a double bass player. Her talent allowed her to perform as a contract musician in orchestras—including the Grand Rapids Symphony Orchestra and the Boston Women's Symphony—to support her family while Bert completed his doctoral degree at Brandeis University before becoming a professor at Calvin College (now Calvin University).

—Courtesy of the de Vries Family

Since 2004, ACOR has offered a fellowship in Bert and Sally de Vries' name. For details, please visit: acorjordan.org/named-fellowships/de-vries-fellowship

GDH and ACOR: Training and Capacity Building

Matthew Vincent

Global Digital Heritage's activity in Jordan over this period has been concentrated on capacity building and training, responding to steady demand from partner institutions for practical instruction in digital documentation methods. Working with ACOR, GDH has contributed to a series of workshops in digital documentation and GIS for Jordanian heritage professionals. Sessions have covered the working stages of the digital pipeline—photogrammetric capture and processing, data management, and spatial analysis in open-source GIS environments—structured so that participants leave able to apply the methods in their own institutions and field projects. Participants work directly with the equipment and software rather than observing demonstrations, since the aim is not familiarity with a technique but the ability to run it independently once the session ends.

The collaboration draws on complementary strengths: ACOR's longstanding institutional relationships and its role as a convening point for the research community in Jordan and GDH's technical capacity and field experience in digital documentation. Each extends the other's reach; GDH's methods enter a wider professional network through ACOR, while ACOR's training program gains depth from practitioners working with these tools daily. Demand for the workshops continues, and further sessions are anticipated alongside GDH's ongoing documentation work in Jordan.



GIS training for staff from Jordan's Department of Antiquities and Syria's Directorate-General of Antiquities and Museums at Kallirhoe (see p. 7). (Photo by Yara Alkhatib.)

ACOR and CASA: Cooperating to Advance Arabic Language Studies

Pearce Paul Creasman, Noreen Doyle, & Sonia Shiri

Established in 1967, the Center for Arabic Study Abroad (CASA) is a consortium of American colleges and universities that supports American scholars and students who need to attain high proficiency in Arabic. Its nearly 2,000 alumni carry out research and pursue careers in academia, U.S. government service, and international business and development. Over the decades, several of ACOR's staff and trustees, and many fellows, have studied Arabic with CASA. Building on our collaborations, noted in prior newsletters with U.S. Department of Education language training grants, in 2025, ACOR became CASA's new host institution and fiscal sponsor. Most recently, CASA was hosted at the University of Arizona, and Harvard University. (Learn more about CASA at: acorjordan.org/casa). CASA and ACOR have much in common, so the deepening partnership was a logical and mutually beneficial one. Since 2012, the consortium has based its intensive language and culture study in Amman and in recent years expanded offerings in Meknes, Morocco.

The CASA curriculum, which undergoes continual development, integrates reading, writing, speaking, and listening into each course, presenting both Modern Standard and Levantine Colloquial Arabic as a unified whole, as the language exists in life. Integral to this is a prolonged immersive, authentic experience, in which the fellows learn social norms, such as the socio-linguistic cues that indicate when each form of Arabic is appropriate, and encounter the dialects and accents of Iraqis, Syrians, and other Arabic speakers. In Amman, students begin their training with a residency at ACOR.

In May 2025, the U.S. Department of Education's Fulbright-Hays Group Projects Abroad Program cancelled future grant-years, which in the past supported CASA's three-tiered programming. Through 2026, ACOR and CASA worked together to implement and bring to a close the existing grants. The "CASA I" program is a nine-month, advanced-level training fellowship available to qualified undergraduate and graduate students who are United States citizens or permanent residents. CASA II and III provide twelve-week language and research support fellowships for graduate students and faculty, respectively.

From August 2024 to January 2025, ACOR facilitated CASA II, hosting nine graduate students. Having improved their mastery of Arabic through mentoring and networking with Arabic-speaking local academics and experts in their fields, these fellows gave presentations about their work during two public-facing symposia at local universities.

CASA I in Amman had begun at that time, too, scheduled for September 2025 to June 2026. Fourteen students participated; they were among those who had responded to a nationwide call and taken the required proficiency tests. Before leaving for Jordan, the fellows met online for four orientation sessions covering travel safety and security, living abroad, and a program overview. Upon their arrival in Jordan in late August, they had three more sessions, during which they were introduced to ACOR and other local institutions and underwent placement tests and interviews. The students stayed in residence at ACOR until finding their own accommodations elsewhere in Amman.



GPA FULBRIGHT-HAYS
GROUP PROJECTS
ABROAD

Living in Jordan is a vital aspect of the program, exposing the fellows to the culture of everyday Jordan and Arabic speakers from all walks of life and thus improving their cultural proficiency and their ability to build cross-cultural rapport.

During the fall semester, fellows attended classes in Modern Standard Arabic, Levantine Colloquial Arabic, and Arabic media, writing workshops, guest lectures, and biweekly cultural-exchange discussions with Jordanian students. The spring semester was designed to provide fellows with an opportunity to refine and apply the advanced language skills they had developed. They would accomplish this through a language-enhancement course and two or three electives. One of the options would enable fellows to engage in volunteer projects in Amman that strengthen communication skills, expand intercultural competence, and develop social networks. Fellows could also elect courses on topics such as Islamic jurisprudence, Bedouin society, refugees and migration issues, and many others. Often, CASA I Fellows visit academic and societal institutions and governmental agencies to make use of resources and conduct interviews.

Unfortunately, with the outbreak of hostilities in the Gulf, and the acute escalation of that conflict on March 2, 2026, U.S. governmental evacuation orders for Jordan were necessarily applied to this U.S.-funded training. Close cooperation among CASA and ACOR staff over the subsequent twelve hours saw the orderly and expedient evacuation of all active CASA Fellows from Jordan. Notified of this at 6:00 a.m. in Amman, ACOR's staff—notably, deputy director John Shearman, operations and administration manager Zovinar Mananian, and HR manager Lina Shara'an—sprung into action, contacting the fellows, who were spread throughout Amman. By 8:30 a.m., all fellows were packed, collected at the emergency meeting point, and on their way to the airport. The immense efforts of U.S.-based CASA and ACOR staff during the prior evening saw all fellows booked on the first available flights out of the country. Despite the disruptions to air travel caused by events of the war, by noon, all fourteen were on flights and safely on their way home. The CASA Fellows subsequently completed their fellowships remotely. Such expert conduct is a testament to the dependability of ACOR as an institution, to the necessity of having such institutions in-country, and to the professionalism, under difficult circumstances, of everyone involved.

ACOR and CASA look forward to continued partnerships, seeking opportunities together to advance Arabic language education and international exchange experiences.

Archaeobotany Workshop with Samples from 'Ain az-Zara

China Shelton

On June 22 and 23, 2026, Prof. Jennifer Ramsay of SUNY Brockport and Dr. China Shelton of ACOR facilitated the Fundamentals of Archaeobotany workshop at ACOR. Six participants from the Department of Antiquities of Jordan (Hana' Mahmoud Lafi, Maher Abdelhafeez Alamreyn, Najdat Mamoon Hazaimh, Bilal Fawwaz Al-Boreeni, Obada Abdulkareem Alfarajat, and Omaira Amhad Fodeh) joined the workshop in order to gain a better understanding of this archaeological subfield. Along with Prof. Ramsay and Dr. Shelton, they visited the archaeological site of Kallirhoe (see p. 2), from which the archaeobotanical samples to be studied had been collected, and they were given a tour of the site by archaeologist Holly Hughes. In the afternoon of the first day, Dr. Ramsay gave a lecture on the basics of archaeobotany. The next day, the participants experienced the practical components of archaeobotanical work: They spent a morning at the flotation tank, in which the soil samples collected from the site were processed using water and mesh in an effort to collect ancient plant remains. Later, they sorted heavy fraction (the portion of an archaeobotanical sample that sinks to the bottom of the mesh and often contains archaeological artifacts and ecofacts) and then had a quick look at some of the seeds recovered in the light fraction (the portion of an archaeobotanical sample that

The workshop participants learning the process of flotation, one of the main ways that preserved plant remains are recovered from archaeological deposits.
(Photo by China Shelton.)



floats and often contains carbonized plant remains) through the microscope in ACOR's laboratory. The workshop closed with a lecture on case studies of archaeobotanical research in Jordan. Everyone got a little bit dirty and came away with a better understanding of the importance of archaeobotany and how such studies unfold on sites and in the lab.

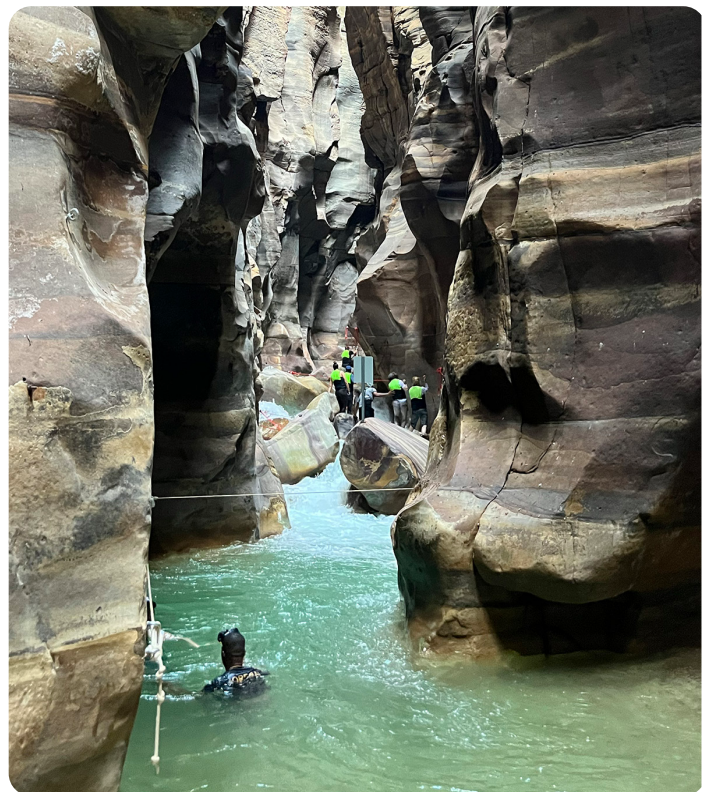
Trustee Adventures

China Shelton

In addition to holding a productive meeting (see p. 12), the Board of Trustees enjoyed a full slate of events and activities while they visited Jordan. On the evening of June 19, they met for dinner at Sufra in Jebel Amman to begin the weekend. The following day, ACOR hosted a Fourth of July-style party for the Board, staff, and families where everyone had the opportunity to socialize and get to know one another better. After the board meeting, which took place late Saturday afternoon, trustee Reem Habayeb hosted dinner at her home (see pp. 3, 12).

On Sunday, the board went on a unique excursion. First, they visited medieval Karak Castle, where ACOR has done conservation work in the past and will soon begin a new project in partnership with the DoA. After touring the site, they had a catered lunch inside Al-Nasiriyah Hall, an immense room (80 m by 7.20 m, with an 8 m high barrel vault ceiling) stretching the entire length of the western wall of the castle. All who experienced this special lunch appreciated the once-in-a-lifetime nature of the moment. After lunch, the board carried on down to the coast of the Dead Sea, where they visited the Wadi Mujib Biosphere Reserve, where several intrepid members of the board made it a good distance up the wadi, wading, swimming, and hiking through the deep waters of the river and up the waterfalls, before floating back down to the bottom.

Finally, they visited the site of Kallirhoe ('Ain az-Zara), where ACOR is conducting ongoing excavations (see p. 2), and returned to Amman to share a last dinner.



In the distance (wearing green life jackets), several members of the Board of Trustees make their way up a rushing waterfall using ropes and ladders!
(Photo by China Shelton.)

We are pleased to announce
the creation of a new endowment:

The Douglas R. and Carmen L. Clark Student Travel/Research Scholarship



The purpose of this new endowed scholarship fund is to support students from outside Jordan to travel to and conduct research in Jordan, with a preference for archaeological research (including excavation).

For details, please visit:
acorjordan.org/named-fellowships

Library and Archive Update

Ibrahim Rantissi, 2026 Brilliance Librarian & Archivist

Internal collection management saw significant, tangible advancements. Notably, the extensive maps collection was comprehensively assessed, reorganized, and maintained. This crucial physical overhaul ensures that these invaluable cartographic resources, many of which document the shifting landscapes of the region, are preserved in optimal environmental conditions while remaining easily accessible for spatial and historical analysis.

A major highlight was a specialized, capacity-building initiative led by the center's staff. We held a comprehensive two-day training, Fundamentals of Library Systems and Digital Archiving. We were pleased to host six dedicated professionals who participated in the intensive sessions, representing both the Department of Antiquities (DoA) of Jordan and the Syrian Directorate-General of Antiquities and Museums (DGAM). This cross-border participation reinforced the center's vital role as a regional hub for the exchange of archival best practices and cultural preservation strategies.

During the first day of the training workshop, Ibrahim Rantissi focused on physical collection management, leading an in-depth discussion on the Library of Congress classification system. The participants explored its theoretical framework and practical application, assessing how standardized classification enhances the discoverability of specialized archaeological texts and journals. The session provided attendees with the foundational skills and practical workflows necessary to implement or refine cataloging systems within their respective governmental and academic home institutions.

On the second day of the program, modern preservation methodologies were discussed, with sessions exclusively dedicated to digital archives. Mr. Rantissi shared recent project insights regarding the digitization lifecycle, emphasizing metadata standards, digital asset management, and the long-term secure storage of digitized cultural heritage materials. The participants engaged in practical dialogues concerning the unique technical challenges of digitizing vulnerable regional collections, an effort that further aligns with ACOR's broader strategic goals in digital preservation and open-access scholarship.



Photogrammetry and laser-scanning workshop at Kallirhoe ('Ain az-Zara) along the shore of the Dead Sea. (Photo by Yara Alkhatib.)

Technical Trainings for the DoA and DGAM

Pearce Paul Creasman

The 2025–2027 strategic plan approved by the Board of Trustees places a strong emphasis on supporting the development of early-career and future generations of scholars from Jordan and beyond. The strategic plan also focuses on regional engagement, with our center in Amman serving as a hub. Accordingly, in 2026, utilizing the areas of specialization and expertise of our staff and several guests at the center, we have hosted monthly technical training opportunities and workshops. The participants are designated by their respective employers, with all costs provided for by ACOR. The goal of the trainings is to increase awareness of certain methods and the ability of those who undertake the workshops. In the first six months of 2026, opportunities were focused on engaging heritage professionals from Syria's Directorate-General of Antiquities and Museums (DGAM) and Jordan's Department of Antiquities (DoA), together.

In February, we provided a week-long "Introduction to Geographic Information Systems for Archaeology and Cultural Heritage" for nine participants. Co-led by Helen O'Brien, coordinator of the Archaeology Center Program at Pima Community College in Tucson, Arizona, and Matthew Vincent, project director at ACOR and scientific director with Global Digital Heritage, the workshop provided hands-on training in fundamental GIS concepts, spatial data collection and management, and the application of geospatial technologies to heritage documentation and site analysis. In March, seven participants worked with our staff in Axiell Collections training for museum collections, storage, and artifact management. In April, 10 participants benefited from a week-long "Photogrammetry and Laser Scanning for Digital Documentation of Cultural Heritage," offered by ACOR and GDH staff. In May, a two-day introduction to the fundamentals of library systems and digital archiving was provided for six participants by our Brilliance 2026 Librarian & Archivist, with the support of other staff. More details about these trainings can be found on our website (syria.acorjordan.org/events), along with information about other trainings scheduled for the remainder of the year.

Advanced Ceramic Course 2026

Sarah E. Wenner

Despite ceramics being typically the most commonly recovered artifact type from many excavations in Jordan, there are surprisingly few archaeologists working in Jordan with the training necessary to study and publish this class of material. To help address this situation, which extends across all periods but especially in the classical period (ca. 1st century BCE–6th century CE), ACOR offered two in-house ceramics training courses, harkening back to the days of Jim Sauer's directorship (1975–1981). These addressed the process of ceramic analysis as it would occur in conjunction with an excavation or for the publication of legacy material.

The first course, held during three weeks in May–June, trained a small group of students already familiar with ceramic materials in Jordan or elsewhere. This advanced-level course, offered freely to Jordanians, demonstrated the potential of such training. The four students included two Department of Antiquities officials, a recent graduate of the University of Jordan preparing for graduate work, and an American student looking to continue on for a doctorate. Mentored by Sarah Wenner, assistant professor at ACOR, the group analyzed legacy material from Humayma that had been excavated in 1995 and kindly made available for the course by Prof. M. Barbara Reeves of Queen's University. The group processed every sherd, drew and digitized the most diagnostic and best preserved for publication, and identified parallels from sites across southern Jordan. Perhaps most critically, they learned to use a Laser Aided Profiler (LAP), a device for the precise and rapid documentation of ceramics purchased for the course with the support of a grant from the Archaeological Institute of America Steinmetz

Endowment Fund. As the LAP becomes more common among field archaeologists, those already trained to employ the technology will have an advantage in their careers and can speed up the time to publication.

The attendees continue to work together toward the publication of the material. Together they are compiling their analysis of the Humayma assemblage and preparing the ceramic catalogue. In addition to the publication in a traditional journal format, the assemblage will be added to the Levantine Ceramics Project website and Jordan's National Inventory (see p. 10).

Due to the success of this course and the introductory one that followed in July, and the ongoing interest in both levels of ceramic analysis, these will be offered again next year.



Lana Jaber uses the Laser Aided Profiler to digitize a sherd.
(Photo courtesy of Cinzia Presti.)

Lecture Highlights

In addition to lectures offered in person and remotely from Amman, two were held in the United States.

- January 12: "Amman's Modern/Adaptive Reuse and Intervention within Historic Settings as Earned Privilege" by Prof. Rami Daher
- February 22: "Highlighting the Byzantine Umm el-Jimal's Chronology Using the Radiocarbon Dating Technique" by Prof. Khaled Al-Bashaireh
- March 29: "Investigating Early Bronze Age Urbanism at Tall al-Handaqq South" by Dr. Hanna Erftenbeck
- April 20: "The Making of an Ancient Middle East Gallery in a 21st Century Museum" by Prof. Sarah Wenner
- May 6: "Discovering Petra and Excavations at the Treasury" by Prof. Pearce Paul Creasman (*at the Rotary Club of Tucson, Arizona*)
- May 21: "Insights from the Badia Epigraphic Survey (BES): Preliminary Findings and Field Perspectives" by Prof. Ali Al-Manaser
- June 25: "Jordan at the Dawn of Christianity" by Prof. Sarah Wenner (*at the First Baptist Church of Arlington, Texas*)

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



Prof. Sarah Wenner delivers "Jordan at the Dawn of Christianity" at the "Christian Faith in Jordan: Land of Revelation, Baptism, and Pilgrimage" event organized by Jordan's Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and the Jordan Tourism Board. She explored five topics: the three wise men and their gifts, Paul in Arabia, John the Baptist and his connections to Machaerus and Kallirhoe (see p. 2), the Aqaba Church, and Christian mosaics.

(Photo courtesy of the Jordan Times.)

Online

acorjordan.org/events

youtube.com/@ACORJordan1968

Fellowship Awardees

THE AMMAN PRIZE: Rami Khouri (Distinguished Fellow, American University of Beirut and Arab Center Washington), Jordan's Ancient Monuments and Cultures: A Guide for Scholars and Visitors; Alexis Dolphin (Associate Professor and Director of the Ancient and Contemporary Environmental Bioindicators Laboratory, University of Waterloo, Anthropology), Synthesis of Bioarchaeological Insights on Life at Wadi Faynan 100. **THE AMMAN PRIZE (ABD DOCTORAL):** Nour Ammari (New York University, Institute for the Study of the Ancient World), Arabic-Inscribed Oil Lamps from Northern Jordan: Everyday Religion and Craft Production in the Byzantine-Islamic Transition; Jordan Weitzel (Graduate Student, University of California, Berkeley, Department of Middle Eastern Languages and Cultures), Water Use at an Iron Age Capital in a Semi-Arid Zone: Investigating Water Installations and a Unique Ceramic Assemblage from Busayra. **BERT AND SALLY DE VRIES FELLOWSHIP:** Kristen Flake (Lanier Center of Archaeology, Lipscomb University), Khirbat al-Mukhayyat Archaeological Project. **BURTON MACDONALD AND ROSEMARIE SAMPSON FELLOWSHIP:** Miya Pletsas (University of Toronto, Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations), Khirbat al-Mukhayyat Archaeological Project. **CONFERENCE TRAVEL AWARD FOR JORDANIANS:** Mohammad Rababah (Graduate Student, Technische Universität Berlin, Art History and Historical Urban Studies), "Forensic Numismatics: A Multi-Tiered Scientific Approach for the Comparative Authentication of Ancient Coinage" to be presented at the American Society for Overseas Research Annual Meeting in Chicago, November 2026. **DONALD O. HENRY FELLOWSHIP:** Micaela Floriani (La Sapienza University of Rome, Science of Antiquity), Archaeological Expedition to Khirbat Iskandar. **FREDERICK-WENGER JORDANIAN EDUCATIONAL FELLOWSHIP:** Lujain Hazaimah (The Hashemite University, Queen Rania Faculty of Tourism and Heritage), The Power of Locations as New Stars: A Comprehensive Evaluation of Film Tourism, Destination Branding, Emotional Engagement, and ICT in Promoting Jordan's Heritage Sites; Bailasan Mohammad (The Hashemite University, Cultural Resources and Museum Management), University Study. **HARRELL FAMILY FELLOWSHIP:** Kara Larson (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Anthropology), Balu'a Regional Archaeological Project. **JAMES A. SAUER FELLOWSHIP:** Nicola Lanzaro (La Sapienza University of Rome, Science of Antiquity), Archaeological Excavation to Khirbat Iskandar. **JENNIFER C. GROOT MEMORIAL FELLOWSHIP:** Elias Adamson-Andres (State University of New York, Brockport, Anthropology), Continuity and Transition in Southern Jordan; Zoe Bernier (University of Western Ontario, Anthropology), Khirbat al-Mukhayyat Archaeological Project. **JORDANIAN GRADUATE STUDENT SCHOLARSHIP:** Ruaa Alathamneah (The University of Jordan, School of Archaeology and Tourism), A Typological and Technological Study of Lithic Cores at Tell Abu Suwwan Site Neolithic Period. **KENNETH W. RUSSELL MEMORIAL FELLOWSHIP:** Laith Alshboul (Free University of Berlin, History and Cultural Studies, Near Eastern Archaeology), Reexamination and Documentation of Iron Age Ceramic Materials from Tell Ushayer (Dar es-Saraya Museum, Irbid, Jordan). **LAWRENCE T. GERATY TRAVEL SCHOLARSHIP:** Jake Hill (University of California, Los Angeles, Near Eastern Languages and Cultures), Balu'a Regional Archaeological Project. **PIERRE AND PATRICIA BIKAI FELLOWSHIP:** Roman Hobsbawm Bamping (University College London, Institute of Archaeology), Eastern Badia Archaeological Project Lithic Analysis. **S. THOMAS PARKER MEMORIAL FUND:** Cecilia Ripamonti (Postdoctoral, recent Ph.D. from La Sapienza University of Rome, Near Eastern Archaeology), All Around Khirbat Al-Batrawy: Survey and Heritage Monitoring of a Threatened Early Bronze Age Landscape in Jordan.

MoU with the Hashemite University

John Shearman

Aligning with ACOR's commitment to training and capacity building, the Hashemite University and ACOR signed a memorandum of understanding on February 22, 2026, at Hashemite University. The MoU was signed by Hashemite University president Dr. Khaled Hyari and ACOR executive director Dr. Pearce Paul Creasman, in the presence of vice president Dr. Sadeq Shdeifat, dean of the Queen Rania Faculty of Tourism and Heritage, Dr. Nayef Haddad, and the researchers assigned to supervise the project, including head of the Department of Heritage Resources and Museums Management, Dr. Ali Manaser, and ACOR's deputy director, Dr. John Shearman, both of whom are the project co-directors.

The memorandum outlines the plan to train university students in the documentation, conservation, restoration, and site development of Qasr Usaykhim, a small Roman fort/outpost located approximately 14.5 kilometers northeast of the

city of Azraq. Coordinating with the Jordanian Department of Antiquities, the objective is to use the site as a capacity-building instrument to gain experience and knowledge from project conception to completion in a sustainable manner. With other historical sites nearby, the project will add to the area's development and visitor attraction, with benefits for the local population.



The signing at Hashemite University. (Photo courtesy of the Hashemite University.)

Fellows in Residence (January–June 2026)

2025 NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP: Gary Rollefson (Professor Emeritus, Whitman College, Anthropology), Final Report on the Excavations at 'Ain Ghazal, 'Ain Ghazal, Excavation Reports, Volume 1. **THE AMMAN PRIZE:** Rami Khouri (Distinguished Fellow, American University of Beirut and Arab Center Washington), Jordan's Ancient Monuments and Cultures: A Guide for Scholars and Visitors.

Anti-Illicit Trafficking Training Continues

Faris Saadeh & John Shearman

Since 2021, ACOR has received support from the U.S. Department of State for efforts to reduce the illicit trafficking of cultural material (see *ACOR Newsletter* 37.2, pp. 1–2). Using a “training of trainers” (ToT) program, prior grant-funded projects equipped Department of Antiquities and Jordan Customs (JC) employees to train fellow employees to more effectively detect and deter illicit trafficking. The current such project is a component of the State Department-funded “Preservation and Protection of the Holy Land at Herod’s Ain az-Zara Palace and Port to Mukawir” (p. 2). Through “Fighting Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Heritage with the Government of Jordan,” managed by Faris Saadeh, it is expanding the ACOR-DoA-JC collaboration to Jordan’s law-enforcement and judicial branches. For this new partnership, ACOR tailored a training and reference manual for the needs of Jordan’s Public Security Directorate (PSD).

Since this new component debuted in late 2025 through the end of June, project staff have trained 45 police and other security employees as trainers, with another 10 to be trained soon thereafter. These PSD staff members will soon go on to train at least 350 additional police and security personnel by the end of 2026. Through Jordan Customs employees prepared as trainers in 2025, the project has also instructed 128 JC employees, with another 50 expected in the second half of the year. By a combination of discussion-based learning, case studies, and practical scenarios, participants gained a clearer understanding of their roles and responsibilities, particularly in relation to legal procedures, documentation, and coordination with the DoA.

The reach of the project extends beyond the PSD to the courts. In May, ACOR conducted a legal workshop that hosted 25 Jordanian prosecutors and lawyers to discuss existing legal



Faris Saadeh gives a presentation in ACOR's conference room to staff from Jordan's Public Security Directorate. (Photo by Shatha Abu Aballi.)

issues and recommend improvements to the current law associated with illicit trafficking of Jordan’s cultural material. Furthermore, we assisted in modifying existing Customs spaces to serve as temporary object-holding areas at three JC facilities, with the aim of later installing two additional areas with funding from the grant.

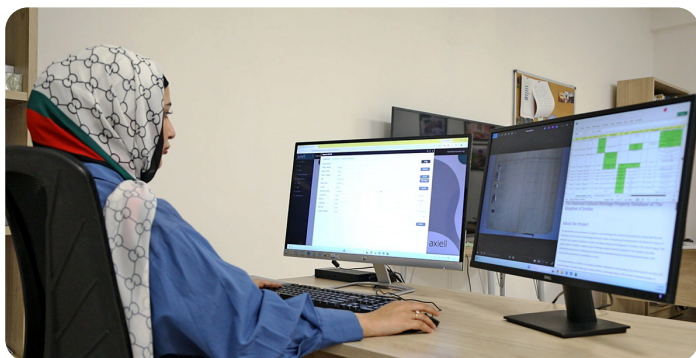
The project is providing a solid foundation for improving inter-agency coordination, reducing procedural delays, and ensuring more effective protection of Jordan’s cultural heritage at border points and customs facilities. Improvements in the collaborative efforts and sustainable training of these Jordanian government agencies allow ACOR to have positive impacts on the preservation and protection of Jordan’s tangible cultural heritage.

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

National Inventory staff member Rua'a Atiyeh transcribing the original inventories from the Jordan Archaeological Museum. (Photo by Shatha Abu Aballi.)



National Inventory Project Update

Matthew Vincent

The National Cultural Heritage Property Database of The Kingdom of Jordan—the National Inventory—spent mid-2026 getting back up to speed, facilitated by restoration of the grant from the U.S. Department of State.

Chief among the developments was the growth of the project staff (see p. 11). Equally important has been the strengthening of our working relationship with the Department of Antiquities. The National Inventory was not conceived as a database built for the DoA; it is a system built with the DoA, and one that must live inside its institutional workflows to have lasting value. To that end, members of DoA staff have been temporarily

assigned to ACOR—an arrangement that has moved collaboration from formal coordination to genuinely shared work, with colleagues from both institutions sitting together and shaping the system as it develops.

We have had the particular pleasure of working with Samah Barakat, whose contribution has been instrumental in integrating our training program and the National Inventory manual into DoA procedures across museums and storehouses. This is the work that determines whether a heritage information system takes hold or quietly falls into disuse. Documentation standards, permissions structures, and cataloging procedures stick only when they are embedded in the routines of the people handling collections every day, and developing the manual into one that provides practical guidance for museum and storehouse staff has been essential to that.

The current phase of the project is institutional rather than technical. The system, the standards, and the infrastructure are in place; success now depends on adoption, on staff across the Kingdom’s museums and storehouses using the Inventory with confidence, and on the DoA holding genuine ownership of both the data and the practices that produce it. With a strengthened staff and closer integration with the Department of Antiquities, that work is well underway.

Donations (January–June 2026)

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The Davis & Creasman Distinction

We are pleased to announce the creation of a new endowment: The Davis/Creasman Distinction recognizes the annual fellowship recipient with the greatest likelihood of making a major contribution to their field. Named in honor of Prof. Thomas W. Davis and Prof. Pearce Paul Creasman and their families, the Distinction is made only as a supplement to an existing ACOR award; there is no application. Reflecting the broad geographic range of research conducted by the awards' namesakes, this award has no boundaries based on discipline, nationality, field of inquiry, era/period studied, stage of career, or methodology. Expected impact is the only barometer. An individual may receive this award only once in their lifetime.

For details, please visit:
acorjordan.org/named-fellowships

Staff Updates

Lina Shara'an

The U.S. Department of State's Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP) grant for "Preservation and Protection of the Holy Land at Herod's Ayn az-Zara Palace and Port to Mukawir" brought two new employees to the organization: Aktham Oweidi as project co-director for the excavation and Holly Hughes as archaeologist. Ali Alsubehat was hired to be the project field lead for another new AFCP grant, the Conservation of the Roman Imperial Western Theater in Umm Qais project. Rua'a Atiyeh joined and Shatha Abu Aballi rejoined ACOR as data entry specialists for the National Inventory. Dr. Isabel Creasman was brought on as monitoring and evaluation officer.

Hisham Al Majali and Hanadi Al Taher left at the end of ACOR's work at Dhiban for the Department of Antiquities, and Nilda Onsing departed at the end of her contract in 2025.



June 2026 Board Meeting

A stated meeting of the Board of Trustees took place in person on June 20, 2026, at our facility in Amman, with some members attending remotely. Amb. Edward (“Skip”) Gnehm called the meeting to order and stated that a quorum was present. He called for a moment of silence to pay tribute to Dr. Pierre Bikai. Executive director Dr. Pearce Paul Creasman gave his update to the board. While most of 2025 was a difficult year, the first half of 2026 was much better, with several new grants received. The geopolitical situation of the region around Jordan continued to make access and willingness to travel to Jordan difficult for many researchers and students. Still, ACOR carried on throughout, hosting our usual public events, including lectures in both Amman and the U.S., to reach those who may not be able to travel. We are also working to develop our relationships within Syria and western Asia at large, reflecting the board’s vision for ACOR to serve as a regional hub. Other updates were provided, and new grant and project proposals were discussed. Work has been completed for the DoA project at Dhiban, and we expect to soon begin a new project at Karak Castle. Plans to help grow the pool of early-career scholars working in our fields were discussed, and plans were approved to initiate two ACOR-run archaeological field schools, one in the south at Petra and one in the north at a location to be determined. Treasurer David Nickols reported on the center’s financial situation, which continues to be strong. The Board approved a new endowment for the Davis/Creasman Distinction and was pleased to see the successful launch of the Douglas R. and Carmen L. Clark Student Travel/Research Scholarship. Other committee chairs gave reports on their respective activities. The Board elected members of the class of 2029: Anne Aarnes, Ahmad Abu Ghazaleh, Jim Barnhart, Geoffrey Coll, Claus Gielisch, Edward Gnehm, Hala Lattouf, Jenna Morton, David Nickols, and Andrew Smith. The next board meeting will take place in Chicago in November 2026.

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Board Meeting Dinner

Center, seated, H.R.H. Prince Raad Bin Zeid; far left, seated, Reem Atalla Habayeb, and, far right, standing, Adib Habayeb, the hosts; second from right, seated, Jim Holtsnider, U.S. Ambassador to Jordan; second to the left of H.R.H. Prince Raad, Louis-Martin Aumais, Canadian Ambassador to Jordan; and trustees, friends, and guests at the Habayeb’s home.

(Photo courtesy of Reem Atalla Habayeb.)

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