

Amman: Khirbet Salameh

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Overlooking a fertile valley in antiquity, the site known as Khirbet Salameh (Fig. 1) was an agricultural settlement founded by no later than the 3rd century BCE, during the Hellenistic period. The current building is a unique example of preserved rural architecture in the Amman area, dating to the Roman period (2nd century CE) and still functioning or reused during the Byzantine and early Islamic periods. The site was partially excavated and documented in the 1970s and 1980s, then utilized in the 1990s as a field school site with the University of Jordan by Pierre Bikai, director emeritus of the American Center of Oriental Research (now the American Center of Research). The fortified square main structure is primarily built of limestone and measures 24 by 24 meters. The main gate faces east, where the water and fertile agricultural lands were most accessible. The building includes fourteen rooms around an inner courtyard. The site adjoins the American Center's property.

Cultural heritage valorization efforts stressed site protection in advance of any site presentation. Based on this approach, basic protection efforts were undertaken at Khirbet Salemeleh in 2020, and more comprehensive work began in January 2021. All efforts were in collaboration and by joint agreement with the Department of Antiquities. Prior to interventions, aerial documentation of the site by drone was carried out by Qutaiba Dassouqi. Thereafter, the first phase, led by John D. M. (Jack) Green, consisted of site cleaning, buttressing fragile areas, covering deep holes, and recording/visualizing the site in its current condition. The second phase included building a stone wall along the eastern exposed cliffside to protect it from geological instability, along with a proper staircase with handrails to protect visitors, a joint effort overseen by Ala'a Al Badarin and Jehad Haron and supported by the American Center's USAID-funded Sustainable Cultural Heritage Through Engagement of Local Communities Project (SCHEP). The third stage focused on urgent and minimal intervention inside the archaeological site, to further stabilize the open holes and install metal covers on the wells and the pit silos, in addition to adding a lighting system. Protecting the landscape was part of the third phase through the planting of trees around the perimeter, in line with the standards of demarking and preserving the archaeological site from potential encroachment (Fig. 1).

The representation and interpretation of this site is an exciting opportunity within urban Amman, an area under daily development, which presents a threat to such historic agricultural settlements in such spaces. Accordingly, starting in late 2021, augmented-reality and virtual tours were created by Hussam Ababneh, to allow different societal groups to interact with the site and better understand the





Fig. 1. Khirbet Salameh after interventions. (Photo by AbedalFatah Ghareeb.)



Fig. 2. Three-D model of Khirbet Salameh created by Hussam Ababneh. (Image courtesy of the USAID Sustainable Cultural Heritage Through Engagement of Local Communities Project, American Center of Research.)

historical content of the site (Fig. 2). The augmented-reality application usable at the site can be downloaded from the Google Play store or Apple App Store.

References

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