

The Madaba Regional Archaeological Museum Project

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Officially initiated in 2015, the Madaba Regional Archaeological Museum Project (MRAMP), a joint American-Italian-Jordanian endeavor to establish a new regional archaeological museum in historic downtown Madaba, accomplished several of its objectives in 2020–2021, in spite of the ravages of the COVID-19 pandemic. Conceived in “community archaeology,” the MRAMP program sets out to 1) preserve cultural heritage; 2) add value to Jordan’s legacy; 3) develop the link between heritage and the economy through increased tourism; 4) ensure sustainability; and 5) guarantee community engagement at numerous levels.

The MRAMP project enjoys several avenues of support, particularly USAID (through SCHEP, the Sustainable Cultural Heritage Through Engagement of Local Communities Project, implemented by the American Center of Research), the Ambassador’s Fund for Cultural Preservation/Cultural Antiquities Task Force (funded by the U.S. Department of State), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy, and other international resources, both monetary and in kind.

This report focuses on 1) MRAMP activities accomplished remotely or in hybrid fashion; 2) MRAMP activities performed on-site in Madaba; and 3) future objectives.

Because COVID-19 prevented in-person engagement through 2020 and much of 2021, MRAMP navigated a significant shift from on-site to primarily online venues and activities. Necessitated by the pandemic, this pivot propelled MRAMP into extremely promising territory to advance the project and its effectiveness. Three major workshop series, two with accompanying manuals, were launched during this period which saw in-person sessions connected to local and non-local specialists via interactive media technology. These included Artifact Handling (a hybrid workshop and published manual in Arabic and English); the Pottery of Jordan (three hybrid workshop sessions and a manual [in press], also in Arabic and English) (Fig. 1); and several more workshops focused on artifact curation, conservation, and restoration.

Development of online resources took a major step forward with the production of several digital platforms that address cultural heritage preservation. Funded by the U.S. Department of State and enabled by CyArk.org, local university students and faculty were trained in photogrammetry to capture three locations in Madaba, local tour guides were engaged for these locations, and local storytellers reflected on growing up among archaeological ruins. This led to the production of the interactive virtual tour (in Arabic and English): “One Place, Many Stories: Madaba, Jordan” (cyark.org/projects/madaba/Guided-Tours). In addition, there now exists a five-minute,

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Fig. 1. Pottery of Jordan training workshop at the Madaba Institute of Mosaic and Art Restoration. (Photo by Douglas Clark.)

three-D video tour of the proposed new museum (madabamuseum.org/en/page/44/THE-BUILDING). The MRAMP website (in Arabic and English) continues to see enhancements as well.

Also accomplished, for the most part remotely, was a remarkable transformation that took place as the current Madaba museum was repurposed into a well-organized and smooth-running storage, research, and display venue (Fig. 2), following best practices, carried out by the local Department of Antiquities/MRAMP team of specialists and directed by Drs. Fatma Marii and John (Jack) D. M. Green. Periodic training sessions helped to build the team's capacity and to preserve, physically and digitally, the thousands of artifacts in the collection. U.S. Ambassador's Grant reviewers recommended the Madaba facility as a model for other museums in Jordan.

On-site accomplishments included ongoing maintenance and the installation of interpretive signs in the Madaba Archaeological Park West (II), site of the proposed new museum. More consequential to the success of the project was continued development of local stakeholder groups, in particular the MRAMP Advisory Council, an informal committee made up of a wide cross-section of representatives from local, regional, national, and international stakeholder groups. Outcomes of these meetings have a direct impact on enthusiasm and support for the new museum.

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Future objectives include removal of a 20th-century cinderblock building, a final excavation season beneath that building, an interactive virtual tour of the proposed museum, renovation of the entry hall and an early 20th-century clinic (Introductory/Timeline Hall), fulfillment of regulations governing new construction, continued website development, fundraising, and construction.

Project website (Arabic): madabamuseum.org/ar

Project website (English): madabamuseum.org/en

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Fig. 2. Current Madaba museum, repurposed for storage. (Photo by Fatma Marii.)