

Site Presentation in Jordan: Concept Design and the January 2009 Documentation Season at Umm el-Jimal

Bert de Vries

During the last two excavation field seasons of the Umm el-Jimal Project (UJP, 1996 and 1998), the architects, Amjed Bathaine, Edith Dunn, and Bert de Vries, developed a traditional site preservation and development plan that proposed the consolidation of key buildings of the Byzantine-Umayyad site, especially the Praetorium; the layout of a signed walking tour; and the reversible adaptation of the Umayyad "Farm" House (House 119) as a Museum Visitor Center. Several years ago the Department of Antiquities (DoA), under the direction of its own architects, began implementing the restoration of the Umayyad House and its adaptation as the proposed Museum Visitor Center, a process that is nearing completion.

In 2006, a new nonprofit organization, Open Hand Studios (OHS), founded by Calvin College graduates to work in partnership "with communities across the world to create hands-on museum exhibits and virtual media that nurture social justice," adopted the Umm el-Jimal Project as one of its pilot programs (www.openhandstudios.org). The objective of the partnership is to present Umm el-Jimal and all its data and research as a virtual museum linked to the site presented as a museum in reality. These linked museums will be structured to enable access and to engage all interested communities, ranging from the local village to the people of Jordan, as well as Jordanian government ministries responsible for antiquities, tourism, cultural heritage, and education; academic communities and their agencies in Jordan and around the world; and anyone anywhere interested at a popular heritage and tourism level.

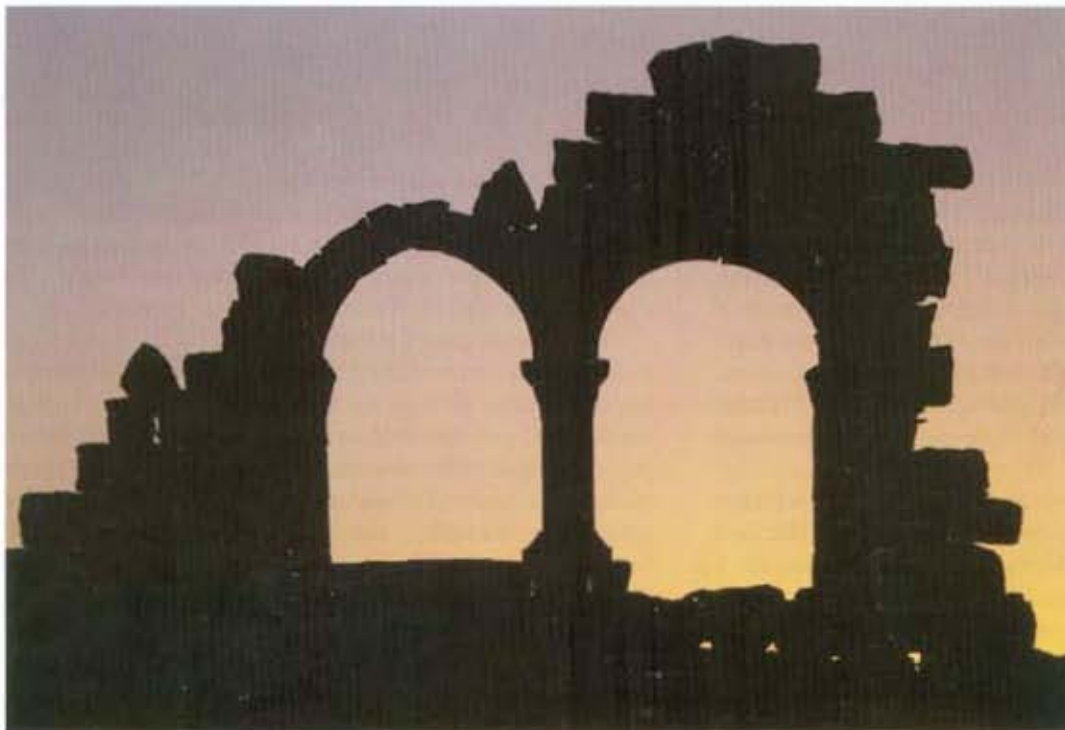
Inception and Implementation of the Work of the UJP-OHS Partnership

OHS and UJP have worked together since 2007 to complete the long process of digitizing the vast amount of UJP field data for digital structuring and presentation. The new UJP website (www.ummeljimal.org) opened May 2008 and functions as a carefully planned museum with complexes of wings and rooms that will contain all the Umm el-Jimal research and site materials ranging from raw data to field reports, publications, photo and other specialty records, project history, site tours and much more. While "front" rooms will present attractive and informative displays, the "back" rooms will contain fully searchable GIS-integrated project data.

To complete the installation of these virtual "exhibits" and "storerooms" new documentation using current equipment and methods became necessary. For example, to integrate the access to the real site with the virtual one required the installation of a walking tour on the ground that matches a visually recorded virtual tour on the Internet. And to give a realistic rendering of the structures of the site in virtual reality, a photographic regimen for three-dimensional rendering needed to be done.

In addition, this site documentation enabled connection with at least three of the "communities" mentioned above. First, the team began documenting the living heritage of the six thousand-strong village of Umm el-Jimal, both to reconnect it historically with the antiquities and to make it a "stake-holder" in the hosting of visitors and the management of liaison between Umm el-Jimal and the rest of the world. The creation of Umm el-Jimal's archaeological educational curriculum was planned to promote intellectual appreciation at all levels from local to international and from popular to academic.

Bringing a team of documentation and museum specialists to the site also satisfied the interests of the DoA in two



The double windows of House XVIII at Umm el-Jimal at sunrise; all photos courtesy of B. de Vries



Sally de Vries and Calvin students enjoying the tent fire during a heritage interview

ways. First, computer technicians in the Department joined the team working on three-dimensional photographic rendering of structures. Second, the field team and DoA staff began working together on the design and installation of the museum on the ground.

Thus, the documentation field work done in January 2009 functioned as a four-way partnership between the DoA, the Umm el-Jimal Municipality, Open Hand Studios, and the Umm el-Jimal Project, with adjunct participation by Jordan's Ministry of Education, Calvin College, and ACOR. All this will continue into the indefinite future, both in Jordan and at Calvin College, and will include a second documentation season in January 2010.

Documentation of Ruins and People at Umm el-Jimal in January 2009

The goal of the multi-faceted January 2009 season was to gather documentation for the site presentation program described above. As diverse as the potential audience, the team members came from Calvin College (Grand Rapids, Michigan), Open Hand Studios (Chicago, Illinois), the Department of Antiquities (Jordan), and the village of Umm el-Jimal itself. The central goals for the work included:

1. Museums: Creation of Umm el-Jimal Virtual Museum interfaced with Umm el-Jimal in Reality (Museum-on-the-ground).
2. Heritage: Gathering data in the living village for integration into the antiquities of Umm el-Jimal, working towards the goal of establishing the site as a Southern Hauran culture center.
3. Environment: Sampling of historic soils to service the Jordan-wide ancient soils research and documentation of modern ecology.

To achieve these goals the project staff was divided into six teams, each with their own areas of specialized expertise:

The Video Production team led by Jeff DeKock (OHS) documented the entire site in film and still photography and filmed numerous interviews with experts and local residents.

The Virtual Museum and Site Development team led by Paul Christians (OHS) created a visual tour of the site using elaborate photography techniques, developed the script and signage for such a tour, and is developing the design for the installation of the site museum and walking tour on the ground.

The Virtual Reconstruction team led by Craig Mulder (OHS) did photogrammetric field documentation for the three dimensional portrayal of two buildings, the Umayyad House (by DoA engineers Tawfiq al-Hunaiti and Mowafaq al-Fayez), which is to serve as the new Museum Visitor Center, and the Cathedral (by OHS-UJP staff).

The Modern Cultural Heritage team led by Sally de Vries (UJP) with Muaffaq Hazza (UJP) documented the tent and house occupation of the ancient site during the past century and conducted interviews with numerous members of the community to document their remembered heritage.

The Educational Curriculum team led by Sarah Oord and Mary Workmen (Calvin education majors) developed a multi-discipline strategy for the teaching of archaeology to Jordanians in primary and secondary schools. Based on that, they developed 13 lesson plans using the archaeology of Umm el-Jimal as subject matter and presented their work as a concept proposal to the Ministry of Education for integration into the national archaeology curriculum.

The Historical Ecology team led by Bernhard Lucke (Brandenburg Technical University) and Laurie Koning (Calvin graduate in Geology) took samples of ancient soils for laboratory analysis to study the ancient climate patterns and agricultural adaptation of the various communities at the site.

Expected results of the work include imaginative, attractive, and educational site presentations to be posted both on the Internet (www.ummeljimal.org) and installed on the ground, to enable both virtual and actual visits. Bert de Vries (Director) and his talented collaborators consider this thorough and multi-tiered site presentation structure to be a potential model for other sites in Jordan and elsewhere. We view the results as a great step towards the overarching goal of providing a structure that enables equal, open, and fair access to antiquities sites and the information based on them. Our model of multiple intersecting partnerships also serves to facilitate the just implementation of that goal within the normal strictures of local, national, and international civic societies.

The field work was funded by Calvin College and the Norwegian Research Council and received strong support

from its project partners, the DoA and Open Hand Studios. In addition to the core staff listed above expressions of deep gratitude are due to Dr. Fawwaz al-Khraysheh (DoA Director General) for his gracious enablement of our partnership; Muaffaq Hazza (long-time UJP team member) for his tireless local arrangements and community coordination; the Mayor of Umm el-Jimal Municipality, Saleh Fallah, for his visionary blending of heritage dream and economic practicality; and the entire ACOR staff for its encouragement of our vision and enabling of our work. We are also grateful to Sultan es-Serour for allowing us to use the house of his father, Sheikh Hail, for our "camp" and its great *madhafa* for our communal computer lab, living room, and lecture hall.



Teaching Umm el-Jimal—the Boys' School with Byzantine houses in the foreground

ACOR Activities in Boston

At the ASOR Annual Meeting in Boston, several activities took place to continue the celebration of ACOR's 40th anniversary year. There was a double academic session on "ACOR at 40" which took place on Friday morning (11/21). The program was developed to cover numerous aspects of ACOR's involvement in archaeological projects in Jordan. It was duly noted that many projects could not be included due to the limited time.

The lectures were divided into two sessions—the first presided over by me as the current ACOR Director and the

second by David McCreery of Willamette University who was ACOR Director from 1981 to 1988. The full program was:

Session I:

Barbara A. Porter: ACOR at 40: The People and Places

Gary Rollefson (Whitman College): Leave No Stone Unturned: ACOR's Expansion into Prehistory

R. Thomas Schaub (Expedition to the Dead Sea Plain): Studies on the Early Bronze Age in Jordan from 1968-2008: A Period of Downsizing from an 'Urban' Culture to Corporate Villages

Burton MacDonald (St. Xavier University), ACOR and Survey Archaeology in Jordan