



Archaeological Museum NEWSLETTER

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INTRODUCTION

It is nearly 50 years since best-selling author Gail Sheehy wrote her seminal book **Passages: Predictable Crises of Adult Life**. In summary the book involves a gallop through the various decades exploring the challenges we face and the lessons we can learn.

So what has this got to do with the AUB Archaeological Museum Newsletter? Nothing really except that if one is supposed to anticipate and learn from “Predictable Crises”, what about the Unpredictable ones? Like a massive port explosion that destroyed the Museum’s precious glass collection, or the latest ongoing war that rages above and around the University. Or indeed the alarming flood triggered by an explosive water-cooling pipe that, but for some fortuitous timing, may well have destroyed whole swathes of the museum and its artifacts.



Since stepping into the role of Curator of the AUB Museum, Dr. Nadine Panayot has encountered one crisis after the other from a 'baptism of fire' to a deluge. The story of the glass collection and the subsequent "Museum in a Bunker" contingency plan to preserve precious artifacts from potential destruction, have been well covered in previous issues. Here below is Nadine's description of her most recent "unpredictable adult crises".

"Following the realization that we were fortunate not to have dismantled the protective bunker established in 2024, the escalation of direct bombing across Lebanon this year compelled us to reinforce our safeguarding measures. As a precaution, we once again removed all small and highly vulnerable objects that had been reinstalled after 2024, including jewelry and coins. In addition, we decided to relocate larger, freestanding artifacts, particularly pottery mounted on fragile tripods, due to the risks posed by shockwaves and sonic vibrations generated by aircraft.

These measures remained in place until explicit threats were issued against American and educational institutions, including universities. At that point, it became evident that no physical bunker could fully guarantee the safety of our collections. In response, I submitted an emergency grant application to the International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage (ALIPH) to support the rapid digitization of the remaining objects on display at the museum. Owing to our strong track record with ALIPH, the request was approved without delay, and we are currently implementing this emergency digitization response under conflict conditions.

Just as this phase was concluding, an entirely unforeseen incident occurred on Thursday, April 23. While preparing to deliver my zoom address for the World Federation of Friends of Museums, we heard a sudden blast within the conference hall, immediately followed by the sound of gushing water rapidly flooding the space. While we had been bracing for explosions, we did not anticipate an implosion! The main climate-control pipeline supplying the museum's cooling system ruptured. Within five minutes, water had inundated the storage areas.

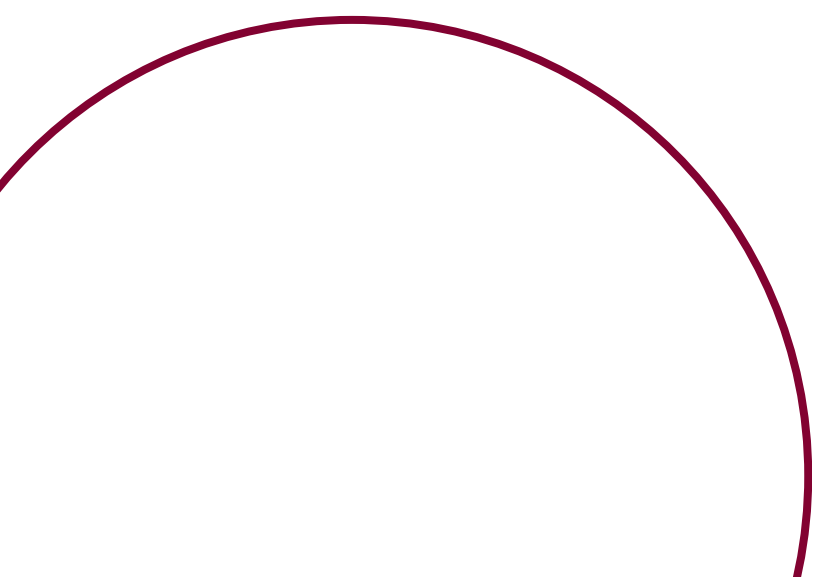
Since then, we have been actively managing the consequences of this incident, addressing both immediate damage control and longer-term recovery challenges. These are numerous and consequential.....”



Mopping up before underlying damage is revealed.

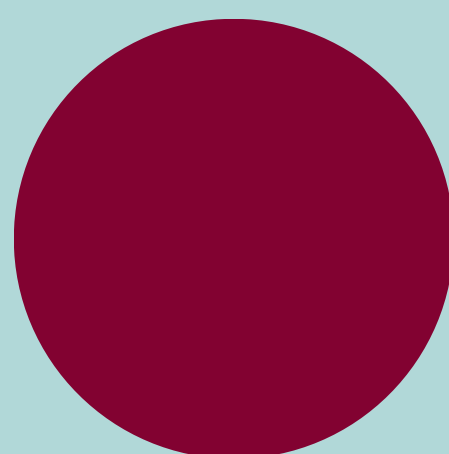
Hats off to Nadine for navigating this extraordinary, high-speed series of ‘passages’ while still coming up with new ideas and solutions.

In spite of all the above, the Society of Friends’ popular activities: the Lectures, the Children’s Program, our first Adult Workshop, a new exhibition, trips both local and overseas, have all informed our local members and helped to keep spirits high. We hope you enjoy reading about them.





LECTURES



LECTURES

The AUB Archaeological Museum lecture program was privileged to welcome three distinguished overseas speakers alongside AUB Department of Archaeology's Phoenician expert Dr. Helen Sader. The topics explored were: **New approaches to Ugaritic and Phoenician Epigraphy, ASOR Lessons on Community Engagement for Post-Conflict Heritage Work, Irrigation and Power in Assyrian Capitals, and From Tyre to Gadir: The Great Tyrian Adventure.**

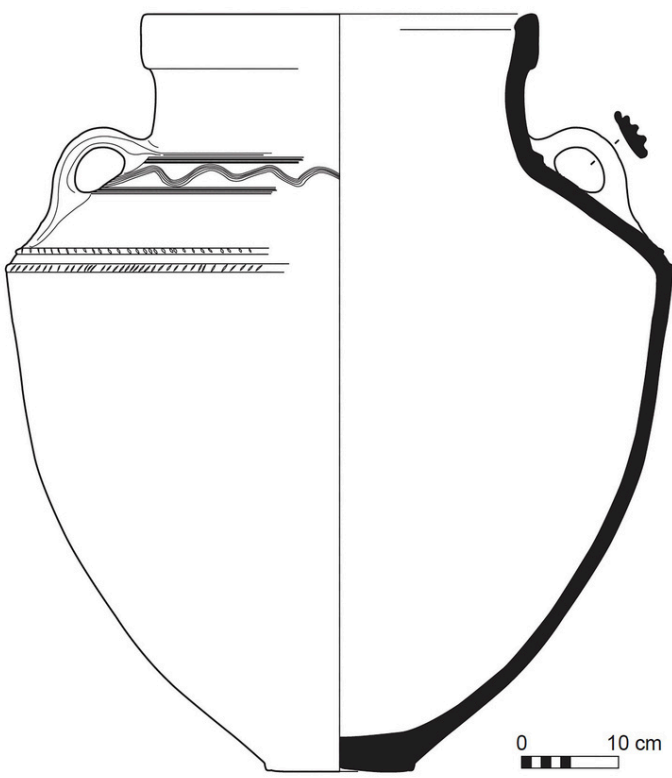
November 12, 2025

Ancient objects, New Readings: New Approaches to Ugaritic and Phoenician Epigraphy

Dr. Robert Hawley, directeur d'études at the École Pratique des Hautes Études - Paris, France.

Dr Robert Hawley discusses the intersections between material culture, digital tools, and textual scholarship in current Ugaritic and Phoenician epigraphic research.

The lecture began by referencing a locally made 'agunnu storage jar from the site of Tell Kazel on the Syrian coast (near Tartous), dating to the 14th or 13th century BCE, emphasizing its significance as a prism for viewing connections between ancient language and material culture, and highlighting how archeological findings can inform textual interpretations, and vice versa.



A pithos-like crater with crenellated handles from the Tell Kazel excavations (Badre, Capet et Vitale, *Tell Kazel au Bronze Récent: Études céramiques*, Beyrouth, 2018, n° 265, pl. xxiii; photograph courtesy of L. Badre and E. Capet). One of the Amarna letters from Tyre indicates that a jar like this was called an 'agūnu in the Phoenician language of the time. Two similar, but inscribed, crenellated jar handles are known from neighboring coastal sites to the north: one from Ras Shamra (ancient Ugarit) and the other from Şarafand (ancient Şaripta); the Şarafand example also contains the word 'agūnu (written ?GN).

Hawley then described a shift in scholarly perspective in recent decades, moving from an older, more rigid separation between the disciplines of Ugaritic and Phoenician studies to a more integrated approach in recent decades. In order to set the stage for this discussion, he presented the archeological site of Ras Shamra (ancient Ugarit), on the Syrian coast a few kilometers north of Lattakia, known for its important of cuneiform archives: approximately 5000 tablets in all, with around 2000 written in a local alphabetic script and in the local vernacular language.

This corpus is (for the time being) the earliest known significant literary corpus written in an alphabet and in a West Semitic language (other West Semitic languages include Phoenician, Arabic, Aramaic, Hebrew, Ethiopian, etc.).

Having presented the archives from Ugarit, Hawley then discussed the diplomatic connections there documented between the kingdom of Ugarit and Phoenician cities such as Byblos, Beirut, Sidon, and Tyre. A vivid example included a letter sent from the king of Tyre reassuring the king of Ugarit about a sunken boat, illustrating the close commercial and diplomatic ties actively maintained between the two cities at the time (13th century BCE). These relations have been more recently further illustrated by the recently published documentation from the so-called “House of Urtenu” at Ugarit, which has tripled the available textual information on Byblos and doubled it for Beirut, for example, thus greatly enriching our sources for studying these kinds of interactions.



The letter RS 18.031 from the king of Tyre to the king of Ugarit (photograph courtesy of the “PhoTÉO” project, D. Pardee, C. Roche-Hawley, R. Hawley). The letter, written in standard Ugaritic language and script, was found at Ugarit.

Hawley then presented a series of similarities between the literary traditions of the Ugaritic and Phoenician corpora, suggesting that despite superficial differences, significant parallels in their inscriptions and literary forms suggest a common cultural background. Examples presented included votive inscriptions and literary curses.



The mortuary stele RS 6.028 from Ugarit (photograph courtesy of the “PhoTÉO” project, D. Pardee, C. Roche-Hawley, R. Hawley). The formula found in this inscription closely resembles the opening formulas of many of early royal inscriptions from Byblos.

Hawley then attempted to reinforce our appreciation of these shared features from a linguistic point of view, further arguing that the similarities between the two traditions are profound and not merely superficial. He illustrated this through examples of shared grammatical structures and vocabulary, showing continuity between the two traditions.

The lecture concluded with an apology for a more holistic approach for the joint study of Ugaritic and Phoenician texts, encouraging scholars to recognize the interconnectedness of the two disciplines and their texts, and stressing the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration for a richer and more nuanced understanding of these two ancient cultures.

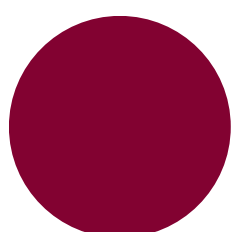
December 10, 2025

The Turn to the Environment
Selected Writings of Hanaa Malallah,
1989-2003, edited with an introduction by
Saleem Bahloly, AUB Assistant Professor
of Fine Arts and Art History.

Click Here



Professor Saleem Bahloly's book launch on the work of Hanaa Malallah in the presence of the artist.



As a young artist studying in Baghdad in the late 1980s, Hanaa Malallah found early inspiration in the legendary Iraq Museum and in the teachings of pioneer Iraqi artists, Jewad Salim and Shakir Hassan Al Sa'id.

By the early 1990s, with the closure of the Museum, Malallah turned her attention to the Museum's surroundings. This forced switch of focus became the inspiration for an artistic practice that Malallah continues to develop.

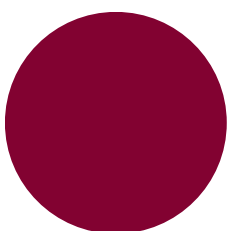
In what must seem somewhat extraordinary in today's world, throughout the 1990s Malallah published dozens of short, hand illustrated texts conceptualizing this turn to the environment in newspapers in Baghdad and London.

In The Turn to the Environment, alongside his meticulous reproduction of these articles, Bahloly's expansive introduction invites the reader to explore, not only the theory and practice of Malallah's art but also the philosophical ideas informing her practice and that of leading pioneers of Modern Iraqi Art.

In the book's synopsis Bahloly describes how the young Malallah "...made frequent visits to the Iraq Museum, sketching archaeological artifacts in an attempt to grasp the temporality by which they could at once belong to the past and yet exist in the present."



Conversation between Saleem Bahloly and Hanaa Malallah.

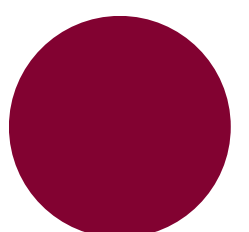


Of Malallah's nascent new practice in the wake of the Museum's closure Bahloly writes, "...she began to explore the city of Baghdad as a field of traces with a temporal structure like that of an archaeological artifact. This research resulted in a distinctive manner of constructing her panels – using found materials to build patterns that seem to encode some indecipherable meaning but only communicate the meaning of time itself – and it set her on a path of further research that moved increasingly in the direction of semiotics and logic."

Malallah's early theoretical explorations did not evolve in a vacuum. She had studied under the leading artist and thinker Shakir Hassan Al Sa'id who in turn had been influenced by the 'father' of modern Iraqi art Jewad Selim. Selim was the first artist to pose the key question about the relationship between the modern artwork and the historical artifact, later pursued by Al Sa'id and by Malallah in her collective writings.

While the main thrust of **The Turn to the Environment** is the analysis of Malallah's journey through the reproduction of her original texts, the bonus is Bahloly's instructive exploration of key developments in modern Iraqi artistic practice and the significant philosophical and political currents that informed them. As he puts it, "This book gathers that body of art theory not only to provide insight into the evolution of Malallah's practice, in its taking up a question first posed by Jewad Selim and renewed by Shakir Hassan Al Sa'id of the relationship between the modern artwork and the historical artifact, but also to open a window into the practice of art in Iraq during a decade of intellectual isolation and material deprivation."

An installation and exhibition by Hanaa Malallah will take place at the AUB Archaeological Museum in May, marking her first exhibition in the Arab world.



December 10, 2025

ASOR Lessons on Community Engagement for Post-Conflict Heritage Work

Dr. Andrew Vaughn, ASOR Executive Director.

Dr. Vaughn's lecture was hosted by the AUB Department of History and Archaeology in collaboration with the Archaeological Museum.

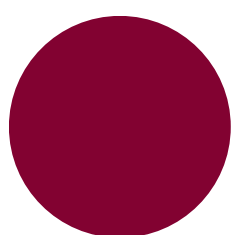
The presentation explored key lessons in community engagement within the field of post-conflict heritage preservation.

Drawing on the work of ASOR's Cultural Heritage Initiatives (CHI), Dr. Vaughn reviewed the organization's early efforts to document and stabilize heritage sites during periods of conflict across Syria, Iraq, and Libya. These formative experiences, shaped by rapidly evolving and often challenging conditions, have since informed ASOR's more recent initiatives in North Africa and the Sahel.

A central theme of the lecture was the increasing importance of community-based approaches. Dr. Vaughn highlighted how tools such as crowd-sourced condition assessments, targeted mini-grant programs, and accessible heritage toolkits have helped empower local stakeholders to take an active role in protecting and promoting their cultural heritage.

With improved conditions allowing for broader collaboration, ASOR launched new initiatives in September 2025, including geospatial documentation training programs in Syria and Yemen. Building on these efforts, the organization also initiated in-person training sessions in December 2025 in partnership with national heritage authorities in Lebanon and Syria.

The lecture offered a timely and insightful perspective on how heritage preservation strategies are evolving—from emergency response to sustainable, community-driven engagement—grounded in nearly a decade of field experience across some of the world's most complex cultural landscapes.



January 28, 2026

From Tyre to Gadir: The Great Tyrian Adventure

Professor Helene Sader, Department of History and Archaeology, American University of Beirut.

Click here



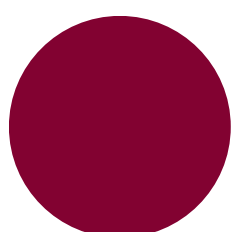
Professor Helene Sader.

Professor Sader started by explaining the terms Phoenicia and Phoenicians, the names given to the Levantine coast and its inhabitants by the Greeks in the first millennium BCE. Tyre was one of four Phoenician kingdoms occupying this coast in the Iron Age.

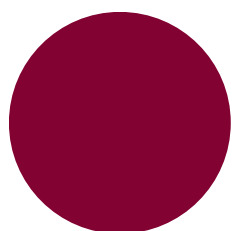


Tyre and its mainland extension.

Sader argued that the city of Tyre was the main protagonist of the Phoenician expansion in the Mediterranean. Indeed, no other Phoenician city is mentioned in the Old Testament and in the Classical sources as having founded colonies.



To support her argument Sader combined written and archaeological sources. She demonstrated that Tyre was very well equipped for her maritime adventure: she took advantage of her long navigating experience and of the information her sailors collected during their peregrinations in the East Mediterranean during the Late Bronze Age. The latter period was one of intensive Mediterranean trade which led Greeks, Cypriots, and Levantine people to look for new markets and new sources of raw materials beyond the geographical area they were familiar with. Tyre probably participated in these explorations and certainly heard about rich sources of metal beyond the borders of her traditional trade networks. This is probably the reason why we find Tyrians already present in Sardinia and in the Iberian Peninsula as early as the 10th century BCE. These are the two countries richest in metals. The Levant and neighboring Mesopotamia badly needed these mineral resources, mainly silver, which was the currency used in the first millennium BCE. Tyrians settled in the islands of Cyprus and Thasos, in Sardinia, in Huelva and in Cádiz, all countries very rich in metals.



The three most important colonies of the Phoenicians were established by the Tyrians: The legend of Cadmos, a Tyrian prince, speaks of the foundation of Thebes in Greece, of the kidnapping of his sister Europa and of the transmission of the alphabet to Ionian Greeks.



Tyre. Valerian I. 253–260 CE.



Mosaic from the Beirut National Museum representing the kidnapping of Europa by Zeus in the shape of a bull.
Source Lebanese Directorate General of Antiquities.

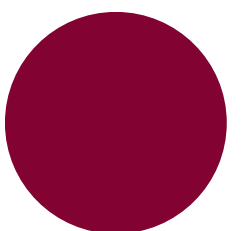


Philip I. 244–249 CE.
Cadmus presenting the alphabet to the Hellenes.
Source Classical Numismatic Group, LLC.

The legend of Elissa/Dido, the Tyrian princess, says that she fled the wrath of her brother who killed her husband. She went to North Africa and founded Carthage.

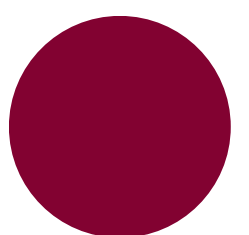


Tyre. Gallienus. 253–268 CE.
Elissa-Dido overseeing the building of Carthage. Source
Classical Numismatic Group, LLC.

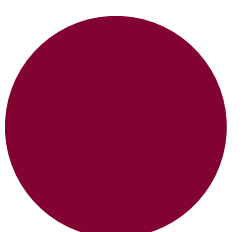


The legend of the foundation of Gadir, modern Cádiz, by Tyrian sailors who have crossed the straits of Gibraltar for the first time tells us how the Tyrians reach the area of Huelva, very close to the silver ores of the Guadalquivir, and later founded the city of Gadir; modern Cadiz on the Atlantic coast.

The archaeological evidence that confirms the Tyrian origin of the settlers claimed by the myths is manifold: first and foremost is the presence of pottery that finds its closest resemblance in the Tyrian pottery retrieved from the soundings on the island of Tyre as well as the pottery found in the cremation cemetery of Tyre el-Bass; second is the evidence for the worship of Tyrian gods mainly Melqart and Astarte; finally, the presence of funerary practices alien to the land before the coming of the Tyrians and similar to the Tyrian cremation practice with its typical pottery assemblages attested at Tyre el-Bass. Phoenician inscriptions bring additional confirmation of Tyrian presence.



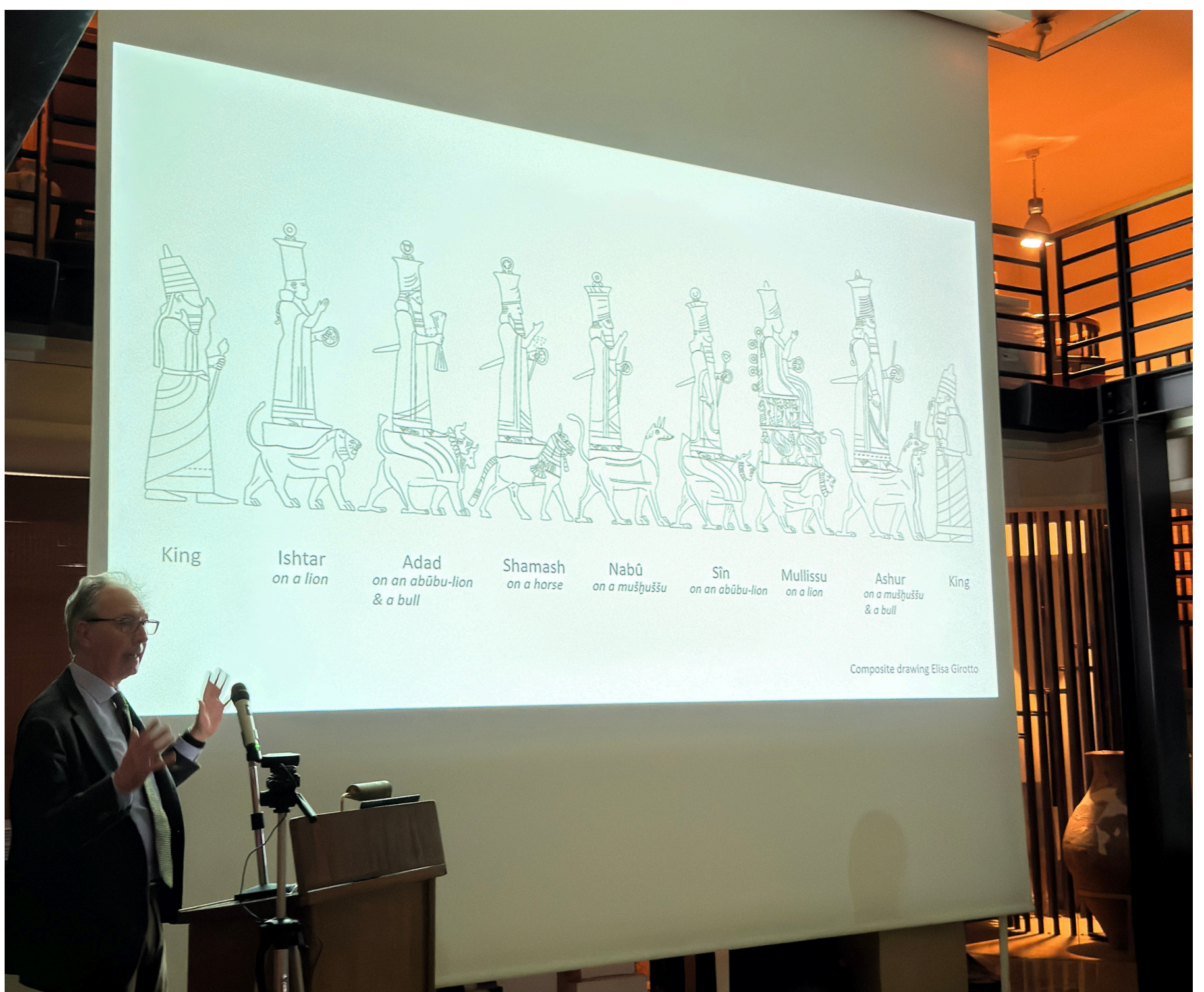
These foundations earned the city the title of “metropolis,” meaning “***founder city of overseas settlements.***” On Tyrian coins of the Roman period, the Tyrians represented the foundation of Carthage and Thebes.



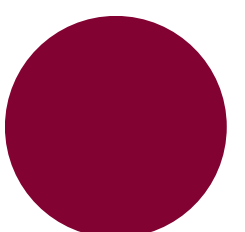
February 25, 2026

Irrigation and Power in Assyrian Capitals (9th-7th Centuries BCE)

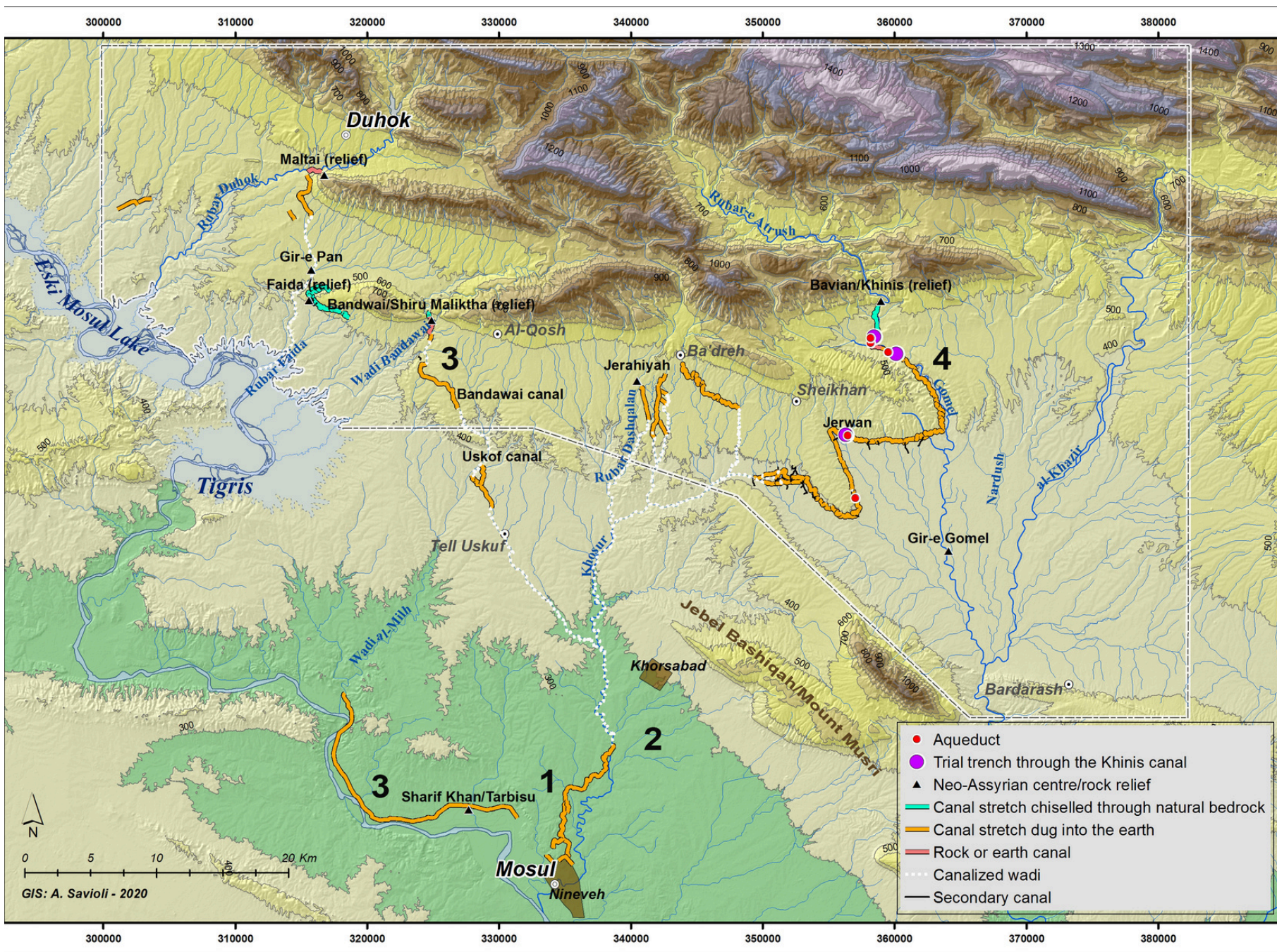
Professor Daniele Morandi Bonacossi,
University of Udine - Italy.



Professor Daniele Morandi Bonacossi.

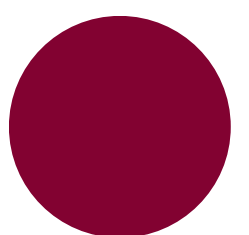


The history of Assyria involved a long process of territorial expansion driven by an ideology of universal conquest, which culminated between the eighth and seventh centuries BCE in the creation of what became the most extensive territorial power in the ancient Near East before the Achaemenid Empire.



Map of the Northern Assyrian Irrigation System in the land behind Nineveh.

Evidence from cuneiform records and archaeological research in the core region of the Assyrian Empire, conducted by the Land of Nineveh Archaeological Project of Udine University in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq since 2012, shows that from the 13th century BCE onward, Assyrian rulers actively built large-scale irrigation networks. This was part of a broader effort to transform Assyria through new policies on settlement, farming, and population growth, as well as the construction of vital infrastructure and the celebration of these newly engineered landscapes with monumental rock reliefs and cuneiform inscriptions at symbolically charged locations. The systematic development of extensive irrigated lands in semi-arid areas of the empire during the Neo-Assyrian period boosted agricultural production in much of the 'Assyrian dry-farming belt' and helped stabilize the staple crop economy against the uncertainties of irregular rainfall.



Additionally, the centrally planned construction of massive canal systems provided the empire with extra waterways beyond rivers for transporting bulk goods such as staple foods and raw materials, making movement throughout the Assyrian homeland more efficient.

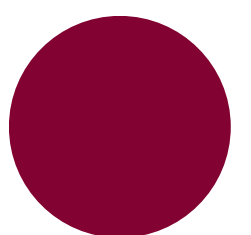


The Faida Canal.

The governorates of Duhok and Ninawa in northern Iraq feature the most distinctive and monumental irrigation system ever built by the Assyrians in the heart of their empire.

Between 703 and around 688 BCE, Sennacherib developed the 'Northern Assyrian Irrigation System' in four stages, creating a network of canals to water Nineveh's vast hinterland and supply water to his "Palace without a Rival" and the royal parks on the citadel of Nineveh and its surrounding fields. The construction of this new waterscape significantly transformed the rural landscape of the Assyrian core region, marking a shift from extensive dry farming to an intensive, predictable, and high-yield irrigation-based farming system.

The Land of Nineveh Archaeological Project's work on the Northern Assyrian Irrigation System has enabled the mapping and detailed archaeological analysis of a branching irrigation network, including 240 kilometres of canals, canalised watercourses, dams, weirs, and stone aqueducts at Jerwan and four other sites. Impressive rock reliefs have been carved into the cliffs above the canal headworks at Khinis, Maltai, and Faida. Here, a new Assyrian canal and rock art complex was uncovered.



Starting in 2019, the investigation of the highly endangered Faida Archaeological Complex revealed an irrigation canal at least 10 km long, carved into the limestone bedrock of the Chiya Daka hill range. Thirteen large sculpted rock panels were found along the canal's eastern bank, each depicting an Assyrian king at both ends, framing cult statues of seven deities standing on pedestals supported by striding animals or mythological creatures.

The Faida canal and reliefs have been documented, protected, and restored.

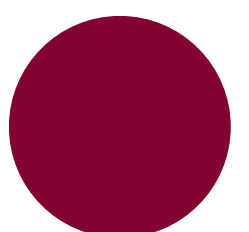


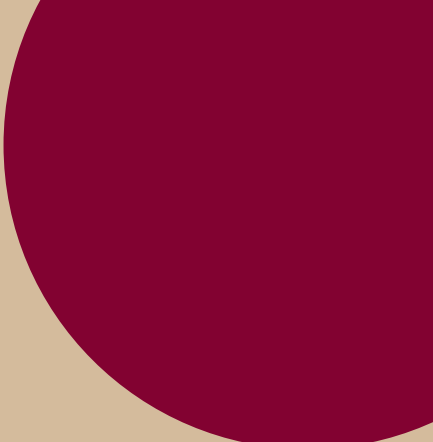
Rock relief carved along the Faida Canal (Panel 8, after restoration).

Efforts to conserve and improve the sites have also been undertaken at Khinis, Maltai, and Jerwan to establish an archaeological park that encompasses the entire irrigation system built by King Sennacherib (704-681 BCE) and his successors.



The 'Large Panel' commemorating the excavation of the canal at Khinis after restoration. The relief shows King Sennacherib twice, worshiping the gods Ashur and Mullissu. The openings carved into the relief are tombs dug during Late Antiquity.





CHILDREN'S PROGRAM

CHILDREN'S PROGRAM

Youngsters attending the AUB Archaeological Museum Children's Program readily embraced the fun and the challenges of two significantly different events. Senior Museum Assistant Aimée Bou Rizk captures skill and enthusiasm with which the kids tackled the **Tanagra Workshop**. Meanwhile Hussein Salman describes how the almost forgotten story of Saint Barbara was adapted into a fascinating **Spooky Night at the Museum**.

October 12, 2025

Tanagra Workshop

Some 70 children from the AUB Archaeological Museum Children's Program celebrated the International Day of Friends of Museums, initiated by the World Federation of Friends of Museums, with an event dedicated to Tanagra figurines.



**AMERICAN
UNIVERSITY
OF BEIRUT**
Archaeological Museum



EUROPEAN DAY
OF FRIENDS OF MUSEUMS
Be a Friend of Museums!



WFFM
WORLD FEDERATION OF
FRIENDS OF MUSEUMS

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF FRIENDS OF MUSEUMS

TANAGRA FIGURINES

A program by the CHILDREN'S COMMITTEE OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM

**SUNDAY,
OCTOBER 12, 2025**
9:00 AM–12:30 PM
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
MUSEUM

LIVE CERAMIC WORKSHOP
Children explore and create Tanagra figurines
with a ceramic expert.

Mankoucheh cheese & zaatar plus juice will be served.
For a greener planet, bring your own water flasks for refills.

7–14 YEARS OLD

**REGISTRATION BEFORE
THURSDAY, OCTOBER 9, 2025**

YOUR
MUSEUMS
OUR
PASSION



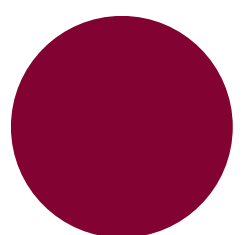
Tanagra Figurine
AUB Archaeological Museum

The program began with a short, engaging PowerPoint presentation introducing these small terracotta statuettes and offering the young participants a window into the lives of women more than 2,000 years ago. The children learned that the small clay Tanagra figurines, typically 10-30cm tall from the Hellenistic period, were named after a town in Greece where they were first discovered. They learned how the figurines were widely produced and traded across the Mediterranean, even reaching Lebanon.



They were surprised to discover that the figures did not represent goddesses, but real women: dancers, elegant ladies, and everyday females; capturing moments of their ancient life and society. These women wore long, elegant dresses, held fans or flowers, and styled their hair with care; some even wore hats or veils. They stood in graceful, confident poses, each one unique. The presentation also highlighted their different uses, from offerings in temples to objects placed in tombs or displayed in homes. Finally, children learned how the figurines were made using clay molds, then hand finished, carefully assembled, fired, and painted in bright colors; far from the plain terracotta appearance we see today.

Moving next to the museum, the children examined the real Tanagras on display and were encouraged to imagine their once bright colors and their role in everyday life in ancient times.



After a short breakfast, the children began modeling their own figurines, inspired by what they had seen in the presentation and museum. They were guided by ceramic artists Nour and Elio Haddad from **Fabrica Design**. Before starting, Elio demonstrated the process by creating a figurine. Equipped with modeling and carving tools, the children then stepped into the role of ancient terracotta artists, imagining themselves in Hellenistic times crafting figures for elegant ladies eager to be seen and admired. Like the original Tanagras, each creation was unique; some added hats, others fans, flowers, or baskets. Their designs extended to hairstyles, from elegant updos to long tresses falling on the shoulders, offering a wide variety of looks. Along the way, they learned how to use different tools to shape drapery and hair, and to carefully incise facial features.





With steady hands and full concentration, a young participant adds the final touches to her Tanagra-inspired statuette.

As there wasn't enough time to paint the figurines during the session, the children got creative with the decorative materials provided. Some fully bedazzled their statues with colorful beads and shimmering details, while others added as many multicolored feathers as they could find. A few, however, chose a more discreet approach, keeping their figurines simple with minimal decoration.



Proudly exhibiting the colorful Tanagra-inspired figurine, bedecked with bright feathers and beads.



A newly shaped Tanagra-inspired figurine takes form, complete with a wide hat and basket, fresh from the hands of its young creator.



The program ended on a joyful note, with children proudly exhibiting their unique creations. The day was a great success, marked by their enthusiasm and engagement throughout. Their creativity and curiosity brought their figurines to life, making the experience both educational and enjoyable for everyone involved.



Proud artists and their one-of-a-kind figurines, each piece as unique as its maker.

December 6, 2025

Spooky Night at the Museum

**Spooky Night at the AUB
Archaeological Museum Children's
Program brought alive the story and
traditions of Saint Barbara for some
90 children from Lebanese schools,
alongside young patients from Gaza
receiving medical treatment under the
Ghassan Abu-Sittah Foundation in
Beirut.**



The activity was conceived following a similar program around Halloween held the previous year that had prompted a reflection on shifting festive practices among younger generations. Over the past decade, there has been a gradual decline in the celebration of Saint Barbara's Day with children increasingly familiar with Halloween traditions instead.

Recognizing that such celebrations and observances constitute an essential element of intangible cultural heritage, encompassing historical, archaeological, religious, and social knowledge systems, the AUB Museum sought to reintroduce the Saint Barbara tradition to the children, alerting them to a nearly forgotten dimension of their cultural heritage.



Listening to the story of St. Barbara.

The program began with an engaging presentation introducing the story of Saint Barbara through both historical and folkloric lenses. The session explored the various interpretations of her origin, ranging from Baalbek to Anatolia and beyond, highlighting how her narrative travels across the region. It also examined Lebanese village traditions associated with her feast day, while drawing parallels with similar customs in Palestine, Syria, and parts of Turkey.



Children settle down to watch as the story of Saint Barbara begins to unfold.

A key part of the session focused on the historical and archaeological context of Heliopolis (modern Baalbek), particularly its connection to Jupiter Heliopolitanus. The children discovered to how symbols such as lightning and wheat - central to the god's imagery - later became intertwined with the story of Saint Barbara, especially in relation to themes of protection, fertility, and survival. Objects from the museum's collection related to Heliopolis and Jupiter Heliopolitanus were highlighted, allowing participants to connect the narrative to tangible archaeological material.



Exploration of traditions related to wheat and ancient silos.

The presentation also bridged past and present by showing how elements of Saint Barbara's story continue to appear in modern narratives, including comparisons with popular tales such as Rapunzel. This helped the children to recognize how older myths are adapted and reshaped across time.

A symbolic reenactment of a conversation between Barbara and her father, performed in colloquial Lebanese by our Children's Program volunteers, presented the story in a simple and engaging manner. This interactive format helped make the narrative easily accessible, allowing the children to further identify the themes underlying Saint Barbara's tale.



Paying close attention to the conversation between St. Barbara and her father.

A lively moment centered around the well-known song “Hashli Barbara” by Sabah. The lyrics were explained in simple terms and linked back to the story and local traditions, among them disguise, escape, and communal celebration, helping the children to understand the deeper meanings embedded in a song many were already familiar with.

Participants were then offered warm traditional wheat (amh), reinforcing its symbolic role in the narrative and in seasonal practices. This was followed by an interactive scavenger hunt inside the museum, where children solved archaeological riddles to uncover hidden words. The activity encouraged teamwork, observation, and playful engagement within the museum space in an educational context.

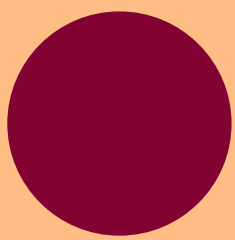


Excitement as the scavenger hunt gets under way.

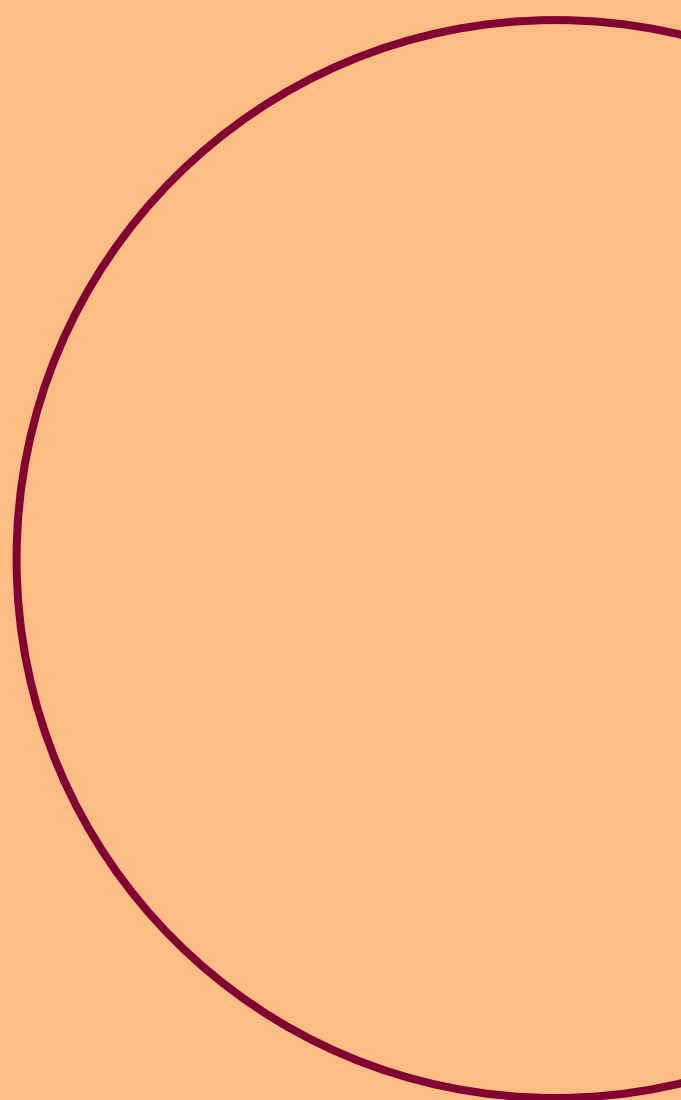
At the end each participants received a small gift in recognition of their enthusiasm and participation. Many parents expressed appreciation for the initiative, noting the importance of reconnecting younger generations with cultural traditions and festive practices that were once widely celebrated but are now increasingly overlooked.



Face painting – all part of the fun.



EXHIBITION AND WORKSHOP



OCTOBER 29, 2025

EXHIBITION Tanagra Tales

How a diminutive Hellenic terracotta figurine became the centerpiece for an exhibition, a children's activity and the first AUB Archaeological Museum adult live workshop.



Holograms bringing the past to life.

It all started in response to an invitation extended to the Museum to participate in Chapter 3 of the AUB Art Collection's **Open Walls** exhibitions.

Taking her inspiration from an innovative interpretation of classic Tanagra statuettes by Joanne Aoun, a Lebanese student studying in Paris, Curator Nadine Panayot soon recognized the potential for a multi-media installation.

Entitled **In the Moment: The Future Within the Past**, it stars the museum's small but perfectly preserved Tanagra, along with her famous "ancestor", the Louvre Museum's *La Dame d'Auxerre*.



Tanagras and the scrolls they inspired.

The Evolution of Tanagras

From Cult Image to Archaic Form (late 7th–6th c. BCE)

Rooted in wooden cult statues (xoana), these rigid, columnar forms, carved in limestone and marble, evolve into the earliest kore (maiden) types, precursors to the more naturalistic korai and kouroi of the 6th century BCE. Despite foreign models, Greek artists forged a distinctly Greek idiom of symmetry, order, and the idealized human figure.

La Dame d'Auxerre: An Icon of Daedalic Style



(c. 640 BCE, Limestone, h. 75 cm)
©LOUVRE Museum

The Auxerre Goddess, is one of the most celebrated works of the Daedalic style. Discovered in 1907 at the Museum of Auxerre in Burgundy, she likely originated from Crete. Her form reflects early Greek ideals of piety and restraint.

The figure stands in a rigidly frontal pose, with a triangular face framed by thick, patterned locks of hair. Her right arm bent across the chest suggests an act of devotion or supplication, consistent with the solemn symmetry of the Daedalic style. She wears a sleeveless garment, possibly a tubular peplos or layered outfit, decorated with faint engraved meander patterns at the wrists, neckline, and hem.

Women in Public Life: From Exclusion to Visibility

In 508/507 BCE, Athenian democracy took shape, but political participation was restricted to adult male citizens; women (like metics and slaves) were excluded from voting and office. Yet women were present in public religion, taking part in state festivals and women-only rites. By the Hellenistic period (3rd–2nd c. BCE), in the wake of Alexander's expansions, female public visibility widened in many cities of the Greek East: inscriptions record honors, benefactions, and civic roles for women.

Hellenistic Tanagra Terracotta Figurines



(4th–2nd century BCE
© AUB Archaeological Museum)

Discovered in the 19th century near the town of Tanagra in Boeotia, these refined terracotta figurines captivated Parisian collectors with their charm and realism. Their immense popularity, however, led to mass forgeries that flooded the art market and cast doubt on their authenticity.

Tanagra terracottas reveal a cultural transformation, a lively vision of everyday women, walking, dancing, socializing, and adorned, beyond the realm of goddesses and queens. Affordable and portable, they spread images of “ordinary” women, reflecting social life rather than state power.

Joanne Aoun's interpretation

Inspired by the Tanagra figurines at the AUB Archaeological Museum and the Louvre Museum, the artist reinterprets their elegant drapery and form, drawing direct links to similar discoveries from the ancient port of Tyre.



Reliefs of Lebanon (Exhibited at the Louvre in 2022)
Kham fabric, screen print.

Entitled **Giving Back Color and Memory** these two colorful “skirt scrolls” represent Aoun’s interpretation of a history of female statues together with that of her own family. Expounding on the meaning of the scrolls Aoun writes:

“These two works stem from my interest in the history of female statues and my feminist commitment. At their heart is the *Lady of Auxerre*, a powerful figure that was lost for many years and gradually stripped of her original colors. Her story touched me deeply, and I wanted to respond by reimagining her in a brighter, more expressive way, using color and symbolic offerings to acknowledge the long period during which she was forgotten.

“A journey to Thasos was an important source of inspiration. Visiting the marble quarries and encountering the many female statues found there left a strong impression. One skirt features portraits inspired by statuettes discovered on the island, while the other, linked to my Greek roots, depicts women from my own family. These familiar faces help create a direct and personal connection with the viewer.

“Like the *Lady of Auxerre*, the Tanagra figurines mark a moment in art history when ordinary women, rather than goddesses, came to the fore. Through screen printing and the use of vivid color, I aim to recall the rich appearance these works once had, and to challenge the idea of ancient sculpture as purely white.

“Presenting these works at the AUB Archaeological Museum is a reminder that placing women at the center of artistic and cultural life remains as important today as ever.”



Joanne Aoun explains how the Tanagras inspired her work.

Meanwhile, alert to the potential of digital illustration, Dr. Panayot installed two holograms flanking Aoun's scrolls, one animating the figure of Tanagra and the other the *Lady of Auxerre*.

Standing front and center in the exhibition, encased within a glass box, the AUB Tanagra contemplates her own image in the form of three, 3-D printed clones painted in original colors, as witnesses to her illustrious past. Their caption reads: "Such reproductions illustrate the potential for digital technology to reanimate ancient art, spark dialogue across collections, and even restore life to lost heritage".



3-D printed Tanagra recaptures original Tanagra colors.



Within its full title “***In the Moment: The Future Within the Past*** -, where *innovation turns memory into presence and the past into potentiality*” Panayot seeks to convey the spirit of best practice 21st century conservation: also explored in two other **Chapter 3 Open Walls** exhibits from the Saloua Raouda Choucair Foundation and the Kamal A. Shair Science Laboratory.



January 21, 2025

WORKSHOP

Meanwhile as a precursor to **Open Walls**, the Museum Children's Program hosted an enormously successful **Tanagra Figurines** live ceramic workshop (see page 39). The children's enthusiastic responses peaked piqued their parents' interest to the extent that they too began to discuss the possibility of their own workshop. Thus, the first ever AUB Museum adult archaeology workshop, **Tanagra Figurines**, took place on January 21st, preceded by a Curator led tour of the **Open Walls** exhibition.



Dr. Nadine Panayot leads a tour of the exhibition.

Some 36 participants, spanning a wide across an age range, from both within and beyond without AUB, worked studiously and diligently under the guidance of Mrs. Sherine Sbeiti and Mr. Elio Haddad. At times the room was so quiet you could hear a pin drop such was their level of concentration. With snacks and refreshments to fuel their energy, they emerged after more than two hours full of enthusiasm and the plea, “Can we have more of these workshops?”



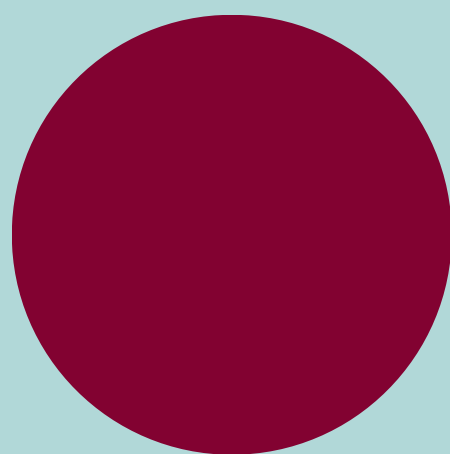
Fabrigo's Sherine Sbeiti and Elio Haddad provide expert assistance.



Proud and happy at the end of the evening.



TRIPS

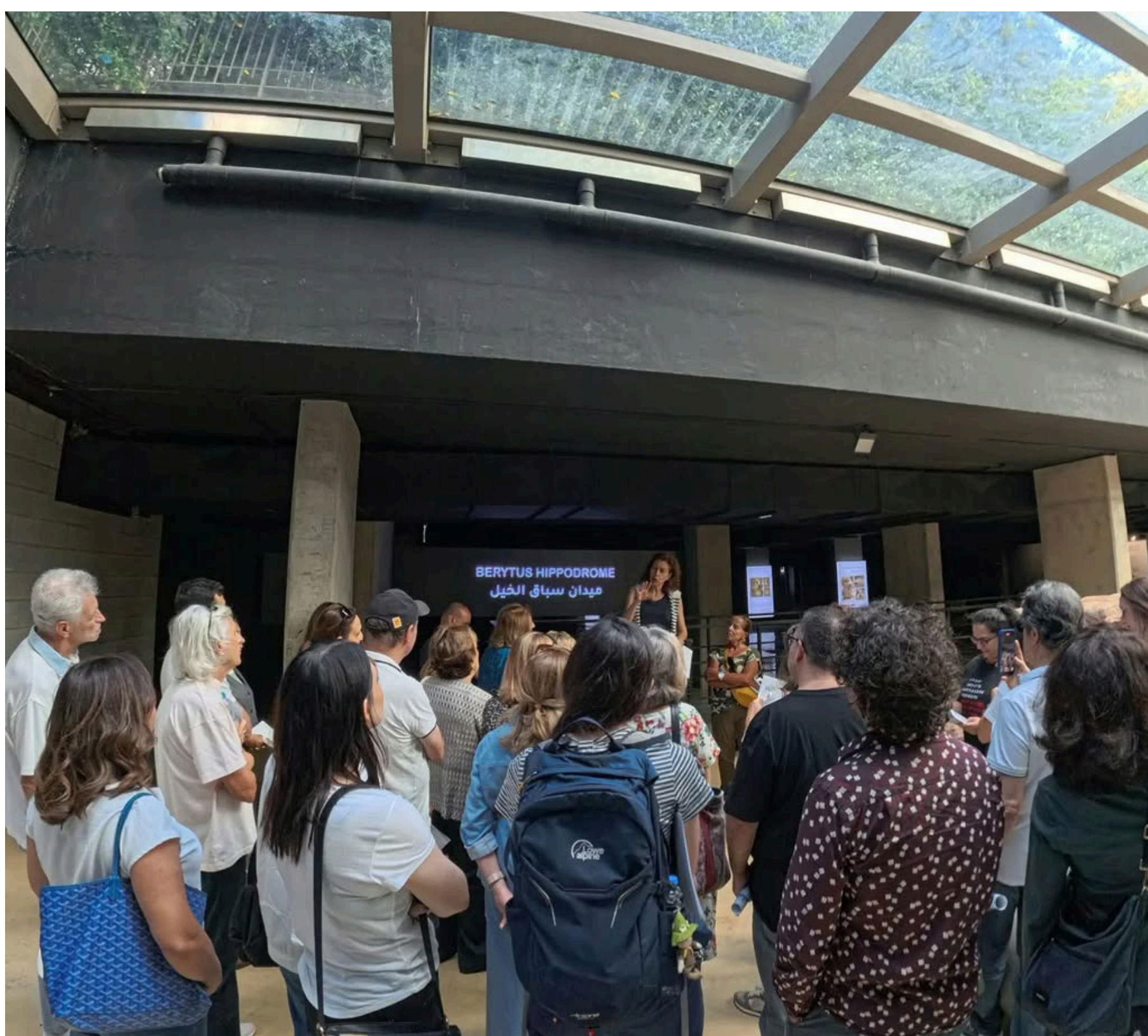


November 1, 2025

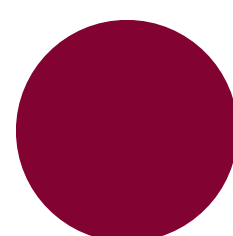
Layered Beirut Curator-led tour

We gathered down town in bright sunshine excited to begin our Beirut exploration, starting with the seldom viewed Beirut Roman Hippodrome and Theatre hidden away in the exclusive, some might say exclusionary, gated community of Wadi Abu Jamil.

Descending a steep staircase, we arrived at a somber, low ceilinged, low lit underground space dominated by the out-of-scale overhead building. Rarely open to the public, we entered the site with a mix of privilege and puzzlement, delighted to be there but confused as to why such an important site remains off limits, hidden from view, its excavation clothed in secrecy.



Consulting our crib sheets about the role and structure of Beirut's Roman Theatre and Hippodrome, and guided by Dr. Panayot, we sought to plot out and imagine these momentous structures, crouched in their oppressive basement, rescued from total oblivion but somehow unmoored from their context:



The Roman Theater of Beirut



Near the heart of Roman Berytus stood a monumental theater that formed part of the city's civic and entertainment center, reflecting Beirut's status as an important Roman colony. Built probably in the 2nd–3rd centuries CE, the theater included semicircular seating (cavea), an orchestra reserved for elite spectators, and an elaborately decorated stage façade.

Excavations revealed several construction phases, with reconstructions continuing into the 4th–5th centuries CE, as well as pavements, stairways, and architectural remains that attest to its former grandeur. The theater hosted plays, musical performances, and public celebrations, serving not only as a space of entertainment but also as a symbol of Roman social order and civic identity, where architecture, spectacle, and political prestige came together at the cultural heart of ancient Beirut.

Beirut Hippodrome



A short distance from the theater lay Beirut's Roman hippodrome, an elongated arena dedicated to chariot racing—the most popular spectacle of the Roman world. Dating to the early 2nd century CE, during the reigns of Trajan and Hadrian, the hippodrome featured a long racing track divided by a central spine decorated with monuments and surrounded by seating for thousands of spectators. Sponsored by local elites, races and public games reinforced civic pride and Beirut's integration into the Roman Empire.



Together with the nearby theater, the hippodrome formed a unified entertainment complex that embodied both the cultural refinement and the collective excitement of Roman urban life, illustrating how public spectacle shaped the identity of Roman Berytus.

It's fair to say the ruins inspired both awe and confusion: imposing remnants and their incongruous presentation.

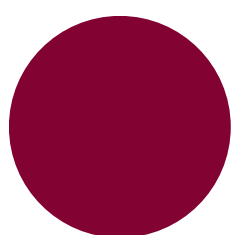


The Phoenico-Persian Quarter



Ascending back into the sunlight helped lift the spirits as we strode towards the Souks and the impressive, brightly lit, readily accessible Phoenico-Persian quarter. Located in what is today Beirut's Foch–Allenby district, it once overlooked the bustling harbor city during the Persian period, when Phoenician towns experienced a renewed prosperity under imperial rule, explained Dr. Panayot.

Organized into housing blocks measuring approximately 48 × 14 meters, the neighborhood followed an orthogonal street plan comparable to those of other Phoenician and Greek cities, a layout that survived for centuries and can still be traced in the alignment of Souk al-Tawileh. Discoveries from the site revealed a vibrant urban life: human clay figurines reflecting local traditions, a standing stone recalling the worship of sacred stones, and Greek pottery attesting to strong commercial and cultural ties between Biruta and the Aegean world. Together, these remains evoke a city shaped by maritime exchange, cultural encounters, and the interconnected networks that defined the eastern Mediterranean in antiquity.



The Corm Foundation

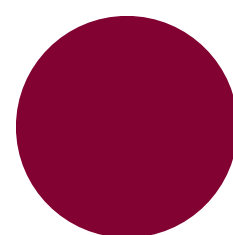


The warm welcome received at the Corm Foundation was equaled by the fascinating tour of the beautifully restored Corm Building, a unique edifice designed by the poet-scholar businessman Charles Corm as his homage to modernism and progress. The tour was eloquently articulated by the Foundation's curator Eliane Bou Dagher who explained The Foundation's Restoration, Mission, and Vision.



Scholar, innovator, and visionary, Corm imported the first Ford motorcars into Lebanon.

As a man who spent decades researching and writing about Phoenician culture and its achievements, Corm was simultaneously an entrepreneur and innovator, much in the way he perceived his country's ancestors. The decades old Corm archives, meticulously maintained by his sons Hiram and David, and latterly in cooperation with scholars from St. Joseph University, hold a wealth of information about Lebanon and its history.



Corm's celebration of Phoenician culture is summarized in his book "6000 Years of Peaceful Contributions to Mankind" (from the original "6000 ans de Génie Pacifique au Service de l'Humanité") by Editions de la Revue Phénicienne, the publishing house started by Corm and later maintained by his sons.

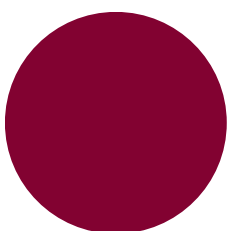


Corm Foundation Curator Eliane Bou Dagher outlines Charles Corm's philosophy.

Spending time with the Corm family in the Foundation's enchanting garden brought our tour to a soothing conclusion. We left happy and satisfied at the end of this, our first Beirut excursion.



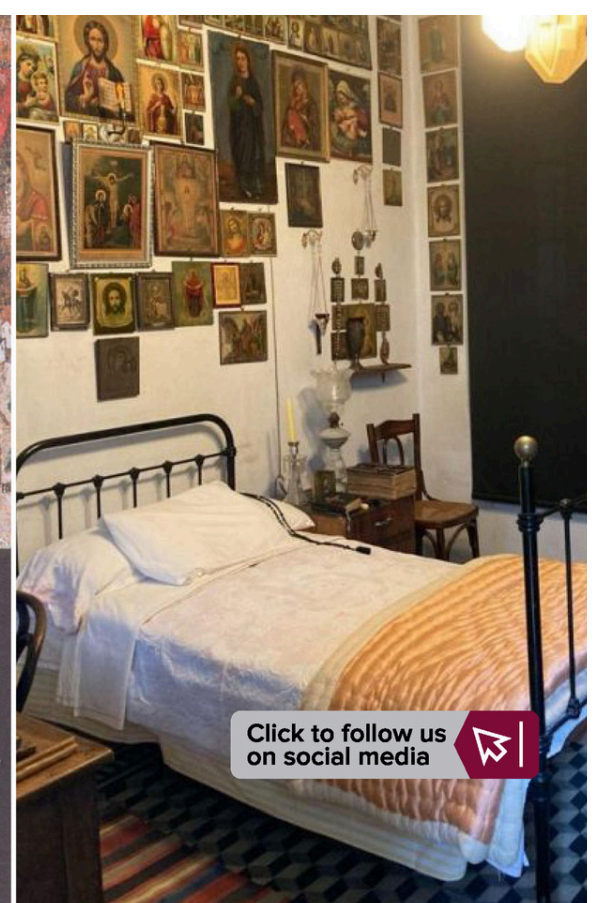
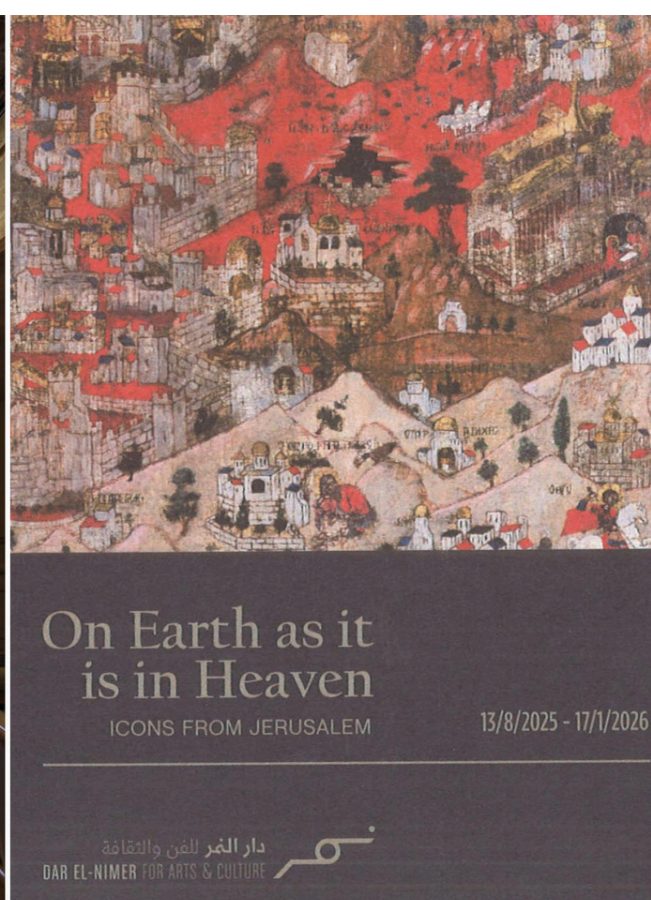
The iconic Corm Foundation Building and newly restored garden were a pleasure to behold.



December 13, 2025

Layered Beirut (2) Curator-led tour

On a crisp December morning, participants gathered for a Christmas stroll through Beirut, a cultural journey through the city's layered history, spirituality, and artistic heritage. The walk offered a rare opportunity to experience Beirut through three remarkable sites, each revealing a different dimension of the city's memory: archaeological, artistic, and devotional.



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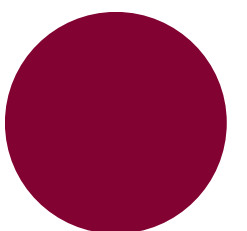


First Stop: Saint George Greek Orthodox Cathedral

The stroll began in the heart of Downtown Beirut at **Saint George Greek Orthodox Cathedral**, a site whose history unfolds through successive architectural transformations spanning more than fifteen centuries.



Dr. Panayot begins the journey leading through layers of time.



Restoration work on the Cathedral following over a decade of damage and neglect during Lebanon's civil war began with investigations led by Dr. Leila Badre in 1993, and conducted by Dr. Panayot (1994-95), followed by Ms. Rita Kalindjian (1995-1996 & 2000-2001). These required the temporary removal of three successive altars in order to search for the continuation of an ancient mosaic floor and the apse believed to belong to the early Anastasis Church. Although these elements were ultimately destroyed by later construction phases, the research allowed scholars to reconstruct the remarkable evolution of Beirut's earliest cathedral.

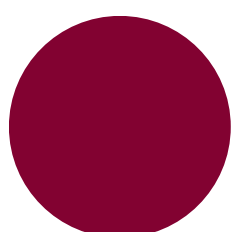


Each new layer tells its own story.

A short film presented on site guided visitors through the cathedral's historical phases:

Phase I — 5th Century

A mosaic floor decorated with ivy leaves reveals the presence of a Byzantine church, most likely the Anastasis Church. This early sanctuary was destroyed by the devastating earthquake of **551**, which ravaged Beirut entirely.



Phase II — 12th–13th Centuries

Medieval architectural remains — semi-circular apses and pillars adorned with frescoes — attest to the construction of a new church during the Crusader period.

In **1660**, the Chevalier d'Arvieux described “a beautiful church dedicated to St George, seat of the Orthodox Archdiocese.”

An earthquake in **1759** severely damaged this medieval structure, leading to its reconstruction.



Medieval Pillars adorned with frescoes.

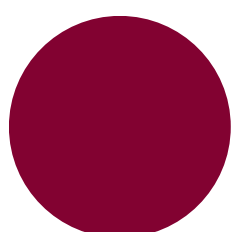
Phase III — 1764

A new cathedral was built on a larger plan with a single nave and vaulted ceiling, centered around one altar dedicated to Saint George. Completed in **1767**, the structure soon suffered a collapse due to insufficient structural support.

Phase IV — 1772

The cathedral was rebuilt once again, this time adopting a cruciform plan with three naves. Major additions included:

- a northern portico and western enlargement,
- a bell tower,
- a gilded wooden iconostasis donated by Younis N. al Gebeily (Abou Askar),
- the repositioning of the Saint George altar,
- and the consecration of two additional altars dedicated to **Saint Elie** and **Saint Nicolas**.





The gilded wooden iconostasis donated by Younis al Gebeily.

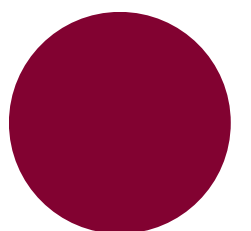
Phase V — 1783

Further modifications brought the cathedral close to its present appearance, including a western narthex and enlargement of the central apse while maintaining the axis of Saint George's altar.

Phase VI — 1910

The last major alterations added a southern portico, extended the structure westward, relocated the bell tower to the southeast, and enriched the interior with frescoes while preserving the three altars.

The cathedral endured abandonment and vandalism during the Lebanese Civil War (1975) before being carefully restored under the patronage of Archbishop Elias Audi, restoring both its architectural integrity and spiritual presence. Years of excavation slowly uncovered the forgotten remains beneath the cathedral, while conservation efforts patiently restored their fragile traces. From these discoveries emerged a new space of memory: Beirut's first museum crypt, the first in Lebanon, where the past could finally be experienced by the public.





Exploring St. George Cathedral’s Crypt Museum.



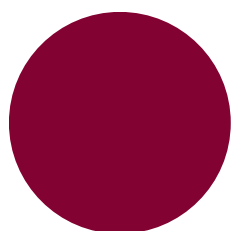
Precious artifacts in the Crypt Museum.

Second Stop: Dar El-Nimer for Arts and Culture: “On Earth as It Is in Heaven”

The stroll continued at **Dar El-Nimer**, where participants visited the exhibition ***On Earth as It Is in Heaven***, dedicated to Levantine and Jerusalemite icons, paintings, and devotional objects.



From the outset Professor Frances captures everyone's full attention.



The visit to the exhibition was guided by Professor Ricco Frances, who captivated attendees with his passion and insight. Rather than simply describing each scene, he invited participants to learn how to read an icon, revealing its symbolism, theology, and visual language. Through light, gesture, and composition, icons emerged not as static images but as living narratives.

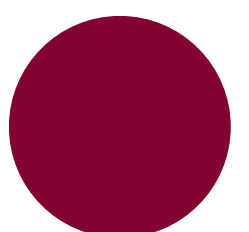


Professor Frances explains how to read the icons.

The exhibition highlights the vibrant artistic movement that flourished in Jerusalem, where generations of Palestinian artisans specialized in icon painting, church decoration, and restoration. During this period, the Holy Land functioned not only as a spiritual destination for followers of the three monotheistic religions but also as a dynamic artistic center.



Icons from Jerusalem the 'dynamic artistic center'.



The Jerusalem School developed a distinctive visual language, different from Byzantine, Greek, or Aleppine traditions. Workshops produced icons distributed throughout churches across the Arab Levant, while pilgrims carried devotional souvenirs back to their homelands. Among the most remarkable works are the Proskynetaria, commemorative maps of Jerusalem extensively studied by Dr. Mahmoud Zibawi. Richly detailed, these works combine topographical representation with biblical narratives and saintly imagery, reflecting both devotion and artistic innovation.



Historic landscape painting.

The group was deeply mesmerized by Professor Frances' communicative talent and generous spirit, and many participants, particularly the ladies in attendance, were enchanted by the clarity and enthusiasm with which he brought these works to life.



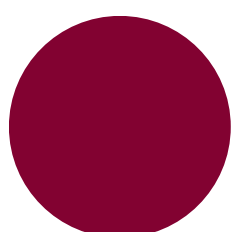
Enchanted by Professor Frances' clarity and enthusiasm.

Final Stop: The Restless Prayer Monastery (Sioufi, Ashrafieh)

The final stop brought participants to an unexpected treasure nestled in Ashrafieh: the newly opened Byzantine museum at the Orthodox Convent of Notre Dame de la Présentation (Saydé). Guided by Father Elias Farah, an extraordinary storyteller, visitors discovered the origins of the convent and the spiritual movement that gave birth to it.



Father Elias Farah, the extraordinary storyteller.



The story begins in 1888, when a deeply devout young woman, Catherine Karkabi, devoted seven years to continuous prayer from her home in Khandak el Ghamik. Soon joined by other women, the group's spiritual life inspired the construction of a convent following a miraculous healing experienced by Dimitri Andraos Gholam, husband of Saada Abourrous.

In 1909, foundations were laid for what became known as "*the house of the virgins who never sleep*," named after the sisters' continuous prayer cycles, maintained round the clock beneath an icon of the Virgin. The convent received its present name in 1935.



The convent's peaceful setting.

The museum preserves a remarkable collection:

- handwritten Gospels from the 18th and 19th centuries,
- Byzantine crosses and liturgical vessels,
- icons and symbolic ostrich eggs,
- archives and correspondence documenting connections with Moscow, Jerusalem, and the Ottoman capital.



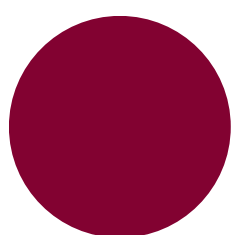
Handwritten gospels with embossed bookbindings.

At the heart of the visit stands the preserved room of Mother Catherine, founder and first superior, whose memory remains central to the convent's identity.

Through vivid anecdotes, from famine relief offered to all communities in 1915 to stories of miraculous icons, Father Farah brought the site's living heritage to life.

Today, although only five nuns remain, the convent's legacy endures through the museum initiative launched by Liliane Chammas and Robert Matta, and beautifully designed by Jean-Louis Mainguy.

More than a seasonal outing, a Christmas stroll through Beirut revealed the city as a palimpsest of faith, resilience, and artistic exchange. From Byzantine mosaics to Jerusalemite icons and monastic archives, the walk traced Beirut's capacity to preserve memory while continually reinventing itself.



February 4-7, 2026

Trip to Cairo of the Pharoahs

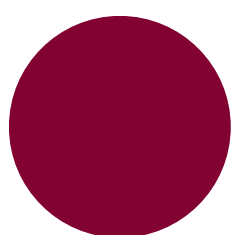
Karl Fadel, the newest member of the Society of Friends of the AUB Archaeological Museum, shares his impressions of both the trip and of getting to know the Society's seasoned travellers.



**“First came Egypt, then came history.”
— Naguib Mahfouz**

There are cities that you visit, and then there are cities that enter you quietly and rearrange something inside. Cairo belongs firmly to the latter category. It is not simply a destination layered with monuments and museums; it is a living palimpsest of civilizations, faiths, and chaotic daily life unfolding in full intensity.

The recent trip organized by the Archaeological Museum of the American University of Beirut was, in many ways, what one would expect of such a historic metropolis: dense with information, overwhelming in historical context, and rich with the tapestry of millennia of civilizations. But Cairo was also something far more personal and far more transformative.



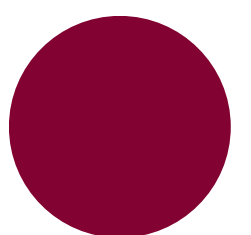
We began with the newly constructed Grand Egyptian Museum, which is finally able to house a portion of the immense collection of archaeological artifacts from Egypt's Pharaonic period. The museum itself is an architectural statement: monumental yet restrained. It does not overwhelm the artifacts; rather, it frames them. The vast entrance hall, anchored by the monumental sculpture of Ramses II, prepares the visitor for a journey not only through objects but through epochs.



Ramses II presides over GEM's entrance.

The area consecrated to Tutankhamun alone is worth the trip. To see his everyday toys, his chariot, his clothes, his gloves and shoes is almost intimate. The craftsmanship is, of course, astonishing: gold hammered into delicate forms, inlays of semi-precious stones, ritual objects that are at once symbolic and practical. The experience becomes even more striking when encountering the layers of his burial: the three sarcophagi and the nested shrines that enclosed them, each covered in hieroglyphs and sacred imagery, fitted one inside the other like a Russian doll designed to protect the king in eternity. And then, finally, seeing the funerary mask itself, with its exquisite details, is simply jaw-dropping.

Other artifacts were equally memorable: the androgynous statue of Akhenaten, reflecting the artistic and religious revolution of his reign; the visible evolution of artistic styles during the Ptolemaic period; and the remarkable reconstruction of the ceremonial solar boat that had been buried at the base of the pyramid.





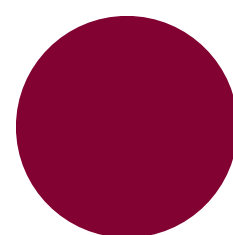
Miraculously preserved and skillfully excavated sacred barge.

Our local guide played a vital role in bringing this world to life. A monument without narrative is impressive; a monument with narrative becomes alive. She did not simply recite dates or dynasties. She translated gestures carved in stone, explained the political theology of divine kingship, described daily life along the Nile, and helped us understand that these monuments were not abstractions but human projects conceived and executed within a complex society. Walking through the museum galleries, she guided us through the succession of dynasties, the most important pharaohs, and the more eccentric figures who shaped the civilization.

The museum's chronological progression reinforced this sense of continuity and change. Moving from the Old Kingdom to the Middle and New Kingdoms, one observes subtle alterations in style, shifts in emphasis, and refinements in technique. At the same time, the architecture of the museum constantly reconnects the visitor with the landscape outside: as one moves from gallery to gallery, the distant view of the Giza pyramids occasionally reappears, a quiet reminder that the objects inside were created around the very monuments that still stand on the horizon.



The group: “as surprising as the pyramids”.



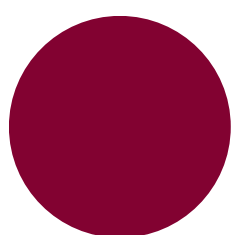
And yet our understanding did not stop there. What made this journey particularly rich was the presence of the curator of the AUB Archaeological Museum. Nadine Panayot's role was less about guiding us physically through the sites and more about framing what we were seeing within a broader historical and intellectual perspective. She connected Egypt to the wider currents of Mediterranean and Near Eastern history. She also drew our attention to recurring artistic patterns. The act of repetition that appears throughout Egyptian painting and sculpture reflects a profound understanding of patience: in farming, in craftsmanship, and in construction. Everything took time. The repetition of small gestures, carefully executed over generations, eventually produced greatness. Finally, she highlighted the, often overlooked, role of women in the early phases of civilization, adding an important dimension to the narrative of fertility, lineage, and divinity.

Of course, one cannot speak of Cairo without speaking of the pyramids. And yet, how does one write about structures that have been described for millennia?

The Great Pyramid of Giza rises from the plateau with an authority that no photograph can prepare you for. Standing before it, you become acutely aware of scale and are confronted with the ambition of a civilization that conceived eternity as architecture nearly five thousand years ago.

But equally fascinating was our visit to Saqqara. The pyramids there predate those of Giza by roughly a century and reveal the evolutionary process that ultimately led to the monumental perfection of the later pyramids.

Designed by the architect Imhotep, the Step Pyramid represents a remarkable leap in architectural experimentation: a series of mastabas stacked one above the other, gradually reaching toward the sky.





The Great Pyramid of Giza.



The Step Pyramid.

The surrounding complex is equally compelling. Courtyards, ceremonial temples, and symbolic structures once formed a sacred landscape dedicated to the king's passage into the afterlife. Walking through the site, one can almost sense the moment of experimentation, the stage at which Egyptian builders were discovering how to translate religious belief into monumental form. In many ways, Saqqara is the laboratory that made Giza possible.



Saqqara the laboratory that made Giza possible.

Outside the monumental era of Pharaonic Egypt, present-day Cairo itself offered another layer of richness. In the downtown area, architectural diversity speaks of centuries of layered faiths and communities. Coptic churches, Islamic mosques, narrow alleys, and wooden mashrabiyyas coexist in a dense urban fabric that resists simplification. Walking through these neighborhoods, you feel almost as though you are living inside a story by Naguib Mahfouz, surrounded by his characters, secondary plots, and the gentle humor of daily life. The past does not feel distant. You hear it in the call to prayer echoing through the streets, as well as in the songs of Umm Kulthum drifting from cafés. You see it in the small trinkets sold alongside beautiful traditional crafts. Cairo is a testament to continuity through adaptation.

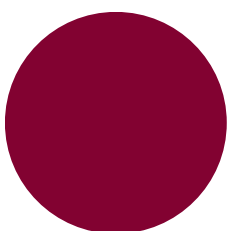


Walking in the footsteps of Naguib Mahfouz.

And yet, as profound as the monuments and museums were, what truly surprised me was the human dimension of the journey.



Egyptian tomb mural of workers in procession.



I expected beauty and majesty, but what truly impressed me was the group. This collective of sweet (and sometimes sharp-tongued) ladies was as surprising as the pyramids themselves, as astonishing as Tutankhamun's treasures, and as varied as Old Cairo's architectural richness. The way they cared for one another, constantly ensuring that no one was lost or left behind, was heartening.

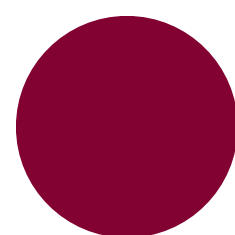


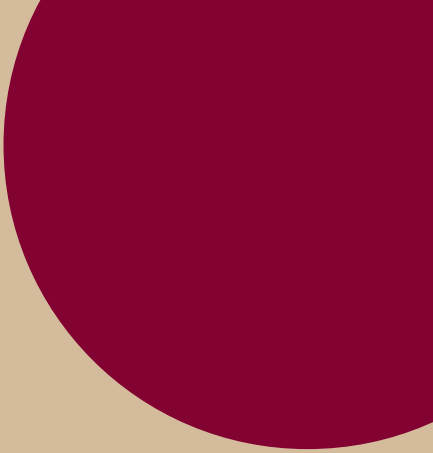
Caring, sharing, sparring, and a pleasure to know.

There is something about traveling through deep history together that accelerates connection. Between visits, we shared meals, exchanged reflections, and allowed ourselves to be vulnerable in the face of time's immensity. Dark humor balanced the reverence; empathy softened the intellectual rigor. It was a group dynamic as textured as the relief carvings we admired.

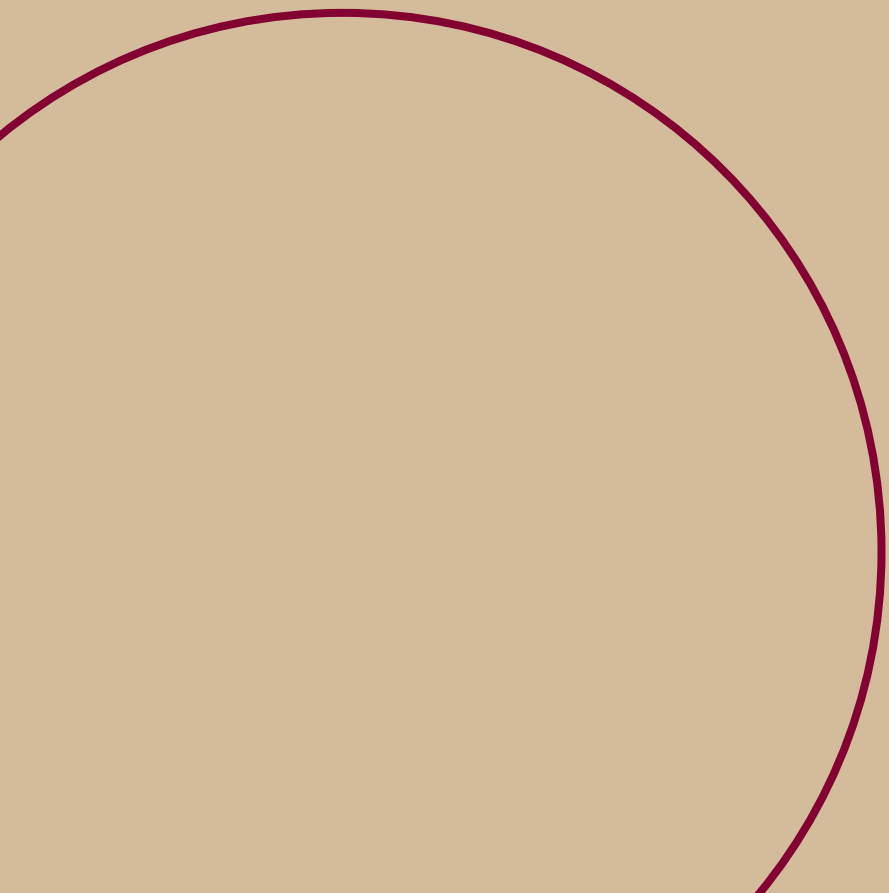
Standing before monuments designed to immortalize rulers, we were reminded of the fragility and preciousness of ordinary human bonds. The pyramids were built to endure forever; our conversations have already faded into oblivion. And maybe, that's not so bad after all.

Photos by Karl Fadel.





NEW INITIATIVES AND COLLABORATIONS

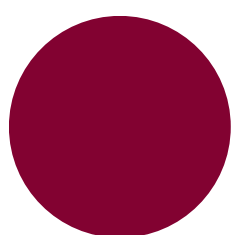


Bringing Collections to Life: Interdisciplinary Teaching through the Museum

Curator Dr. Nadine Panayot outlines how the AUB Museum is providing a novel teaching opportunity.

A fragment of pottery, an archaic surgical instrument, or a piece of ancient jewelry: what if these objects could speak, not only about the past, but directly to the present? At the Archaeological Museum of AUB, they do.

Over the past three years, the museum has evolved into more than a place of preservation. It has become a space for intellectual encounters, where students question, debate, and create, by directly engaging with archaeological objects as sources of knowledge. The collection is no longer static; it is animated, dynamic, and embedded in the university's teaching.

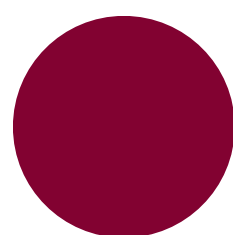


This transformation has taken shape through a series of collaborations with faculty across disciplines. By integrating museum objects into course content, professors from medicine, anthropology, design, and architecture have turned the collection into a communal academic resource. As a guest lecturer in these courses, I have observed the power of objects trigger unexpected connections and open new ways of thinking beyond traditional classroom boundaries.

In Fall 2025, this approach was particularly apparent with medical students assessing antique medical instruments, in collaboration with Dr. Joelle Abi Rached, and in **Life and Death (MED1)**, with Dr. Beatrice Khater. Here, students engage with ancient surgical tools and funerary artifacts not as distant relics, but as entry points into the history of care, the body, and mortality. These encounters prompt reflection on how medical knowledge evolves, not only through scientific advancement, but also through cultural, social, and ethical frameworks that continue to shape our understanding today.

This engagement with material culture also opens onto broader socio-political questions. In Spring 2024, **Matriarchal Societies (SOAN 221)**, developed with Dr. Nikolas Kosmatopoulos, Professor of Political Anthropology, invites students to confront issues of gender, power, and representation through the lens of archaeological evidence. Figurines, domestic objects, and symbolic artifacts become more than historical remnants, they act as catalysts for debate. Through them, students are encouraged to question dominant narratives, unpack underlying assumptions, and imagine alternative interpretations rooted in the material record.

This approach is not limited to historical or theoretical inquiry, it also extends into creative practice. In Fall 2024, **Contemporary Jewelry Design**, led by Ms. Ghita Abi Hanna, invites students to draw inspiration from ancient adornment. By studying pieces from the museum's collection, students develop contemporary designs that reinterpret traditional forms and techniques. In this way, the past becomes a resource for innovation, stimulating a meaningful exchange between heritage and contemporary creation.



Similarly, **Women through the Ages (MED1)**, developed with Dr. Beatrice Khater in Fall 2023, demonstrates how objects can anchor discussions on women's roles and representations across time. Working with tangible artifacts allows students to approach complex and often fragmented histories in a more immediate and nuanced way.



Museum as a learning space.

Earlier iterations of this pedagogical model were experimented within **A Visual Exploration of the Museum through Counter-Fiction as a Narrative (ARCH 018)**, developed with Mohammad Kanaan in 2023. In this course, Architecture and Design students engaged with the collection through speculative storytelling, creating alternative narratives that challenge traditional modes of museum interpretation.

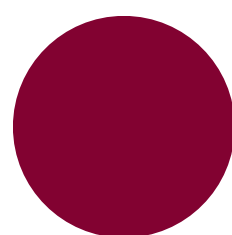
During a **Gendered Narratives in History** workshop facilitated by Dr. Nadine Panayot, participants from AUB-MEPI scholarship program explored depictions ranging from ancient fertility figurines to warrior roles, gaining valuable insights into the portrayal of women throughout history. The discussion delved into the transition from possible past societies centered around females to patriarchal structures, and how religion influenced the evolution of gender roles.



Dr. Panayot imparts her knowledge of gendered narratives throughout history.

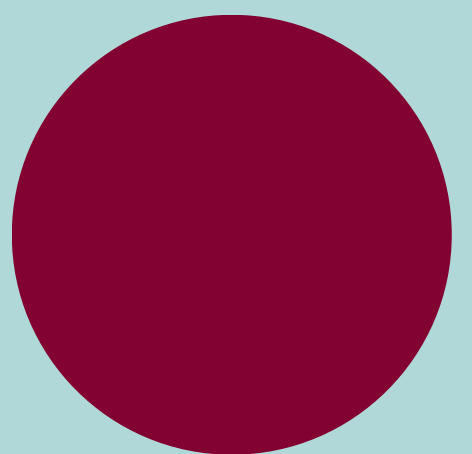
What emerges from these initiatives is a fundamental rethinking of the museum's role within the university. No longer a silent repository, it becomes a space for dialogue—where disciplines intersect, where questions are raised rather than settled, and where objects actively help generate new ways of thinking.

For students, this approach cultivates critical thinking, creativity, and a deeper engagement with both their field of study and the wider cultural context. For faculty, it creates meaningful opportunities for collaboration and innovation in teaching. And for the museum, it affirms its place as an active, evolving force within academic life, not simply supporting learning, but helping to reshape it.





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Founded in 1979 to encourage public support and use of the museum, members in the Society participate in many activities including lectures, children's programs, cultural trips, and excursions. All society members receive a subscription to the Museum Newsletter.

Dear Friends of the AUB Archaeological Museum

A new academic year has begun and we have resumed our activities after a quiet summertime break.

It's time to renew your memberships for 2025-2026!

We extend our heartfelt appreciation for your unwavering support.

Your membership enables us to offer a rich program of lectures, exhibitions, and cultural trips — and we have many exciting activities ahead that we look forward to sharing with you.

As part of our efforts to make membership contributions easier, we've now introduced a direct online payment option. you can do so easily by selecting the category that suits you best and following the relevant link below.

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