



# Conservation and Management Plan for Saint Hilarion Monastery at Tell Umm Amer



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# *Foreword*

On behalf of the Palestinian people and with great pleasure, I present the Conservation Management Plan for the Monastery of Saint Hilarion at the Tell Umm Amer archaeological Site in Nuseirat, Gaza Strip. Tell Umm Amer is on Palestine's Tentative List for cultural and natural Sites of potential "Outstanding Universal Value" (OUV). The monastery was an important center of early missionary work in the Gaza region, and its Roman baths, mosaics, and multi-layer church complex make it a world-class destination for tourism, archaeology, and education.

This Conservation and Management Plan for the Monastery of Saint Hilarion at the Tell Umm Amer Site in Nuseirat is introduced at a time of devastating violence and destruction. Many of Gaza's cultural heritage sites and treasures have been looted, damaged, or destroyed by Israeli occupation forces. The preparation of this Plan is a response to this destruction and a message that Palestinian are determined to protect our heritage and identity on this land. The Plan is an important tool for the protection of this Site, which is on Palestine's Tentative List for cultural and natural sites of potential "Outstanding Universal Value" (OUV). The monastery was an important center of early missionary work in the Gaza region, and its Roman baths, mosaics, and multi-layer church complex make it a world-class destination for tourism, archaeology, and education.

This Conservation Management Plan aims to protect and preserve the Outstanding Universal Value of the Site in a sustainable and respectful manner that will enable the local community as well as international visitors to enjoy its cultural richness. Developing this document is truly a milestone that shall ensure the sustainable, permanent protection of the Site and its OUV for future generations and all of humanity. The protection strategies and policies in this document were developed in accordance with extensive consultations with stakeholders and the public to ensure the special value of the Site is transmitted in a holistic way. Safeguarding the Site is our shared responsibility as a community. We must work together to implement the policies and deliver the actions and activities provided in this plan. I wish to express my deepest pride and gratitude to the local practitioners who collaborated to produce this document. I am confident it will prove to be an invaluable management tool for everyone involved in the ongoing conservation and management of this unique and special place. Rula Ma'ayah Minister of Tourism and Antiquities

Rula Ma'ayah  
Minister of Tourism and Antiquities

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# *Executive Summary*

Saint Hilarion Monastery at the archaeological Site of Tell Umm Amer in Gaza (the Site) is on the Tentative List of Palestinian heritage sites of Outstanding Universal Values and has the potential to be inscribed on the World Heritage List in the near future. This Conservation and Management Plan analyses its cultural significance and provides policies and strategies to guide future management, use, conservation activities, and interventions at the Site.

The statement of significance included in Chapter Two concludes that the Site has a universal significance due to being one of the earliest known Christian monasteries and certainly the most complex. The architecture of the chapels, the organized complexity of the baths and other amenities, and the beautiful mosaics bear witness to a well-organized society with excellent artisans of their time capable of exploiting local materials.

The ruins of Saint Hilarion Monastery are the most outstanding cultural heritage site in the Gaza Strip, Palestine. It bears witness to the importance of Gaza as a port in antiquity and as a major transit hub to and from the Terra Santa. This fascinating historical Site is also linked with Saint Jerome, a contemporary saint who translated the Bible into Latin (Miniac 1992) and wrote a biography of Saint Hilarion.

This Conservation and Management Plan has been prepared under the direct guidance of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and in cooperation with the PUI and personnel of the MoLG, MoTA, and Nuseirat Municipality in Gaza. The Plan provides guidance for future interventions at the Site and its surrounding and proposes activities, policies, and by-laws that shall contribute to conserving the Site and developing it for the benefit of the local community and to enrich the experience of visitors.

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## *List of Abbreviations*

<b>CMP</b>	Conservation Management Plan
<b>MoTA</b>	Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities
<b>OUV</b>	Outstanding Universal Value
<b>SMC</b>	Site Management Committee
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>NM</b>	Nuseirat Municipality
<b>MoLG</b>	Ministry of Local Government
<b>CCHP</b>	Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation
<b>PUI</b>	Première Urgence Internationale
<b>AFD</b>	Agence Francaise de Developpement
<b>NGOs</b>	Non-governmental Organization
<b>Ebaf</b>	École Biblique et Archéologique Française
<b>INP</b>	Institut National du Patrimoine
<b>INSA</b>	Institut National des Sciences Appliquées
<b>MoENR</b>	Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources
<b>WMF</b>	World Monuments Fund

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# *Section 1*

# *Chapter 1: Introduction*

Saint Hilarion Monastery, located at the Tell Umm Amer archaeological Site in Gaza, was listed on Palestine's Tentative List for cultural and natural sites of potential OUV in 2012. The Site "bears outstanding testimony to the diversity of exceptional historical, religious, and cultural values" (UNESCO 2012). The Site is tangibly associated with the start of monastic desert centers in Palestine during the Byzantine period (Downey 1963; Sadeq 2000). Tell Umm Amer was a center of the Christian community in Gaza, seemingly isolated in the desert but actually at a crucial crossroads of communication and human affairs (Taha 2017).

Tell Umm Amer appears on the Madaba map as Tabatha, the name used during the Byzantine era and up to the early Islamic period (400-670AD). It had three churches, a crypt, four baptisteries, cemetery, and a refectory. The Site featured infrastructure and facilities including water cisterns, clay ovens, and drainage channels. Its floors were partially paved with limestone, marble tiles, and colored mosaics with plant and animal scenes. An important fifth-century mosaic was laid on the floor of what was probably a chapel. The floors also include a Greek inscription decorated with circular motifs. The Site was equipped with baths consisting of Frigidarium, Tepidarium, and Caldarium halls. The wide halls ensured the baths could serve the pilgrims and merchants crossing the Holy Land from Egypt to the Fertile Crescent through the main route of Via Maris.

Tell Umm Amer (Tabatha) was the birthplace of Saint Hilarion, who received his education in Alexandria then traveled to Antonius in the desert for further instruction. He founded his eponymous monastery by the beginning of the fourth century and is considered the founder of monastic life in Palestine and Israel (Coleiro 1957).

## **1.1 Role of the Conservation Management Plan**

The Conservation and Management Plan aims to respect, enhance, and sustainably develop our cultural heritage at this unique and important Site. The rehabilitation of the Site and its preservation, enhancement, and promotion require thoughtful and efficient planning and management that require collaboration among the different bodies involved, including civil society and representatives of the local community.

The main purpose of this Plan is to sustain and increase the OUV of the Site by enhancing its cultural resources. The Plan will describe the extent and diversity of the key features, characteristics and attributes of the Site in order to identify and highlight the challenges facing the Site and provide a responsive and comprehensive framework for specific management requirements and tools designed to protect and conserve the Site.

This Conservation and Management Plan aims to preserve the Site, manage current activities, and provide a vision to ensure its future development, use, and visitation. CCHP establish a multidisciplinary technical team composed of national and international experts in world heritage, cultural heritage, archaeology, architecture, heritage management, urban planning, and ethno-sociology. This team worked together to develop this Conservation and Management Plan, pursuing an inclusive approach to ensure the participation of all relevant stakeholders and actors in all phases of preparation and development.

Their aims include:

1. Preparing a Conservation and Management plan according to the UNESCO Management guidelines for World Cultural Heritage Sites in line with the provisions of international Charters and Conventions
2. Providing a detailed work plan/methodology/CMP structure while considering potential risks and mitigations
3. Collecting and analysing data and conducting surveys to identify the Site's value, cultural significance, physical attributes and conditions of integrity and authenticity
4. Documenting the property (including its description and history), defining the boundaries of the Site/territorial framework. Drafting and producing thematic and analytical maps, and Preparing a State of Conservation report for the Site
5. Providing a clear description of the property and its potential Outstanding Universal Value and related attributes
6. Identifying and highlighting challenges facing the Site, including development projects, urban pressure, climate conditions, various types of conflict, and management challenges, and prepare a risk assessment report, including environmental and social risks and mitigation measures

7. Analysing the current effective Institutional and Legal framework on the Site
8. Preparing operational recommendations for construction works to protect the Site without compromising its cultural heritage significance
9. Establishing a management system and structure and preparing a responsive and comprehensive framework for specific management requirements
10. Setting up strategies for monitoring and maintenance
11. Facilitating the formation of a steering committee and a technical committee for the CMP
12. Conducting workshops and meetings with stakeholders, working teams, the MoTA, etc.

## **1.2 The Structure of the Plan**

The CMP provides a framework for the effective management of the World Heritage Site based on a comprehensive and well-elaborated structure outlined in the following sections.

Section 1 contains a description of the Site and its history, religious significance and relation to monasticism in Gaza (see Annex 1). It explains the political context of the Site and the attributes of OUV under which the Site was included on UNESCO's Tentative List to join the official ranks of World Heritage Sites.

Section 2 assesses the conditions of the Site and analyses its components and assets. It identifies the main issues affecting different elements of the Site and opportunities that can be further developed to enhance and conserve the Site. The section addresses the current planning and legal framework as well as the institutional framework and the various stakeholders involved in managing the Site.

Section 3 sets out a series of themes and corresponding objectives and draws diverse strategic policies and actions into a coherent framework designed to ensure the protection of the Site in a way that meets international commitments and helps to align the actions of all parties involved in the management process. An action plan for the implementation of the objectives is then illustrated. The actions are developed according to the needs of the users of the Site and will ultimately work towards preserving its OUV and other related values. This section also contains details on the administrative structure and specifies the approach of maintaining and monitoring the Site.

# *Chapter 2 : Presentation of the site*

Saint Hilarion Monastery in Gaza, located in the Tell Umm Amer Site, is a historically significant cultural heritage site that holds remnants of a Byzantine-era monastery and church complex dedicated to Saint Hilarion, a Christian hermit and ascetic who lived during the 4th century AD. The Site is a testament to the rich history of early Christian monasticism in the region (Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky 2000). It serves as a reminder of the spiritual and architectural legacy of the Byzantine era and provides a glimpse into the life and teachings of Saint Hilarion, making it a valuable destination for history enthusiasts and pilgrims alike (Downey 1963; Sadeq 2000). This chapter sheds light on the Site's history, attributes, fabric, social and religious context, and exceptional cultural significance that transcends national boundaries.

## **2.1 Contextual State**

The contextual state of the archaeological Site of Tell Umm Amer covers several components, including its location, history of excavation and restoration, historical relevance, and archaeological context. Such information is necessary to assess the Site as a cultural resources of potential world heritage value. Saint Hilarion is the oldest monastery in Palestine and best-preserved monasteries in Gaza. It illustrates the evolution of monasticism in the region, as it represents the legacy of St. Hilarion, whose fame goes beyond Gaza to the whole Mediterranean basin. This document provides an assessment of the state of conservation and the need to preserve the Site's integrity and authenticity and its archaeological, historical, cultural, and religious value, a crucial step to determine the Site's management plan.

### **2.1.1 History of the Site**

Preliminary research into the Site's location, identification, exploration, excavation, and restoration is required to provide an assessment of its cultural-resource potential for world heritage status. A detailed chronology of historical and religious events shows the history of the Site from its inception in the 4th century AD to its abandonment in the 8th century AD.

The Site is located on the coast in Nuseirat village 8.5 km south of Gaza City. Tell Umm Amer is identified with ancient Tabatha, mentioned in the Madaba map (Donner 1995) and other sources such as Stark and Karl 1852; Meyer and Martin 1907; Glucker 1987; and White 1998. The excavation revealed remains of a monastery from the early Byzantine and early Islamic periods (340-670 AD). The monastery consists of two churches, a baptismal hall, an audience hall, a dining room, water cisterns, a clay oven, drainage channels and a cemetery. The building was paved with limestone and colored mosaics. The mosaic floor includes a Greek inscription mentioning Saint Hilarion, the founder of monasticism in Palestine. The monastery was equipped with a hostel and baths consisting of Frigidarium, Tepidarium and Caldarium halls serving pilgrims and merchants passing from Egypt to Palestine.

Tell Umm Amer was listed in 2005 in the Inventory of Cultural and Natural Heritage Sites of Potential Outstanding Universal Value in Palestine as a cultural heritage site that met criteria II, III and VI (Taha, 2005/2009). The history of the Site is shown **Table 1** below:

<b>Period / Date (AD)</b>	<b>Event or intervention</b>
c. 291-292	Birth of Hilarion in Tabatha
303-306	Persecution of Christians under Emperor Diocletian
c. 306-310	Hilarion retires to a hut in the desert near Tabatha (on the coastal dune)
<b>c. 306-361</b>	<b>Hilarion founds a hermitage and develops a community. Construction of a primitive mud-brick building that encompasses the hermit's hut or cell and houses the first community (Level 8)</b>
<b>c. 310</b>	Hilarion builds himself a small cell.

Period / Date (AD)	Event or intervention
313	Edict of Milan marks the tolerance of Christianity in the Roman Empire and the end of persecution
c. 356	Death of Anthony, founder of monasticism in Egypt, who had influenced Hilarion
c. 361	Departure of Hilarion for Egypt to visit the tomb of Anthony
c. 363	Hilarion stayed in Egypt until 363, he then went to Libya and then the same year he left for Sicily.
c.365	Hesychius finds Hilarion in Sicily. He does not wish to return to his monastery and they leave for Epidaurus in Dalmatia.
c. 366	Hilarion goes to Cyprus where he stays two years near Paphos
c. 371	Death of Hilarion who had chosen Hesychius, then absent, as his heir. Following his wishes, Hilarion is buried in the garden of his last Cypriot home.
c. 372	Hesychius removes the body of Hilarion to bury it in his monastery at Tabatha
c. 372	<b>A vault is built over the cell of Hilarion, transforming it into a tomb. Development of the sanctuary and a cemetery near the tomb of the saint (Level 7, phase 7a)</b>
c. 390	Jerome writes the life of Hilarion, mentioning his “small cell which remains to the present day, five feet in height, that is less than his own height, and only a little more in length; one might suppose it a tomb rather than a house.”

Period / Date (AD)	Event or intervention
	His last sentence: “Even at the present day one may see a strange dispute between the people of Palestine and the Cypriotes, the one contending that they have the body, the other the spirit of Hilarion. And yet in both places great miracles are wrought daily, but to a greater extent in the garden of Cyprus, perhaps because that spot was dearest to him.”
c. 400-450	<b>A first church is built over the sanctuary and the ad sanctos cemetery. The apse and the choir follow the orientation of Hilarion’s vaulted tomb. The basilica plan of the church reuses the layout of the orthogonal frame of the first cenobium. An inscription mentioning Hilarion is placed in the mosaic pavement near the entrance to Hilarion’s tomb (Level 6)</b>
c. 440-450	In his Ecclesiastical History, Sozomen mentions Hilarion and his monastery
c. 450-500	<b>A second, larger church completely encompasses the first. The new apse retains the same orientation as that of the first church (Level 5, phase 5b)</b>
c. 486	According to Jean Rufus, Peter the Iberian stayed three years near the sanctuary of Saint Hilarion at Magdal Tūtha (Tauatha)
c. 475-500	<b>The orientation of the church is straightened towards the East, towards the original crypt. A baptistery is installed to the southeast of the sanctuary (level 5, phase 5a).</b>
c. 500-520	According to Jean Rufus, a monastery in Tauatha bears the name of Seridos. It is possible that this monastery is that of Hilarion, henceforth designated by the name of its abbot, Seridos. <u>If this hypothesis is confirmed, during the 6th century AD, the monastery of Tell Umm Amer hosted eminent personalities (Barsanuphius, John of Gaza and Dorothy of Gaza) and was a place of exceptional literary production.</u>



<b>Period / Date (AD)</b>	<b>Event or intervention</b>
c. 500-525	A third, even larger church is built. The geometry and plans of the new edifice are determined from the original location of the vaulted tomb of Hilarion. The east-west longitudinal axis of the earlier buildings is moved south and aligned with the first crypt. The use of marble for the paving, columns and capitals breaks with previous architectural programs. A baptismal complex takes its place in the northern part of the sanctuary (Level 4, phase 4b)
c. 525-600	A second, larger crypt is built over the first, and the church choir is extended to the east. The final church reached 40 m in length. The new crypt appeared to be the largest in the eastern Mediterranean at the time. During this phase, the baptismal complex was enlarged and included a chapel. The bath and the hostel were also enlarged (Level 4, phase 4a)
c. 560-570	Pilgrim Antonius of Placentia locates Hilarion's tomb two miles south of Gaza
c. 615	Sassanian occupation of Gaza territory
c. 637	Muslim troops arrive in Gaza
c. 650-750	Under the Umayyads and after a series of earthquakes, the Site is still used for Christian worship and craft activities. The well and the bath remain useful for caravans and travelers (Level 3, phase 3c)
c. 750 - 900	The church complex is abandoned following the earthquake of 746. Under the Abbasids, the well and the bath are still used (Level 3, phase 3b et 3a)
c. 900-1300	The Site is permanently abandoned. Before disappearing under the dunes, the stones are removed and reused elsewhere (Level 2)

[Table 1] History of the Site

### 2.1.2 Historical relevance of the Site

Tell Umm Amer's Saint Hilarion Monastery holds particular importance. Not only is it the oldest of the over 116 documented Byzantine monasteries in Palestine/Israel (Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky 2004), but it also appears to be the largest excavated monastery in the Holy Land so far. With an unearthed building area of 13,450 m<sup>2</sup>, it surpasses the 5,750 m<sup>2</sup> of the Martyrius Monastery, located east of Jerusalem in the Judean Desert, which ranks second in size. Moreover, Saint Hilarion Monastery stands as one of the most complete and best-preserved monasteries, offering an ecclesiastical complex complete with a crypt along with a well, bathhouses, and even a guest house / pilgrim's hostel—features not always found in such sites (Sadeq 2000; Downey 1963). It is very rare in Palestine and illustrates the importance of monasticism in the region during the Byzantine era (Parrinello 2010).

The Site encompasses the Tomb of Saint Hilarion, the founder of Palestinian monasticism, immortalized in his biography penned by Saint Jerome (White 1998). Excavations reveal the Site to be the oldest monastery in Palestine, surpassing even the unexcavated monastery near Bethlehem founded by Chariton around the same time. The tomb of Hilarion is presented in a crypt, like other monastery founders, but this Site has kept the crypt unusually well-preserved.

In addition, mosaics from Tell Umm Amer and Jabalia stand out as premier examples of the "Gaza Mosaic School." This regional workshop, essentially defining the mosaics of southern Palestine in that era, produced distinctive motifs such as figures carrying amphorae and giraffes that have been found as far away as Petra.

Another monastery located in the immediate vicinity of the Site at Tabatha (or possibly at the Site itself) hosted eminent personalities (Saint Barsanuphius, John of Gaza, Saint Dorotheus and Saint Dositheus), and certain important texts, preserved until today, were written there (letters of Barsanuphius and John; writings of Philemon of Gaza). Most likely that it is the site of Saint Hilarion which transformed and reused (Elter 2012).

The Site also recalls other famous monasteries founded around Gaza by Isaiah of Gaza, Saint Peter the Iberian, Saint Severus the Great, etc. (Hirschfeld 2004).

### 2.1.3 Architectural elements and features

- The site of the monastery is divided into two contrasted architectural centers, one, ecclesiastical, to the south around the sanctuary, and the other to the north around the baths and the hotel. An enclosure made of cut stone blocks later closed everything off. The location of the well and its water supply crossing the monastery from west to east shows the separation between the two centers.

- The remains cover an area of approximately 14,000 m<sup>2</sup>. The ecclesiastical complex forms a quadrilateral facing east, measuring 7,200 m<sup>2</sup> (80 m by 90 m). It includes the churches, the crypt, the atrium, the baptisteries, a chapel, the cells, the refectory, an interior road, and annexes (attics, kitchen, latrines, etc.). The entire bath and guesthouse cover an area of 6,250 m<sup>2</sup> (78 m by 80 m). The hotel occupies the north part and the bath to the south.
- The hotel is located to the north of the baths with an area of 700 m<sup>2</sup>. The structure appears rectangular in its plan. It consists of kitchens to the north and accommodation for pilgrims to the south. It believes that the development of the hotel complex could have gone beyond the monastic function of the place and continued during the Umayyad and then Abbasid periods as a caravanserai place.
- The bath complex covers an area of almost 800 m<sup>2</sup>. It develops near the well and its Saqia. The position of the bath and its dimensions are 22 m wide and 30 m long. The plan is organized into eight different sectors. In the center, a large rectangular room is equipped with two basins, and it is bordered to the south by a large courtyard. To the east, the hot and warm rooms are equipped with benches or bathtubs. The interior walls of the rooms as well as those of the bathtubs and swimming pools were covered with a coating and whitewashed with lime. The seats of the benches and the floors were covered with slabs of fine white limestone or white marble. Lead pipes allowed the water from the bathtubs to be evacuated to external sewer networks. The warm rooms were mounted on terracotta pillars and suspended floors. The vertical walls are heated by circular terracotta conduits, tube or quadrangular. Vaults and domes covered the warm and hot rooms. To the east, beyond the hot rooms, the nuisances from the boiler rooms were driven away by the westerly winds coming from the sea. To the north, towards the hotel, in two rooms adjoining the outside of the bath were installed consecutively two sets of latrines. To the west, the building is extended by a series of adjoining rooms.
- The heating rooms or boiler rooms are located to the east of the bath building. Access to the boiler rooms passes from outside through an open space where the fuel was stored and the waste from the fireplaces was piled up. The isolated building, to the northeast, probably controlled the entrance and the passage to the hotel. The ashes, still in a pile along the east wall, indicate the location of the ashtray. The masonry shows numerous repairs which imply long-term use of the boiler room. Coastal sandstone is used for the entrance to the hearth and terracotta brick for the interior facings of the furnace and its vault.
- To the southeast of the bath complex, two pools were discovered. The largest is rectangular. Its dimensions are 6 m wide by 6.60 m long and 1.40 m deep. A second pool of smaller dimensions, but it has the same depth and is in the northwest corner of the larger one. The masonry of the walls is made of coastal sandstone blocks, covered with a thick lime mortar coating.



**Fig 1.** Water supply and drainage system in the Bath complex (CCHP team 2023). Building materials: mud brick, marble tiles, and sandstone.



**Fig 2.** Two hot bathrooms with benches, bathtubs, underfloor heating system (CCHP team 2023).



**Fig 3.** Water supply and drainage system in the Bath complex (CCHP team 2023). Building materials: sandstone.



**Fig 4.** Cold bathtub (CCHP team 2023).



**Fig 5.** Warm Bath  
(CCHP team 2023)



**Fig 6.** Cold water bathtubs  
(CCHP team 2023)



**Fig 7.** Photo from interpretation panel for the Site (Elter,PUI 2020)



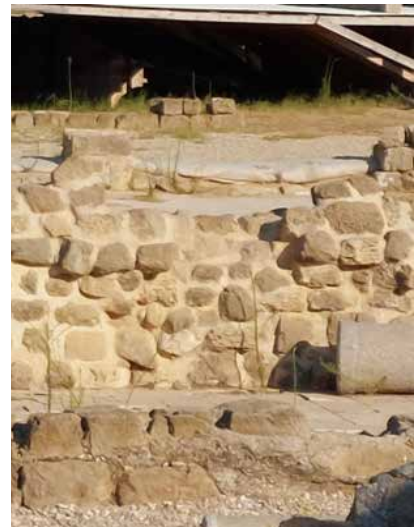
**Fig 8.** Monks' zone  
(CCHP team 2023)



**Fig 9.** Atrium, white limestone, sandstones Pavement, and fountain (CCHP team 2023)



**Fig 10.** South part toward the Bath complex (CCHP team 2023)



**Fig 11.** Remaining walls from the Umayyad Period inside the atrium (CCHP team 2023)



**Fig 12.** The entrance to the monastery (CCHP team 2023)



**Fig 13.** General view to the Site's fabric: Atrium area, churches, and bath complex (CCHP team 2023)



**Fig 14.** Column located 40m north of St hilarion. (CCHP team 2023)



**Fig 15.** Crypt, interior view of the southern vestibule (CCHP team 2023)



**Fig 16.** Crypt, view towards the central chapel of the crypt (CCHP team 2023)



**Fig 17.** monks' rooms (CCHP team 2023)





**Fig 18.** The water distribution system near Saqia and well area (CCHP team 2023)



**Fig 19.** One of the mosaic pavements (PUI 2018)



**Fig 20.** Crypt sandstone structure (PUI 2018)

#### 2.1.4 Religious Context

Monasticism in Gaza has a rich history dating back to the early centuries of Christianity (Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky 2004). It can be traced to the 4th century when Christian ascetics and monks began to settle in the region. Many were drawn to the desert areas for a life of solitude, prayer, and asceticism (Hevelone-Harper 2005). The Gaza Strip was home to a significant Christian monastic community during the Byzantine period (Parrinello 2010), during which a dozen monasteries were founded near the monastery of Saint Hilarion. The nearby monasteries gravitated in its orbit (Downey 1963; Sadeq 2000).

Saint Hilarion, renowned for his ascetic lifestyle, is often considered one of the founders of monasticism in Palestine and is credited with influencing the development of monasticism in the region. Gaza became a significant center for monasticism, attracting famous Desert Fathers and Mothers—spiritual leaders and monks known for their wisdom and teachings. They sought the solitude of the desert to engage in contemplative prayer and spiritual discipline (Basouin 2013).

Although not directly associated with Gaza, St. Sabas (439-532 AD), a prominent monk and abbot, had an impact on the monastic tradition in the broader region. His teachings and establishment of the Great Laura Monastery near Jerusalem influenced the development of monasticism in nearby areas, including Gaza (Hevelone-Harper 2005).

The monastic communities in Gaza faced various challenges, including occasional persecution by authorities and invasions by external forces. Over time, the prominence of monasticism in Gaza declined, particularly with the rise of Islam and changing political landscapes. However, in the modern era, there have been efforts to revive and preserve the monastic heritage of the region (see Annex 1).

#### **The legacy of Saint Hilarion: Founder of Monasticism in Gaza**

The Palestinian monk Saint Hilarion was born in 291 AD and died far from home in Cyprus in 371 AD. He studied in Alexandria and was greatly influenced by the Egyptian monk Anthony (Basouin 2013)

The monk and mystic Hilarion modeled Palestinian Monasticism after Egyptian traditions, and in 306 AD at the age of 15 returned to Palestine (Chitty 1966). He established the first Palestinian monastery in 329 AD. Under religious persecution, during the reign of Emperor Julian (361-363 AD), he migrated to Cyprus where he died in 371 AD. His body was returned by monks to Gaza (Colerio 1957).

His main biography, *Vita Sancti Hilarionis* (Life of Saint Hilarion), was written by Father Jerome in 390 AD (Miniac 1992). Saint Hilarion is venerated as a saint by the Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches. A series of miracles were attributed to him (Basouin 2015). A cult of veneration spread to Europe, especially in Italy and France. In Cyprus a feast day is dedicated to Saint Hilarion on October 21. Hilarion

returned to St. Anthony in the Egyptian desert and found that his fame had spread there too. He fled to Libya and then Sicily to escape notice, but Hesychius traced him there. The two went to Dalmatia, Croatia, and then to Cyprus. Hilarion performed so many miracles that crowds flocked to him when he was spotted in any region. He died on Cyprus, and St. Hesychius secretly took his remains back to Palestine (Coleiro 1957).

## **2.2 Territorial framework, and reference to other Gaza archaeological sites**

The Gaza Strip, located at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea, is a small territory bordered by Israel to the north and east and Egypt to the south. It covers an area of approximately 365 square kilometers and has a population of over two million people. The territorial framework of Gaza is shaped by political and security dynamics, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the governance structure.

From the EAMENA data base (endangered Archeology in the Middle East and North Africa) , and the Digital Archaeological Atlas of the Holy Land (DAAHL) databases, 93 archeological Sites were identified (Savage and Levy 2014). These include principal sites that were excavated during the British Mandate 1918-1948 and under the Palestinian Authority since 1994, and sites that have been documented by the local authorities since 2001. An additional 43 archaeological features (e.g., cisterns, fountains, burials, historical buildings) were identified by EAMENA, and DAHHL has mapped pre-Mandate villages documented by the Western Palestine survey, which could be classified as Late Islamic (Ottoman) or Contemporary Islamic (Early 20th century) (Andreou, et al 2022).

Gaza is rich in archaeological and cultural heritage, with numerous sites dating to various historical periods from the Chalcolithic period to the present. These include Tell el-Ajjul, Tell Rafah, Anthedon Harbor, Tell es-Sakan, Tell el-Qatifa, Tall Ridan, Tall Jinan, Deir el-Balah, and Tell el-Raqish (Guerin 1869). More than 150 tombs from the 1st century BC to the 2nd century AD have been unearthed near to the town of Beit Lahia in 2022/23.



**Map 1.** Overview of Gaza - Source: OCHA, 2013

### 2.3 History of past excavations

The Site was discovered in 1991. Following the Oslo Accords, a series of excavations and restorations was carried out in 1994 under the direction of the Palestinian Department of Antiquities and Ebaf. Here is a brief chronology of previous excavations and restoration works: Humbert 2000; Humbert and Hassoune 2005; Haldimann 2007; Alby, et al., 2013; Al-Utol and Elter, 2018; Sadeq 2005; Alby, 2021. The history of excavations is shown **Table 2** below:

Period / Date (AD)	Event or intervention [Table 2]
1991-1992	<p>In 1991, during the start an urbanization and subdivision project for the coastal dune as a sand quarry, ancient remains were discovered on the Site: bases and columns in marble from the Byzantine period, Corinthian capitals, coins, sandstone and limestone building materials, various artifacts. between December 1991 and January 1992, the Israeli Antiquities Service conducted a first excavation at the site.</p>
1997- 2001	<p>Due to a housing project on the dune, the Site was excavated by the Palestinian Antiquities Department of Gaza (directed by Moain Sadeq). Field operations (directed by Yasser Matar) in the church and its surroundings (Site I), as well as at the northeast end of the tell (Site II), brought to light a set of Romano-Byzantine remains (ceramics, mosaics of large white tesserae, remains of sandstone buildings then wrongly identified as a palace).</p> <p>The ruins uncovered around the church were considered, at first, as those of a village; possibly that of Tabatha. To the southwest, a Christian cemetery was identified (5th-6th c.).</p> <p>Nearly 150 m to the northeast, below the dune (Site II), another architectural complex was unearthed, which includes a large building consisting of several rooms arranged around a courtyard, with annexes.</p>
2001	<p>At the request of the MoTA, a scientific and technical partnership was set up with the Consulate General of France in Jerusalem within the framework of the Franco-Palestinian Archaeological Cooperation Mission in Gaza (directed by Jean-Baptiste Humbert, EbaF). Two expert missions took place, including one in October (under the direction of René Elter, EbaF) to assess the archaeological potential of the Site and draw up a preservation and enhancement program for opening to the public.</p>

<b>Period / Date (AD)</b>	<b>Event or intervention [Table 2]</b>
<b>2002-2006</b>	<p>The chronology of the Site's occupation was confirmed from the 4th to the end of the 8th century (from the proto-Byzantine period to the Umayyad period), during which time the church was completely rebuilt three times. Two architectural complexes were identified. The first, of approximately 4650 m<sup>2</sup> around the southern part of the sanctuary, is for ecclesiastical purposes. It includes the church, the crypt, the atrium, the baptisteries, the chapel, the cells, the refectory and the service annexes. The second, of about 3600 m<sup>2</sup>, stretches to the north and includes thermal baths and a hostel. Two levels of mosaics, coming from two superimposed churches, were unearthed. A mosaic inscription mentioning Hilarion was discovered (October 25, 2003) as well as the saint's tomb (November 11, 2003), confirming that the Site corresponds to the monastery he founded.</p>
<b>2007-2010</b>	<p>The unearthed remains suffered the effects of very rainy winters, visits that were sometimes uncontrolled or too numerous, and bombardments during the winter of 2008-2009. The damage could not be stopped due to a lack of financial, logistical and technical means due to the particular situation of the Gaza Strip. During the winter of 2009-2010, part of the west wall of the crypt collapsed and the apses of the churches of the sanctuary slipped into the crypt.</p>
<b>2010-2014</b>	<p>After an assessment mission led by René Elter (EbaF), on the initiative of MoTA and the Islamic University of Gaza and with the support of France and UNESCO, an emergency intervention program took place from December 2010 to July 2012. It included preparing the first Site survey plan, a levels plan, a study of the water channels and where the water courses end, and urgent strengthening work for some weak structural elements in the eastern part. Before the reconstruction of the western wall of the crypt, an important archaeological trench was made in the church to a depth of 5 m, after the removal of the mosaics by Fadel al-Utol. The chronology could thus be refined. The southeast corner of the second church, the contemporary levels of the first church and the hermitage dating from the first half of the 4th century were unearthed, confirming that the monastery of Tell Umm Amer is one of the oldest in Palestine, if not the oldest.</p>

Period / Date (AD)	Event or intervention [Table 2]
2018-2019	<p>The program launched in December 2017 included the construction of a reception building and of a roof over the baths, the restoration of the crypt, the consolidation of the structures and the construction of a permanent walkway along the remains.</p> <p>February-March 2018: Before the construction of the Site reception building, 5 archaeological test trenches were excavated (112m<sup>2</sup>) at the south-west corner of the Site. Only one trench yielded ancient remains including a floor and a wall, as well as a hearth and jars.</p> <p>February-December 2019: Documentary survey of the walls (mainly photogrammetric), documentation and study of the construction of the crypt (before restoration work on the west wall and on the vault of the south narthex). About twenty archaeological trenches were excavated in three areas: the bath (before the installation of the roof), the well (before consolidation and restoration), and the ecclesiastical complex (before soil stabilization).</p>
2020-2022	<hr/> <p>Monitoring of work in the crypt.</p> <p>Archaeological trench in the apse of the baptismal chapel, reconstruction of the south wall, consolidation of the elevation of the north wall, study of the floors, with two tombs inside, before stabilization.</p> <p>Archaeological and architectural study of baptisteries 3 and 4 before consolidation and conservation treatment.</p> <p>Conservation and restoration of the floor of the atrium.</p> <p>Restoration of hostel walls.</p>

**Table 2:** History of past excavations

## 2.4 Political context of the Site and Gaza territory

Gaza has experienced instability due to conflicts with Israel, which has imposed a blockade on Gaza for nearly two decades, creating economic and humanitarian challenges. The political situation in Gaza has a significant impact on the cultural heritage and archaeological Sites in the region. Here are some of the key factors contributing to this impact:

***Destruction and Damage:*** Continuous Israeli military aggression against Gaza have resulted in the destruction and damage of cultural heritage sites and archaeological artifacts. Historical buildings, mosques, churches, and archaeological sites have been targeted and damaged during military operations.

***Security concerns:*** Security concerns and the volatile nature of the region have made it challenging to conduct comprehensive archaeological research and site management.

***Restricted import of protection and restoration equipment:*** The movement of people and goods is heavily regulated by the Israeli blockade imposed on Gaza. The blockade severely restricts the import of construction materials and sophisticated equipment needed for the excavation, preservation, and restoration of cultural heritage sites. This seriously hampers efforts to maintain and protect historical buildings, archaeological sites, and cultural landmarks, leaving them vulnerable to deterioration.

***Limited access to expertise:*** The blockade also restricts the movement of researchers, archaeologists, and experts in the field of cultural heritage, making it difficult for them to access Gaza and provide the necessary expertise for preservation and conservation efforts.

***Difficulty prioritizing heritage preservation:*** The political instability and limited resources in Gaza have hindered the ability to carry out adequate preservation and restoration efforts for cultural heritage sites. The focus on immediate humanitarian needs often takes precedence over cultural preservation, resulting in a lack of investment and attention to maintaining and safeguarding these sites.

***Illegal Excavations and Looting:*** Political instability and economic hardships have led to an increase in illegal excavations and looting of archaeological sites in Gaza. Desperate individuals seeking valuable artifacts for trade and financial gain have exploited the situation, causing irreparable damage to archaeological remains and further loss of cultural heritage.



***Fragmentation of Cultural Identity:*** The Israeli blockade contributes to the isolation and fragmentation of the cultural identity of Gazans. The restrictions on movement and limited opportunities for cultural exchange and collaboration undermine the connection between the people and their heritage, eroding the sense of cultural continuity and collective memory.

***Uncertainty:*** The political situation in Gaza, coupled with the broader Israeli-Palestinian conflict, has resulted in an uncertainty of Gaza's future, which drives the international community and donors to direct their aid towards humanitarian aims and less to development programs. Limited international cooperation and financial support for cultural heritage projects and preservation initiatives have further impeded efforts to protect and conserve the archaeological Sites in Gaza. Despite that, PUI has managed to obtain several grants for the protection of the Site of Tell Umm Amer through the support of AFD and the British Council.

## **2.5 Description of the core and buffer zones**

UNESCO World Heritage Sites, and those on the Tentative List, require an established core and buffer zone to protect and manage the designated areas. The core zone typically encompasses the most important and significant features of the site, while the buffer zone surrounds the core zone and provides additional protection and management measures and protects the views towards the core zone. Both the core and buffer zones are essential management tools used for the conservation and protection of an archaeological site.

***Core Zone:*** The core zone of Tell Umm Amer includes the primary archaeological features, structures, and artifacts of Outstanding Universal Value that warrant the Site's recognition and protection. Previous and current conservation and protection activities in the core zone are subject to strict professional measures to preserve the site's authenticity and integrity.

The remains discovered at Tell Umm Amer have grown to over 14,000 m<sup>2</sup>. The Paleo-Christian complex, unearthed in 1997, is a monastery. Its chronology ranges from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 8<sup>th</sup> century. *Intra-muros*, it covers an area of about 8,300 m<sup>2</sup>. It is divided into two juxtaposed architectural poles, one at the South around the shrine, the other at the North around the baths and pilgrims' hostel.

The location of the well and its water supply, topographically positioned on the highest part of the Site, marks the separation between the two sets. The ecclesiastical complex forms a quadrangle facing the East that encompasses 4,650 m<sup>2</sup>. It includes the church, the crypt, the atrium, the baptistery, a chapel, the cells, the refectory, and service annexes. Three churches present a total of five phases of transformation of the sanctuary have been identified.

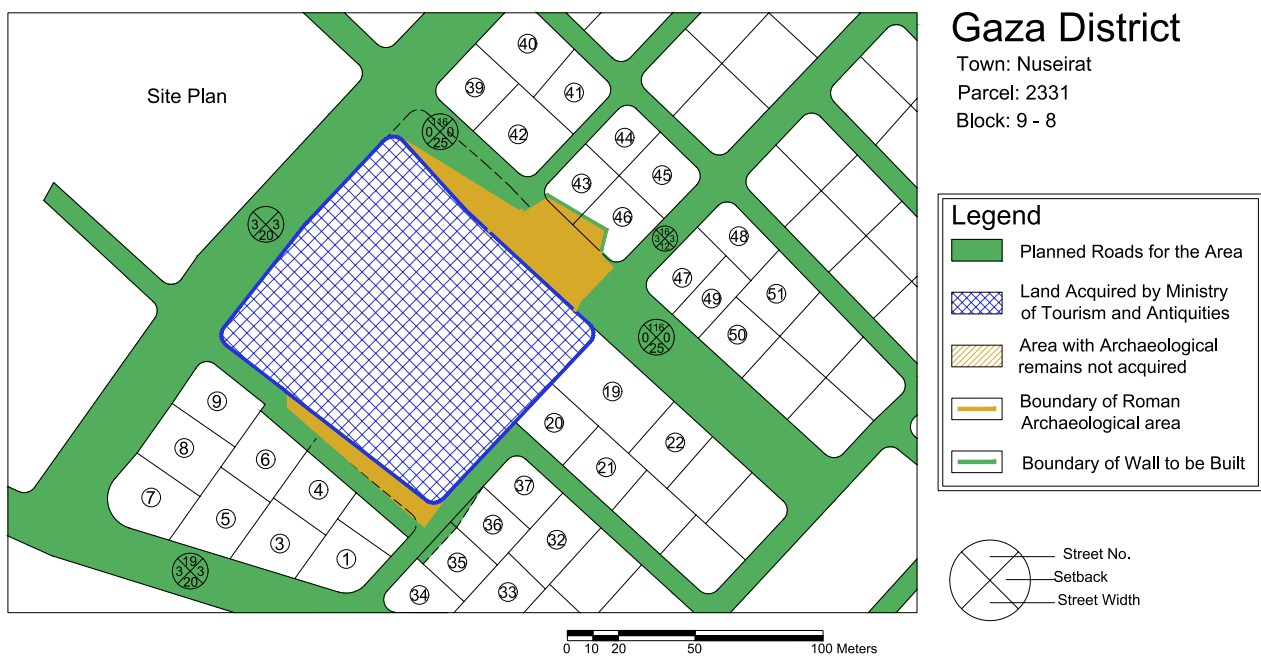
The ruins include some very important mosaics, including one that refers to the burial of Saint Hilarion himself (who died in Cyprus but whose remains were returned to Gaza).

The entire bath and living area encompass 3,600 m<sup>2</sup>. The living area occupies the North while the bath occupies the South. Archaeological investigations have shown that the use and function of the place is time-extended. After the abandonment of the monastery, the site continued as a bath until the 9<sup>th</sup> century and then as a quarry for building materials until at least the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

## Master Plan for Tell Umm Amer Historical Site

Zone A: Acquired Land with an area of 10,797m<sup>2</sup>

Zone B: Non Acquired Land with an area of 1,485m<sup>2</sup>



**Map 2.** The endorsed structural plan on 31/10/2018. Source: CCHP



**Map 3.** Tell Umm Amer Site core zone, which covers about 8,300 m<sup>2</sup>. Source: CCHP

*Buffer Zone:* The buffer zone surrounds the core zone and acts as a protective barrier. It is designed to mitigate potential negative impacts from surrounding activities, such as urban development, infrastructure projects, and other threats.

Currently, the Tell Umm Amer archaeological site lacks a buffer zone. However, there is an ongoing discussion about different scenarios to create a buffer zone. At the moment, the exact size and configuration of the core and buffer zones is not clear and could vary depending on analysis of cultural and natural value and local conditions.



**Fig 21.** Western Street 20m (CCHP team 2023)



**Fig 22.** Northern Street 10m on the ground there is no street(CCHP 2023)



**Fig 23.** Northern street 25m on the municipality plan but on the ground, it is closed by the archaeological expansion (CCHP 2023)



**Fig 24.** Adjusted boundaries to protect the Site, Southern area (CCHP 2023)



**Fig 25.** Eastern street (CCHP team 2023)



**Fig 26.** Eastern street 10m on the municipality plan but on the ground is 5m (CCHP 2023)



**Fig 27.** Eastern street 10m on the municipality plan but on the ground is 5m (CCHP 2023)

### 2.5.1 Boundaries of the Site

The municipality has endorsed a detailed master plan by the City Planning Central Committee of Gaza for the block where the archaeological site is located. The Plan did not consider the protection of the Site, the view toward the surroundings, and the need to have a buffer zone. The land around it has been changed from agricultural classification to residential use (Class B, 6 floors, 60% building ratio), which means multi-story buildings adjacent to the Site. (The block is surrounded by other blocks zoned for agriculture.) The master plan includes regulation of the street surrounding the Site and proposes the annexation of northern parts of the Site to enlarge the street width to 25m.

The Palestinian Authority owns 11,797m<sup>2</sup> of the archaeological Site. However, there is still a need to protect the archeological fabric, which extends north, east, and south. This fabric extends to adjacent parcels and streets. According to the master plan of 2018, these parts are considered illegally located in privately-owned parcels and blocking three endorsed streets. The streets surrounding the Site are as follows: West (north-south direction) is 20m. South (east-west direction) is 10m, and major archaeological parts are in this street.

North (east-west direction) is 25m and a major fabric is in this street and extends to two private-owned parcels. East (south-north direction) is 10m, and the archaeological Site extends to the middle of the street. The master plan lacks building regulations and restrictions to help create a buffer zone.

The endorsed structural plan on 31/10/2018 has a negative impact on the archaeological site. It is important to address the current zoning plan and to adjust it to minimize adverse effects on the Site.



Map 4. Master Plan 2018 (CCHP 2023)

## 2.6 Statement of Significance

**Description:** Tell Umm Amer “Saint Hilarion Monastery” lies in Gaza. It consists of a large and complex monastery that was originally founded by Hilarion and was further extended as his popularity as a Christian Saint became more widespread.

The monastery is situated in a transit area between the southern territories of Palestine and many holy sites of the Christian faith. It also lies close to the Gaza port, which was important as an entry point for pilgrims visiting the Terra Santa.

It was eventually ruined by an eighth-century earthquake and later abandoned with the advance of the Muslim religion (though parts of the complex continued to be used for centuries). The monastery had all the elements necessary for pilgrims to stay there, including a hostel, complex baths, and other facilities.

The Christian sanctuary was never destroyed as Hilarion was still considered to be a local important spiritual leader.

As a Christian pilgrimage site, it has a number of chapels superimposed on one another. The Site has a number of mosaic floors of great quality and other substantial archaeological remains that help visitors understand the outstanding significance of the monastery.

Heritage value: Gaza had close to a hundred identified heritage sites from various periods of its history including from the Bronze Age, Iron Age, and Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine and Islamic eras. A number of these sites have outstanding mosaics. The old town still has a number of important buildings including mosques and churches.

Tell Umm Amer is without doubt the most important heritage site because of its complexity, architecture and archaeology, and it bears testimony to Gaza as a port and pilgrim transit area. It is one of the earliest known Christian monasteries and the origin of monasticism in Palestine (Hirschfeld 2004).

The architecture of the chapels, the complexity of the baths and other amenities, and the beautiful mosaics bear witness to a well-organized society with excellent artisans and craftsmen of their time capable of exploiting local materials. Whilst other sites in Palestine have superior mosaics, those at Tell Umm Amer are an excellent and important example of this art form.

Though very little is known about the early saints of the Christian faith, a contemporary biography of Hilarion gives us substantial detail about his life and mission and therefore allows us to understand not only the person himself but the importance of the monastery he established. This in itself is another added value to the Site.

The Site is on the Tentative List of cultural and natural sites of potential OUV that could be nominated for inclusion on the World Heritage List. Whilst a projected intervention will add yet more value to the Site and expose more of its archaeological and architecture features, the Site already has substantial outstanding universal value that makes it a good candidate for World Heritage status. There is no doubt that the Site merits more valorization and attention and that its story has contributed to the history of mankind.

**Main attributes:** The main attributes of the Site in terms of nomination to the UNESCO World Heritage List are:

1. This is one of the oldest known Christian monasteries (fourth century).
2. The Site bears clear witness to the importance of the location and of Gaza as a port and transit area from the western Mediterranean, from Egypt, and from the southern region toward the Terra Santa.
3. The complexity of the sanctuary area, including the five superimposed churches and the crypt, have outstanding value both for their complexity and for the craftsmanship using local materials. The architecture that is still visible, with some recent consolidation, makes this one of the most interesting and authentic architectural finds from such an early Christian period. Though some of it is from later eras, it all dates from before the 9<sup>th</sup> century and has survived until today because it remained covered by sand for centuries and was only recently rediscovered.
4. The bath area, with its complex drainage and water supply system, is an outstanding example of early baths, and the pilgrimage hostel system has survived almost intact.
5. Whilst a nomination dossier will have to look closely at a comparative study to ascertain its importance and uniqueness, there is already ample proof of its outstanding universal value due not only to its history, architecture, and archaeology but also through the craftsmanship of elements such as columns, beautiful well-preserved mosaics, and other utensils and storage elements that are evidence of a very developed society.

All these elements form a solid ground for the nomination of the Site to be recognized as World Heritage.

### **2.6.1 Outstanding Universal Value**

Tell Umm Amer “Saint Hilarion monastery” is one of the rare Sites that bears exceptional historical, religious, and cultural testimony. It is one of the earliest known monasteries in the region. The monastery used to be an important station on the crossroads between Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and Mesopotamia. The Site is tangibly associated with the phenomenon of the flowering of monastic desert centers in Palestine during the Byzantine period. Tell Umm Amer was perhaps a center of missionary work in the Gaza region at the center of affairs at a communications crossroads. The archaeological ruins testify to a flourishing community that included mosaic artists and other artisans. The Site meets cultural criteria as follows:



**Cultural criterion (ii):** Tell Umm Amer Saint Hilarion Monastery exhibits an important interchange of human values, over an important period of time that related to the emergence of Christianity in Gaza and in the Terra Santa in general. The monastery itself became a center of cosmopolitan religion as a station on the trade route (UNESCO 2012). The complex architecture of the sanctuary area represents an outstanding example of the development of architecture and even technology. The way chapels were superimposed one above the other without destroying the older ones makes this a distinctive architectural complex in this region. The layout of the Site was designed in a unique way so that pilgrims could follow a set path among important elements of the complex.

**Cultural criterion (iii):** The ruins at Tell Umm Amer include one of the oldest monasteries in Palestine, so the Site bears a unique and exceptional testimony to Christianity in Gaza. Conservation efforts have ensured that the Site is well conserved and stabilized. The complex and well-organized bath area is a testimony to the traditions and civilization of the early centuries of Christianity. In spite of the lack of water in a semi-desert environment, they were able to provide all that was needed for the people of the time (UNESCO 2012).

**Cultural criterion (vi):** The Site is directly associated with a significant story related to the origin of Christianity in Palestine, and with an artistic mosaic of outstanding universal value. This Site enriches our understanding of early history and stands as a testament to how Muslim and Christian communities coexisted peacefully for centuries. The Muslim community has consistently demonstrated respect for the area's Christian heritage despite the Christian population's smaller size. The monastery's growing renown throughout the region led to its expansion over several centuries, and portions of the monastery remained in use even during the Muslim era. Hilarion was not only appreciated by both communities but also actively served as a local spiritual leader, leaving a lasting impact on the region.

### **2.6.2 Integrity and Authenticity**

The integrity and authenticity of World Heritage Sites are crucial aspects in their recognition and conservation. This CMP aims to uphold these principles to ensure that Tell Umm Amer continues to inspire and educate future generations about our shared heritage. Under the Palestinian national cultural heritage legislation and according to the national register, the Site is designated as a high priority for protection and preservation. The Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage, in cooperation with local and international organizations, is protecting and preserving this important Site to the best of its ability.

Integrity refers to the overall condition of the Site and the extent to which its essential features and characteristics have been preserved. It includes factors such as the Site's physical state, its boundaries, and the presence of any threats or alterations that may compromise its outstanding universal value. To maintain integrity, World Heritage Sites should be protected from significant human interventions or natural disasters that could negatively impact their authenticity and value. To ensure the integrity and authenticity of Tell Umm Amer / Saint Hilarion monastery, MoTA, PUI, EbaF and the UNESCO office Ramallah conduct continuous scientific and professional interventions that follow the UNESCO guidelines and frameworks, which emphasize the importance of preservation, protection, and appropriate management of the Sites. This CMP aims to incorporate conservation strategies, monitoring systems, and measures to mitigate potential threats.

The level of integrity of the Site within the core zone boundaries is good and acceptable. The conservation work by PUI and is of a high standard and has perfectly maintained the integrity of the Site. The archaeological cover over the bath area has ensured that its integrity has been maintained to a high level. The temporary shelters and covers in the ecclesiastical part have maintained the integrity of this part of the Site, but these are temporary measures that will be adjusted during the continuation of the project as proposed.

There is concern about the two adjoining parts that are under the adjacent roads. The level of integrity there can only be confirmed once the necessary excavations take place.

Regarding the anastylosis intervention, which was carried out in three parts of the Site, there were essential reasons to use this method. The three parts are:

- The crypt (2018-2022): the west wall of the crypt and the vault of the south narthex (more than 450 new blocks were used for that purpose)
- The baptismal chapel (2021-2022): mostly the east part of the south wall (7 layers of blocks) but also the top of the apse and of the north wall (more than 120 new blocks were used)
- In the pilgrim hostel (2021-2022): the top of the walls (1 to 3 layers, for a total of around 450 new blocs)

The anastylosis was made following international restoration standards, with the same materials used at the time (Gaza stone, quarry sand, and lime). The reconstructions were made a few centimeters back to distinguish them from the original structures.

All these anastyloses are essential and useful because they consolidate the most endangered structure and protect it from collapse.

This part is situated at the lower point of the Site where stormwater used to flow. The anastylosis method served as a structural consolidation method for the weakened parts. It gives a better visualization and understanding of the ruins. In addition, those in the crypt and the baptismal chapel were necessary to prevent the collapse of the archaeological remains (See Annex2).

However, authenticity relates to the Site's credibility and truthfulness. It refers to the degree to which the Site accurately represents its historical, cultural, or natural significance. Authenticity considers various elements, including the Site's original form, design, materials, techniques, and cultural practices associated with it. It also considers the Site's ability to evoke a genuine sense of time and place, allowing visitors to experience its historical or cultural value.

Over the last 10 years, PUI and the UNESCO office in cooperation with MoTA have conducted regular monitoring at Tell Umm Amer to ensure that the preservation and conservation measurements comply with the requirements for integrity and authenticity. PUI's intervention aims at protecting the Site's condition and avoiding changes that may impact the Site's universal value. PUI and MoTA aim to draw the international community's attention to the Site's vulnerability and trigger actions to overcome any threat.

# *Section 2*

# *Chapter 3: Condition Assessment*

A condition assessment of an archaeological site involves evaluating and documenting the current physical status, state of conservation, and socio-economic status of the Site to understand its preservation needs and to inform future conservation and management efforts. In this CMP, a desk review and Site visits have been conducted to understand and analyze Tell Umm Amer's condition in a systematic way to evaluate the state of the Site, identify preservation concerns, and provide recommendations for its protection, conservation, and management. It is a crucial step in ensuring that the valuable archaeological and historical resources at Tell Umm Amer are preserved for future generations to study and appreciate.

This chapter presents the current state of the Tell Umm Amer archaeological site, conservation of physical structures, visitor management, infrastructure, urban fabric, visual assessment, attributes, amenities, visitor's experiences, and the economic situation.

## **3.1 Current state of the Tell Umm Amer Archaeological Site**

Tell Umm Amer has been an open-air building materials quarry for centuries. The remains are mostly close to ground level. Thus, the Site's outline has been erased from landscape views, and the Site can no longer be perceived at a distance (INCA Architects 2021).



**Map 5.** 3D Representation of remains. Source: M. Santiago/2020

The main factors in the Site's deterioration are natural. These include wind, sun, unstable soil, and vegetation. However, water is the main factor, the effects of which are multiplied by other factors or characteristics of the Site (INCA Architects 2021). Understanding these natural factors is crucial for Tell Umm Amer to develop conservation and preservation strategies.

**CMP's team conducted the following analysis:**

Storm drainage during the winter is the main threat to the Site. It can rapidly erode layers of the Site and carry away artifacts. The Site was exposed to winter storms in 1998 and 2017. MoTA and PUI took measures to prevent similar effects in the future through stormwater drainage procedures to prevent flooding in fragile areas.

Humidity, moisture, and extreme temperatures are considered moderate and can lead to the infiltration of organic materials and the expansion and contraction of materials, which can lead to cracks and other forms of physical damage.

However, there is obvious planting on the west side of the Site outside the archaeological fabric, and the team recommended controlling the growth of these trees. Covering the archaeological Site, the church areas, with a sand layer aims to prevent the plants' roots from penetrating the archaeological layers. A durable method is used to prevent plants from growing up in the archaeological structure.

The Site is exposed to erosion. The Site's soil is sandy and affected by wind and water erosion. However, the urban fabric surrounding the Site plays an important role as a windbreaker that curtails erosion.

All of these factors affect the stability of the remains and mosaic floors of churches, which cannot be left in the open air without protection. Yet leaving them covered hides them from visitors and greatly harms enjoyment and understanding of the places.



**Fig 28.** Some aspects of deterioration affecting the Site (R. Elter/PUI)

On December 17, 2020, there was flooding in the central nave of the first church. Beneath the sand is the pavement of the nave of the first church, and under the pavement lie many burials.

Protective measures have been taken, such as covering the Site with sand, controlling moisture and humidity, and monitoring vegetation in order to mitigate the impacts of these natural elements on the Site. Following those emergency interventions, the challenge for the future will be to preserve and maintain the Site through time and attract the local public.



**Fig 29.** Trees with deep roots. These trees should be removed or controlled (PUI)



**Fig 30.** These are grasses that grow on the outskirts of the remains (PUI)

### 3.1.1 Conservation of Physical Structure

The archaeological remains of Tell Umm Amer are located within the current boundaries that cover an area of 12,282 m<sup>2</sup> and includes five zones:

1. The ecclesiastical complex
2. The thermal baths
3. The Hostel
4. The well and the area west of the monastery
5. The un-excavated area north and west of the monastery

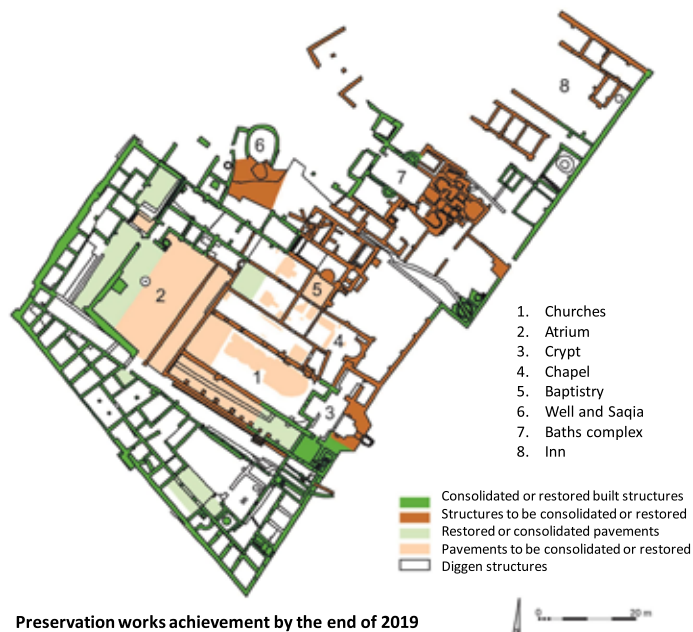
There are nearby remains located outside the monastery about a hundred meters east of it. The Site was excavated by the Palestinian Department of Antiquities in 1997. Ancient remains (walls around a courtyard) were excavated, but their interpretation has not yet been sufficiently established or published (see above, history of the excavations). Since these excavations, the remains have been cleaned by René Elter's team but, as they are not protected, they are exposed to natural degradation (vegetation, rain, wind, etc.) and human and animal degradation (walking over ruins, rubbish, traces of fire, etc.). Currently, this part is not really integrated into the Tell Umm Amer conservation and development project. However, an exhaustive excavation seems quite urgent to ensure a good understanding of the site and to determine whether its relationship with the monastery justifies its inclusion in the CMP or not. It is likely that the Site may have an extension to the north of current boundaries, and a future excavation is highly recommended.

## II. SITE & CONTEXT

### II.3. SAINT HILARION MONASTERY'S REMAINS

The works programs initiated in the very last years have led to a series of significant achievements to stop site's collapse and for remains' consolidation.

Yet, the threatens on the remains remain a critical issue.



Tell Umm El-Amr Monastery as a venue for socio-economic development - Feasibility study presentation report - March 2021 - INCA Architects Team Leader, Tetraakis, R. Colaire, C&E Ingenieer

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Map 6. Main Elements of Tell Umm Amer Site (Elter, 2020)



*The ecclesiastical complex* is in a good state of conservation. The most sensitive parts are sheltered. Four mosaics are presented under shelters built in 2002, and the nave has been protected by a temporary roof since 2010/12. Some mosaics were removed for preservation and restoration. Until the latest war and looting, they were kept in satisfactory condition in the mission's storages (in Gaza and on the Site itself). The rest of the floors were covered with geotextiles and gravel (except the stone paving of the vestibule and atrium, left visible) in 2021/22. Wooden walkways allow the circulation of visitors without risk to the remains. Restorations and consolidations were carried out on the walls to ensure the preservation of the Site. However, much of the area remains exposed to rain, sun and winds. Vegetation must be removed on a regular basis. Rain and wind erosion are significant; some stones changed during recent restorations already show traces of wear. The shelters built more than twenty years ago and the temporary roof must be changed. The construction of a new shelter over the entire ecclesiastical complex seems one of the best solutions to preserve the Site and present it to the public, as was done with the thermal baths.

*The thermal baths*, located directly northeast of the ecclesiastical complex, were protected by a shelter in 2019/20. The necessary measures to conserve the floors and walls were taken at that time. Their condition is very good. Visitors walk along a wooden path that avoids any contact with the remains. This space simply requires occasional maintenance (cleaning and keeping away birds that may stay under the roof).

*The hostel* is located immediately northeast of the thermal baths. It occupies the north-east corner of the monastery enclosure. It was excavated in 1999 and left visible since. Part of the walls was consolidated and restored in 2019. The general condition of the remains is good. However, the entire building was not excavated during ancient excavations. It seems that the western part "has completely disappeared". This point is important and must be verified by research outside the currently demarcated archaeological zone. New excavations should be carried out in the street, at the foot of the wall and fence that currently protect the Site, following the supposed location of the northeast enclosure wall of the monastery. Thus, it would be possible to confirm the absence or presence of remains forming an integral part of the monastery, including disappeared ones (such as traces of foundation trenches even if the stones have been removed). Once the research has been carried out, it will be possible to redefine the extent of the archaeological zone to be protected. It is very important to note that part of the remains of the hostel is threatened by the construction of a road. (These remains are delimited by a simple fence and not by a fence wall as for the rest of the Site.) An expansion of the protected area including all the remains of the monastery is therefore strongly recommended, in this area but also at the southern extremity of the Site where the corner of the monastery enclosure is currently outside the protected area. (It extends a little beyond the enclosure wall.)

*The well and the area west of the monastery* were partially excavated during several campaigns (1997-2001, 2005 and 2019-2020). These made it possible to recognize the water supply system and a camp and burial areas. They have been covered and are therefore protected except for the well and its arrangements that remained visible. Their conservation is correct, and the occupation/evolution of the area can be reconstructed. Additional excavations could be considered to improve our knowledge, but for the moment the priority is not here but in the areas further north, which remains unexplored.

*The un-excavated area north of the monastery* is currently used for the storage of materials and equipment. This is where the construction of the new “visitor center” is planned. It seems urgent to excavate the entire area before moving forward with this project in order to determine the presence of remains which could possibly influence the location or the architecture of the future building.

The Tell Umm Amer Site is subject to many difficulties due to its location in Gaza. Despite everything, it is studied and preserved in a very satisfactory way according to European standards, thanks to the strong personal involvement of archaeologists and the support of international cooperation. However, the situation remains fragile because the Site’s preservation is very dependent on these last two factors as well as on the political situation. Pending any evolution and the opening to international tourism, the human and financial resources must be sustained to ensure the study and preservation of the Site, otherwise the deterioration of the Tell Umm Amer would likely be rapid and undoubtedly irremediable.



Map 7. Future excavations. Source: CCHP 2023

### A. *Historical Development and Interventions:*

The Site was first uncovered in 1991 and has been partially damaged by sand's cut and fill activities. Since that time, many efforts had been made to protect and preserve the Site. These activities include:

1. Consolidation and emergency measures had been done by the Department of Antiquities in Gaza to protect the Site from looting, illegal excavations, and deterioration.
2. UNESCO offered a professional international figure to help protect the mosaics on the Site and to build an urgent shelter.
3. In cooperation with EbaF, systematic excavations and salvage excavations have been done periodically between 2002 – 2020 and a restoration project in 2018 – 2020.
4. PUI has had a presence in the Gaza Strip since 2009. The teams contribute to rehabilitating Tell Umm Amer. The Site was bad condition and in danger of disappearing due to political polarization since 2007.
5. The World Monuments Fund participated in a conference in Paris in 2012 to raise awareness of cultural Heritage in Palestine. Tell Umm Amer “Saint Hilarion Monastery” was the focus of a two-day workshop at the École Normale Supérieure in March 2012. French and Palestinian authorities and heritage professionals gathered to discuss and present to a group of experts and interested people the archaeological and conservation activities developed in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Despite the complexity of the political situation, the French-Palestinian group implemented projects to protect and preserve architectural and archaeological heritage sites in Gaza. Tell Umm Amer is a good example of community engagement in a conflict area.
6. Since November 2010, after the first phase of a condition assessment of the archaeological remains, emergency structural reinforcements were implemented at the Site in the crypt, which is more endangered due to the natural movements of a sand dune and the weight of the walls of the church five meters above. The first action to prepare for the structural work was the cleaning, documentation, and detachment of one of the mosaic pavements on the east section of the south nave of the church. This was followed by archaeological excavations to provide information on the creation and development of this monastic settlement starting from the early fourth century AD. To protect the work area from strong winter rains and create a more comfortable environment for archaeologists, restorers, and architects, a large roof supported by a wooden structure was built.

7. Restoring built heritage in Gaza, funded by the British Council. A 26-month project to rehabilitate Tell Umm Amer “Saint Hilarion Monastery” and to protect the Site from potential future damage. The project aims to build protective shelters for sensitive parts of the archaeological site and construct fences around the Site. Comprehensive on-site training was implemented as well. Community engagement activities were conducted, such as on-site activities for local artisans and for students of archaeology and architecture from two universities in Gaza. Targeted awareness sessions were offered to local school groups and families to increase awareness and engagement with the two sites.
8. Première Urgence Internationale (PUI) and ALIPH (2020-2021). As a continuation of the preservation, mediation, and training program initiated in 2018 by PUI, a new campaign was scheduled between March 2020 and February 2021. Supported by the British Council (DMCS) and the ALIPH Foundation, the conservation work was scientifically monitored by Ebaf. Although initially planned to last 12 months, the intervention was reduced because it was interrupted between August and November 2020 by the COVID-19 pandemic. The program included a variety of activities on the remains of the Site including the anastylosis of ancient masonry, stone cutting, the removal of a mosaic pavement for restoration, the archaeological excavation and processing of the data which resulted from it, etc. The goal of the anastylosis technique was to preserve the cultural and historical significance of the Site while ensuring its stability and longevity. Intervention on the original fabric of the structure was minimized, such as only replacing or reconstructing missing or severely damaged elements in a way that respected the original design and craftsmanship. The team was made up of about thirty people (women and men). As in previous years, recent graduate students from Gaza’s universities (architecture and archaeology) were included. To reinforce the students’ skills, each activity integrated a training component. For example, within the framework of the archaeological activity, leaders provided training in the reading of stratigraphy, sorting, identification, and the drawing of ceramic objects.

The preservation and restoration work followed the work already done on the crypt between 2019 and 2020. The activity also involved, at different levels of intervention, the chapel, the North Baptistery, the churches, the hostel, and the South installations of the monastery. More sensitive projects were carried out on the mosaic pavements of the Site. One of them involved the removal of the pavement of the primitive church choir for restoration. This pavement had partially collapsed in the cenotaph of Tell Umm Amer between 2009 and 2010.

A mobile walkway was built to allow the team to remove various fragments without having

direct contact with the pavement. The fragments collected, after being numbered and listed, were placed in a 25 m<sup>2</sup> sand-filled box and installed in the Site's reception building. There, the pavement was restored after different pieces of this giant "puzzle" were assembled. It was planned for the autumn. Once restored, the pavement should return to its original position in the choir of the front church. Unfortunately, the genocide war on Gaza has not allowed the re-installation of the paving still positioned in the workshop of the site's reception building. The reception of visitors has been reinforced on the sites by the training of two guides accompanying groups and the installation of two interpretation rooms. Finally, actions carried out are regularly disseminated on the net via "INTIQAL 2030", created to facilitate exchange on the heritage of Palestine in the region.

#### ***B. Recent and future interventions in the Site:***

Current and future interventions at the Site depend on the Site condition and the goals of the archaeological excavation. Here are some of the current and future interventions:

***Excavation:*** There are no plans for future excavations. The Site boundaries and archaeological remains are already identified. The Site's archaeologists said that any future excavations will involve carefully removing layers of soil to construct the foundations of the protective covering. The restoration and conservation work will continue to protect built structures, pavements, mosaic pavements, and the structures of the bath.

***Documentation:*** The Site's archaeologists will continue to use various techniques and technologies to document and record the findings during current restoration and future marginal excavations.

***Conservation:*** The Site requires conservation interventions to protect and preserve exposed artifacts and structures. Future works will involve stabilizing fragile structures in the bath area, implementing erosion control measures, and applying protective coatings or coverings.

***Restoration:*** Future restoration works will aim to recreate or reconstruct certain elements to their original structural form such as raising the walls of the hostel one meter above ground level. Future restorations may involve rebuilding structures at the churches, chapel, baptistry, and bath complex areas, repairing damaged artifacts in the atrium, or reassembling fragmented objects of the mosaic pavements.

***Interpretation and display:*** Once the protective cover of the Site and conservation work are complete, the plan is to open the Site to the public. Interpretive displays, visitor centers, and a small museum will be created to provide educational information and showcase artifacts and findings from the Site.

### 3.1.2 Visitor Management

The more people in Gaza who visit the Site and become acquainted with their history and culture, including the Site's OUV, the more mutual understanding will be promoted between people of different ages and cultural backgrounds. In this respect, visitor trends are important.

The Site was already an important educational tourist destination in Gaza before the inscription on the Tentative List. Thus, no rapid increase in visitors, including school pupils and university students, occurred after the PUI intervention, restoration, and interpretation activities, as has been the case with some archaeological sites listed on the tentative World Heritage list. However, the number of visitors has been steadily increasing, reflecting the increasing interest of educational administrators in archaeology and the history of civilizations in Gaza, the current restoration and preservation activities resulting in temporary reductions in visitor numbers. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic further limited people's freedom of movement within Gaza and visitor numbers decreased drastically since then. The 2023-24 tightened siege and massive bombardment of Gaza have made the situation immeasurably worse.



**Fig 31.** General Overview of the Site, East-North (PUI)



### 3.2 Urban Context and development pressures

Archaeological Sites in Gaza often exist within an urban context, surrounded by modern development and facing pressures related to urbanization. The urban context and development pressures in Gaza are shaped by a unique set of political, economic, and social factors.

Here are some key aspects of the urban context and development pressures in Gaza:

**Population Density:** Gaza is one of the most densely populated areas in the world, with approximately 2.3 million people living in an area of around 365 square kilometers. The high population density places immense pressure on the limited land resources and infrastructure, leading to overcrowding, strained public services, and housing shortages.

This situation hinders the creation of buffer zones to surround archaeological sites. Many discovered Sites are private property, and due to a shortage of financial resources or a compensation mechanism and law, it is very difficult to undertake appropriation of private land.

Here are some common development pressures that can impact the Site:

***Urban Expansion:*** As the Gaza population grows and expands, there is often pressure to develop land for housing, infrastructure, and commercial purposes. This expansion can encroach upon archaeological sites, leading to their destruction or degradation. The need for new buildings, roads, or other structures can result in the excavation or demolition of archaeological remains.

***Housing Shortages and Informal Settlements:*** The population growth and limited availability of land have resulted in severe housing shortages in Gaza. Many residents live in informal settlements characterized by substandard housing conditions, lack of basic services, and inadequate infrastructure. These informal settlements often lack proper planning and are vulnerable to demolition due to legal and zoning issues. The informal settlements and urban expansion surrounding archaeological sites have a negative impact on the management of archaeological sites in Gaza.

***Construction Projects:*** Construction projects, such as the development of high-rise buildings, shopping centers, or transportation infrastructure, pose significant challenges to the preservation of archaeological Sites in Gaza. Excavation or ground disturbance during construction can damage or destroy buried archaeological remains, such as the construction of Salah Al Din Street adjacent to Jabalia Mosaic, the construction of Housing projects in Beit Lahia, and the construction of Al Rasheed Street near Anthedon.



**Infrastructure Development:** The construction of utilities such as water supply networks, sewage systems, and power lines can also impact archaeological sites. The installation of underground infrastructure may require excavation, potentially damaging or destroying archaeological layers and artifacts.

**Land Use Changes:** Changes in land use, such as converting agricultural or open spaces into urban areas, can directly affect archaeological sites. Construction activities, landscaping, and alteration of natural features can disrupt archaeological deposits or make them inaccessible. This applies to Tell Umm Amer.

### 3.2.1 Physical Structures in the Surrounding Environment

Physical structures in the environment of the Site can play a significant role in enhancing the overall experience for visitors and supporting the interpretation of the Site. Here are the physical structures found in the vicinity of the Site:

**Visitor Building:** This serves as an entry point to the Site, providing information, orientation, and service facilities for visitors. It includes a film screening room, a mosaic and pottery restoration room, a room to classify artifacts found at the Site, and a room for training graduates and staff.



Fig 32. Mosaic restoration works (PUI)



Fig 33. pottery documentation room (PUI)



Fig 34. Film screening room and meeting room (PUI)



Fig 35. Training room (PUI)



**Fig 36.** Current services building (PUI)



**Fig 37.** A PUI activity at the Site (PUI)

***Interpretive Trails:*** Pathways that wind through the surrounding landscape guide visitors to significant areas within the Site. These trails feature interpretive signage, markers, and audio guides that provide information about specific points of interest along the way. The current pathways are modest and these trails and interpretive signage need to be developed.



**Fig 38.** Trail inside the shelters (PUI)



**Fig 39.** Exposed trail inside the Site (PUI)



**Fig 42.** Temporary shelter (PUI)



**Fig 41.** Permanent shelter (PUI)

***Temporary and Permanent Protective Structures:*** The Site is vulnerable to environmental factors, and protective structures have been erected to protect mosaic pavements. Some structures were built to be temporary and should be removed and replaced by permanent structures. A new permanent protective shelter was erected to protect the bath complex. These structures and shelters shield sensitive areas from direct sunlight, rain, wind, and erosion, helping to preserve fragile remains and artifacts.

***Parking and Access Infrastructure:*** The Site has no adequate parking area. There are earthen-collector roads surrounding the Site with limited traffic. These roads are essential for accommodating visitor vehicles and ensuring smooth traffic flow. Parking and access roads should be replanned to minimize visual impact on the surrounding environment while providing safe and convenient access to the Site.



**Fig 43.** The unpaved street at the main entrance with no spaces designated for parking (PUI)

### 3.2.2 Infrastructure and Urban Fabric

The archaeological site is located in an agricultural area where the vast majority of land is still used for agriculture. Some areas are used for small residential cottages. There are few exceptional cases where several-story buildings are constructed. It is located in the transitional zone between Al Nuseirat to the north and Al Zawayda to the south. The area is characterized by its urban fabric, which follows a grid system. It features intersecting streets that are long and relatively wide, ranging from 10 to 25 m. The area's master plan was approved by the Nuseirat Municipality in 2018 and endorsed by the Ministry of Local Government. Most of the streets in the area are open according to the master plan.

Population density is low in the area, which impacts the infrastructure, with most streets remaining unpaved despite being open according to the master plan. The area is known for its tourist cottages, which attract vacationers throughout the year.



**Map 9.** The road network around the Site. Source: CCHP

## A. *Traffic Flow*

The traffic plan illustrated in Map 10 shows how the road network facilitates access to the area surrounding the Site. The area contains four main types of streets:

1. Regional high-traffic road: Al Rashid Street, with an average of 500 cars/hour.
2. Atrial medium-traffic road: The main road branching from Al Rashid Street and heading eastward to the Site, with an average of 20 cars/hour.
3. Minor low-traffic road leading to the entrance of the Site, with around 3 cars/hour.
4. Local roads, which are the majority in the area, with limited traffic.

## B. *Mechanical networks*

Based on the municipality's data, communication with local residents near the Site, and notes made during a field visit, it is clear that the area is underdeveloped and still maintains a very low population density. There are very few buildings in the area, and it still lacks most essential infrastructure services, including water supply and sewage networks.



**Map 10.** Traffic density around the Site. Source: CCHP

### C. Paving

The area of streets bracing the Site is approximately 1500 square meters in size. All of its surrounding roads are unpaved Kurkar roads made up of sand and gravel, which reduce the mobility to the Site, as shown in Figure 44.



**Fig 44.** The unpaved Kurkar roads in the Site area (PUI)



**Map 11.** The four paved streets around the area of the Site (PUI Feasibility Study, 2012)

This area is surrounded by four paved streets from the outside as shown in Map 9:

1. Al Rashid Street, by the sea in the west
2. Al Nuseirat Main Street in the north
3. The street demarking the municipal boundaries of Al Nuseirat Municipality and Al Zawayda in the south
4. Al Nuseirat Refugee Camp Street at the east of the Site

#### D. Services

The area lacks service centers such as markets, shops, health clinics, police stations, schools, and so on. Al Nuseirat refugee camp, to the east of the Site, is the nearest populated area with all necessary service amenities. As shown in the Map 10, a school is located approximately 1010 meters northeast of the Site. There is also a small cafeteria on Al Rasheed Street, which serves vacationers on the seashore.

The area lacks a water supply network, and residents depend on artesian wells for water. There is no sewage network infrastructure in place, and residents rely on septic tanks.



Map 12. Facilities and services around the Site. Source: CCHP

### E. Aesthetic Measures

PUI drafted various measures to enhance the visual appeal and presentation of the Site and ensure a good visual experience for visitors. These measures aim to create an immersive and engaging experience while also respecting the historical and cultural significance of the Site. Here are some of the aesthetic measures taken into consideration:

**Interpretive Signage and Displays:** Well-designed interpretive signage and displays can provide valuable information about the Site's history, significance, and archaeological finds. These can be aesthetically pleasing and informative, incorporating appropriate graphics, images, and text to engage visitors and enhance their understanding of the Site. The current interpretation tools are not yet sufficient, but ongoing plans aim at building an information center and developing interpretive activities and tools.

**Lighting:** Strategic lighting can dramatically impact the visual experience at an archaeological site, particularly for evening or night visits. Properly placed lighting fixtures can highlight key features, create ambiance, and ensure visitor safety while minimizing light pollution and preserving the Site's integrity. PUI's aesthetic strategies include various cultural activities such as evening music shows and open-space cultural activities.



Fig 45. A youth concert inside the Site to celebrate National Heritage Day (PUI)



**Visitor Facilities:** The Site lacks appropriate visitor facilities such as seating areas, and visitor centers—all important aspects of enhancing the overall visitor experience. These facilities can be designed to be visually appealing, blending in with the Site’s aesthetics and maintaining a harmonious balance between modern amenities and the historical context.

#### ***F. Infrastructure Rehabilitation Projects, including proposed evaluation projects***

Infrastructure rehabilitation projects at Tell Umm Amer involve the restoration, preservation, consolidation, reconstruction, sheltering, and enhancement of the Site’s physical infrastructure to facilitate research, visitor access, and overall conservation. These projects aim to strike a balance between preserving the historical and cultural significance of the Site and making it accessible to school pupils, university students, researchers, domestic and foreign tourists, and the local community. Current and future infrastructure rehabilitation projects at the Site include:

***Site Conservation, restoration, consolidation, and reconstruction:*** These activities, mainly implemented by the PUI, involve the stabilization and preservation of the archaeological remains to prevent further deterioration. It includes reinforcing structures, consolidating fragile walls, and implementing measures such as shelters to control erosion, protect mosaic pavements, and the churches’ basements. Permanent shelters protect the baths complex, and sand and gravel covering are used to prevent plant growth.

***Security and Monitoring Systems:*** Implementing security measures is essential for protecting the Site from vandalism, theft, and other risks. MoTA offers full-time 24-hour guards to secure the Site. Further security and monitoring systems are recommended. These may involve surveillance cameras, access control systems, and alarms to ensure the Site’s security.

***Environmental Management:*** Addressing environmental concerns to mitigate potential damage to the Site is essential. Erosion control measures, water drainage management, and natural vegetation restoration to preserve the Site’s integrity should be implemented.

#### ***G. Visual Assessment, including views from sea and lands***

Map 11 shows the view line of sight to the surrounding area is excellent from all directions, as there is nothing obscuring this view other than a ten-floor residential tower located to the northwest of the Site and the two residential houses adjacent to the Site on the southern side. The widths of the surrounding streets, existing and proposed, contribute positively to maintaining visual continuity of the Site with the sea shore and surrounding areas.



**Fig 46.** On-site restoration and conservation work (the crypt) (CCHP team 2023)



**Map 13.** The view line of sight around the Site (CCHP)

The contour lines in Map 13 shows that the Site has a good view from all directions, as it is distinguished by its height relative to the surrounding area.

Buildings Height around the archaeological site  
(SAINT HILARION ) - 2023



**Map 14.** The height of the buildings and Contour lines around the Site. Source: CCHP.

The above map also shows the heights of the buildings nearby, the vast majority of which consist of a ground floor and two additional floors. The only exceptions are a residential high-rise with ten floors and four other buildings ranging from four to eight floors in height. This analysis makes it easy to implement building regulations that classify the area surrounding the Site as a “tourist zone” where new buildings are limited to no more than two floors.

### 3.2.3 Attractions, Amenities and Visitor Experience

Getting to the Site with no directional street signs and parking on an unpaved road without even a proper sign at the entrance to the Site do not make for easy visitor access. No signage indicates that it is a national heritage Site. The Site attracts archaeologists and heritage experts. The little information in the simple brochure and the very few interpretive signs (some of which have deteriorated due to climatic conditions) are not enough. The video presentation needs to be improved substantially for a better understanding of the Site and to enrich the visitor experience. The amenities in the temporary visitor area are very simple, but these will be upgraded once the new visitor and interpretation center and museum are set up.

### 3.2.4 Social and Economic context

The situation in the Gaza Strip is complex and characterized by a combination of social, economic, and political challenges. It is considered an armed conflict zone. The social and economic context and ongoing conflicts have significantly impacted the local community's interest in cultural heritage.

- **Social Context:** The Gaza Strip is one of the most densely populated areas in the world. This contributes to challenges in providing basic services and infrastructure. A significant portion of the population in Gaza consists of Palestinian refugees and their descendants who were displaced from their homes during Al Nakba in 1948. This has contributed to a sense of displacement and a complex social dynamic.

High levels of unemployment and poverty are other persistent issues in Gaza. The economic challenges, coupled with restrictions on the movement of people and goods, have led to a strained job market. Access to education and health care has long been limited due to economic constraints and the impact of conflicts. The education system has faced challenges such as overcrowded classrooms and shortages of educational materials. The latest assault has almost entirely destroyed the health and education sectors.

- **Economic Context:** The Gaza Strip has been subject to an Israeli blockade and several destructive wars since 2005. This has severely limited exports, imports, private sector investment, and the movement of individuals. These restrictions have hindered the development of sustainable industries, making the population heavily reliant on external assistance, including international aid.

The political situation with Gaza's local government has also influenced economic conditions. The relationship between the local government and the international community, as well as with the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, affects the flow of aid and resources.

Growth reached (3.5 %) in 2022, down from (7.1 %) in 2021. Rapid inflation hit the poorest Palestinian households hardest, with the cost of some basic food commodities projected to rise by as much as (80%) by the end of 2023. Poverty rates rose significantly over the past few years, particularly since 2020. (World Bank 2022).

According to the World Food Programme (WFP) in 2022, one-third of the Palestinian population (1.78 million people) suffered from food insecurity prior to October 7. These included 1.1 million severely food insecure people, the great majority of whom (90%) live in Gaza.

During the second quarter of 2022, the unemployment rate reached 44% in the Gaza Strip and 14% in the West Bank. The absence of and barriers to livelihood opportunities have been driving a cycle of aid dependency and reliance on negative coping strategies to meet basic needs. High reported levels of debt, borrowing, and use of savings to meet basic needs has further exacerbated the financial precariousness of households and reduced their ability to recover from future shocks (UNICEF 2022).

Continuous cuts and irregularities of salary payments to civil servants of the Palestinian Authority (PA) and the de-facto authorities in Gaza add to the need for assistance, including food aid. In the Gaza Strip, 68% of aid receipt households report that humanitarian aid is their primary source of income compared to 4% in the West Bank (OCHA 2023).

As a result, there are significant structural imbalances, namely a resource gap and a labor market imbalance and high dependence on external sources of income, including aid. These fundamental distortions, along with Israel's control over the collection and disbursement of a large part of the Palestinian Authority's fiscal revenues, perpetuate the high dependence of the Palestinian economy on donor support.

The infrastructure in Gaza, including housing, water, and electricity services, has been severely strained due to conflicts and economic difficulties. Reconstruction efforts are often hampered by resource constraints and the challenges of operating in a conflict-prone area. It is worth to mention that the current, ongoing war of 2023-24 has killed tens of thousands, displaced millions, and destroyed nearly all infrastructure for economic development. There is currently no economy to speak of in the Gaza Strip. The war contributes to a sense of insecurity, hinders economic development, and exacerbates social tensions.

### **3.2.5 The view of the local community key findings: Survey, Interviews and focus groups**

The Local social expert dealing with the outreach has prepared and tested the Questionnaire about the local community awareness and its perception of the Site and its role for future development. The targeted sample is One hundred persons which was distributed among youth, adults, elderly, males and females, students, professionals, decision making, etc. Forty-Five Questionnaire forms was filled in Nuseirat, and Fifty-Five forms was filled by people from Gaza living outside Nuseirat. The questionnaire was analyzed quantitatively. The Social expert has also interviewed three key persons from NM, MoLG, and MoTA. In addition, she conducted two focus group meeting to obtain the local community perception to the site. Interviews, and focus groups was analyzed qualitatively.

The local community's point of view on cultural heritage is multifaceted and shaped by the unique historical, social, and political context of the Gaza Strip. While individual perspectives may vary, certain themes and sentiments are commonly expressed:

- Many Gazans view their cultural heritage as an integral part of their identity. The rich history, traditions, and customs are seen as a source of pride and resilience, helping communities withstand the challenges posed by conflicts and economic hardships.
- The local community of Al Nuseirat may express a sense of loss and grief over the damage to cultural sites and the destruction of historical landmarks caused by conflicts. The loss of tangible and intangible cultural heritage is often felt deeply, representing a disruption to the continuity of their history.
- The connection between the people of Gaza and their land is a central theme in their cultural heritage. The impact of displacement and restrictions on movement can evoke a sense of longing for and attachment to the land and its cultural significance.
- Gazans recognize the challenges in preserving their cultural heritage, including limited resources, economic hardships, Israel's siege, and Israeli violence against Gaza. Efforts to maintain and protect cultural sites may be hindered by these challenges.
- Some Gazans view the preservation of cultural heritage as an act of resistance against external pressures and as a way to maintain a distinct Palestinian identity. Cultural practices, traditions, and symbols are seen as powerful tools in resisting cultural assimilation.
- Despite the challenges, Gazans may emphasize the importance of cultural exchange and collaboration with the international community. They may see these interactions as avenues for sharing their heritage, fostering understanding, and building connections with people around the world.
- Gazans may express a desire for international recognition and support in preserving their cultural heritage. They may seek solidarity from the global community to raise awareness about the challenges they face and to garner assistance in safeguarding their cultural legacy.

It's important to note that individual perspectives within the local community of Gaza are diverse, and opinions may vary based on factors such as age, background, and personal experiences. Additionally, the context is dynamic, and the viewpoints of Gazans may evolve in response to ongoing developments in the region.

### **Key findings highlight the views of local community:**

#### **a) Questionnaire: The survey reveals a disconnect between the local community and Tell Umm Amer / Saint Hilarion Monastery**

- Limited knowledge: Only 17% possess complete knowledge, and 72% have no or limited knowledge.
- Rare visitation: 58% have never visited and only 21% have visited more than once.
- Lack of amenities: Respondents cited the absence of cafes, cultural centers, and parking as deterrents.

Despite these challenges, the survey also reveals promising aspects:

- Strong interest among visitors: Those who have visited value the Site's heritage and cultural significance.
- Community support for revitalization: Over 85% favor targeting both visitors and the local community.
- Community management potential: Over half believe the local community can manage the Site, with capacity building needs identified.

Opinions and feedback to preserve the Site include:

- Raising awareness: Educating the local community about ongoing excavation and preservation efforts and the Site's historical significance.
- Building community engagement: Encouraging visits through school field trips, social media promotion, and awareness workshops.
- Developing visitor amenities: Establishing a tourist haven with cafes, information centers, and recreational facilities without detracting from the Site's integrity.
- Promoting sustainable development: Exploring water desalination options and incorporating nearby lands for responsible recreational activities.

#### **b) Key findings of interviews with stakeholders**

- Nuseirat Municipality (NM) participates in managing the Site and plays a regulatory role in controlling access, paving roads, and providing lighting. The municipality is also working to create and develop infrastructure in the surrounding area.
- NM will contribute by improving roads, lighting, and infrastructure around the Site.

- NM can further contribute to **boosting tourism** at the Site by collaborating with cultural institutions within the municipality and central region. This could involve encouraging them to organize recreational and educational activities, including hosting children's camps within the Site itself.
- By promoting educational and entertaining trips to Tell Umm Amer and other archaeological sites, NM can strengthen Palestinian identity and educate young people.
- Collaboration between ministries and municipalities is essential for long-term Site preservation.

**c) key findings of Focus Groups**

Focus groups reveal a strong community interest in and appreciation for the Site. Participants recognize its value not only as a tourist destination but also as a window into the past, a source of new knowledge, and potential inspiration for artistic expression.

The archaeological collection treasure presents a unique opportunity to enrich the community's knowledge and attract visitors while preserve a fragment of the past for future generations, embracing a collaborative approach that prioritizes cultural preservation, sustainable development, and community engagement. Recognizing the importance of collaboration, stakeholders such as Ministry of Local Government, the Nuseirat Municipality, and the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities must work together to develop a comprehensive plan that prioritizes both infrastructure development and cultural preservation. Immediate priorities (when possible) including paving streets and installing lighting, a museum, and community-oriented facilities to ensure the Site's sustainable growth and long-term impact.



# *Chapter 4: Legal And Institutional Frame Works*

Palestine inherited a variety of legislation during the British mandate, Jordanian and Egyptian jurisdictions, and Israeli occupation. This legislation has also applied to the heritage field. Despite national efforts to create unified legislation, the legal and institutional frameworks for the management of archaeological sites in Palestine vary between the northern governorates (West Bank) and the southern governorates (the Gaza Strip).

However, in 2018, a new law for the protection of Tangible Cultural Heritage was ratified in Palestine. Moreover, the state of Palestine has endorsed several international conventions that ensure the protection and safeguarding of cultural heritage resources. These frameworks are essential for the protection, preservation, and management of cultural heritage sites and monuments to ensure their cultural and historical significance is maintained. This chapter discusses the national legislation in Palestine as well as international agreements, conventions, and stakeholder participation. The CMP is considered an essential institutional component that aims at guiding the sustainable use and protection of Tell Umm Amer.

## **4.1 Legal Framework**

Considering the successive political changes in Palestine, various legislations were implemented, the most significant being the British Antiquities Law No. 51 of 1929, the Jordanian Antiquities Law No. 51 of 1966, and the Decree for the Law of the Protection of Tangible Cultural Heritage No. 11/2018.

The British Law remained in effect until it was amended by the Mandate government in 1936. This amendment continued to be in force during the Egyptian administration and subsequently during the Israeli occupation.

In 1994, the Palestinian Authority decided to utilize the Palestinian Antiquities Law of 1929, which has remained in effect to this day in the Gaza Strip. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities in Ramallah follows the Palestinian Tangible Cultural Heritage Law No. 11, which was adopted in 2018 (Decree Law No. 11/2018).

### **4.1.1 History of Conservation Policies**

During the British Mandate, the “Ancient Antiquities Law” of 1929 was launched, and it remained in effect throughout the four political periods in Gaza: The Mandate period until 1948, the Egyptian administration period until 1967, the Israeli occupation period until 1994, and finally the Palestinian Authority period until today.

#### **4.1.2 Present Framework**

Many actor parties contribute to establishing a legal protection framework for the Tell Umm Amer archaeological site, namely MoTA, which is responsible for the management of cultural heritage in Palestine. In addition, the MoLG is responsible for approving appropriate legislation for the physical planning of the surrounding area. The third party is the Municipality of Nuseirat, which controls urban development in the area of the Site. Finally, PUI carries out restoration, conservation, capacity building, and community awareness works.

##### ***A. Present Legislative Framework that protects the Site***

Many archaeological sites in Gaza suffer from weak protection and are exposed to infringements from various actors, including private landowners, the municipality, and governmental institutions. Tell Umm Amer has significant value, which encouraged actors to show interest in the protection of the Site through the following legislative framework:

- MoTA has the authority to issue governmental decisions aimed at protecting the Site. The MoLG and the Central Physical Planning Committee are considered supportive bodies in terms of making decisions on land use around the Site. The MoLG and the Central Committee put the Site on the priority list for preservation. The Central Committee issued a policy configuration for the preservation of cultural heritage properties, which includes sites that need to be preserved in the Gaza strip.
- The Nuseirat Municipality considers itself a representative of the local community, especially residents who own the land parcels surrounding the Site. The municipality is reluctant to change the width of the surrounding streets and the building legislation in the buffer zone of the Site. On the other hand, the municipality is interested in sharing and taking responsibility for the Site as a tool for the development of the area.

#### **4.1.3 International conventions and designations**

In the twentieth century, Europe introduced international legislative and operational measures as a response to war times as a global initiative to restore and protect cultural heritage. These operational approaches were established through different charters, convention agreements, recommendations, resolutions, declarations, and statements, which were drafted and adopted by international organizations such as UNESCO, ICCROM, ICOMOS, and regional bodies.

Since Gaza is located in an armed conflict zone, it is worth referring to the UNESCO 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, and to the UNESCO 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Prevention of the Illicit Import, Export, and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property as two key international agreements aimed at safeguarding cultural heritage in armed conflict areas.

After ratification, each member state is obliged to follow the propositions and operational guidelines and construct its individual heritage policies according to international standards.

From the 20<sup>th</sup> century until today, more than 100 documents were developed for the international establishment and implementation of ethical objectives, considerations, and understandings regarding the process of identification, research, conservation, restoration, and management of cultural heritage. The overall objective of these documents was to create universal standards that can effectively respond to numerous threats caused by human behavior or natural occurrences, to enhance cooperation and dialogue among countries, and to secure the existence of cultural heritage for future generations, noting that the ‘cultural heritage of each is the cultural heritage of all’ (Nara 1994: art. 8).

**Table 3** (below) lists the most important internationally ratified documents for the protection, preservation, and presentation of cultural heritage with an emphasis on archaeological and built heritage.

Document	Type of Heritage	Aims
Athens Charter Art. 65-70, 1933	Built heritage; Individual buildings, groups of buildings	To protect sites and buildings from demolition, protect original settings
European Cultural Convention, Council of Europe, 1954	Common heritage of Europe (languages, civilizations, history)	To safeguard, study, and promote the common heritage of Europe, provide access, and encourage exchange
RIPAAE (Recommendation on International Principles Applicable to Archaeological Excavations), UNESCO, 1956	Archaeological heritage	To excavate, study, protect, preserve, and educate
Venice Charter, ICOMOS, 1964	Historical monuments and architectural heritage and their settings	To safeguard, study, restore, present, excavate, research, and document
ECPAE (European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage), Council of Europe, 1969	Archaeological heritage, the common heritage of Europe	To protect, inventory, prohibit illicit action, and encourage cooperation and exchange
Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, UNESCO, 1972	Cultural (built) and natural heritage	Identification, protection, conservation, preservation, and transmission to future generations
CPMAH (Charter for the Protection and Management of the Archaeological Heritage), ICOMOS, 1990	Archaeological and common heritage	To protect from various threats and provide legislation and practical guidelines for management

Document	Type of Heritage	Aims
European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (Valetta), Council of Europe, 1992	Archaeological heritage	Scientific study, integrated conservation, public dissemination and awareness, and protection against illicit trade
Nara Document on Authenticity, ICOMOS, 1994	Tangible and intangible heritage	Preservation of authenticity of properties in their original cultural context
Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Significance (Burra Charter), ICOMOS, 1999	Tangible (built and natural) and intangible heritage (cultural significance)	Conservation and preservation, policy development, management of cultural significance, and participation
Intangible Heritage Convention, UNESCO, 2003	Intangible heritage	Protection, promotion, education, and development
Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro Convention), Council of Europe, 2005	Cultural heritage (resources from the past, values, beliefs, traditions, environment)	Placing heritage in a wider social context and increasing participation of local communities
Charter on the Conservation of Cultural Heritage in Palestine (Palestinian Charter), 2013	Tangible Cultural Heritage	Set policy for the protection of tangible cultural heritage

**Table 3:** International conventions and designations

#### 4.2. Stakeholders

Tell Umm Amer inhabits an important geographic area of the Al Nuseirat coast with different stakeholders who have differing needs and areas of interest. The following stakeholders are directly relevant to the planning for and implementation of the CMP:

- **Local community:** people who have ties to and traditional knowledge of the Site and its importance. They may include but are not limited to people who indigenously live in the area, including residents of the western part of Al Nuseirat.

- ***Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA)***: the owner of the Site and the formal body that has the mandate to manage the Site according to the Palestinian legal and constitutional framework.
- ***Al Nuseirat Municipality (NM)***: provides the necessary infrastructure and services in the area and is responsible for the management of the land adjacent to the Site. The Municipality in cooperation with the Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage shares the responsibility and cooperates to issue building permits in the area.
- ***Ministry of Local Government (MoLG)***: oversees the Zoning and Physical planning of the area. The Central Committee of Planning and Building Regulations provides support to the Municipality to perform its planning.
- ***Première Urgence Internationale (PUI)***: a non-profit international NGO. Their mission is to defend basic human rights. In 2017, PUI received funding from the British Council Cultural Protection Fund which aims at protecting and preserving Tell Umm Amer and the Byzantine Church in Jabalia. Since 2017, PUI has been considered the main stakeholder that raised funds and implemented conservation works at the Site.
- ***French Biblical and Archaeological School of Jerusalem*** (*—École Biblique et Archéologique Française*): a world-renowned research institute specialized in archaeology and based in Jerusalem. has good experience working in Gaza, conducting excavations, research, and emergency preservation in most of the archaeological Sites in Gaza since 1995. implements its activities in cooperation with MoTA, the French government, and international aid organizations. conducted annual excavations in Tell Umm Amer for more than 20 years and in Jabalia Church, the Roman Cemetery west of Jabalia, Anthedon, Tell Al Sakan, and Tell Rafah.
- ***INTIQAL 2030***: With the support of the British Council Cultural Protection Fund and the ALIPH Foundation, INTIQAL 2030 creates and runs a safe space in which girls, boys, young people, and families engage in concrete actions and express their fears and hopes in a protective environment while developing their resilience following traumatic experiences. INTIQAL 2030 is an active international-national initiative that is directing its main activities at Tell Umm Amer.
- ***The Islamic University of Gaza and the University of Palestine***: The two universities engage in the educational and training programs conducted at the Site. Many students and staff benefit from the research and training programs conducted by INTIQAL and PUI. Iwan Center, affiliated with the Islamic University, is credited with great achievement in preserving cultural heritage in Gaza.
- ***Community-heritage-based grassroots***: There are three active community-heritage-based grassroots organizations active in the fields of cultural heritage awareness, children, local heritage, and women's empowerment: NAWA Association, Al Qarara Museum, and the Culture and Free Thought Association.

## **Stakeholder Consultation**

Public stakeholders — the local community, the Municipality, visitors, MoTA, , PUI, MoLG, universities, and interested experts — play a central role in defining the significance of Tell Umm Amer, creating a shared vision, and contributing to a sustainable plan for its management. Therefore, it was essential to engage with the abovementioned stakeholders in a participatory approach in preparing this Conservation and Management Plan.

A consultation process was developed as an open and effective way for members of the public to engage in a constructive dialogue about Tell Umm Amer. The feedback was assessed and its findings have been integrated into the plan. The decision to prepare a Conservation and Management Plan was welcomed as was the commitment to having the management of the Tell Umm Amer archaeological site supported by sustainable policies.

Consultation during and upon completion of the Action Plan seeks to inform stakeholders of outcomes and to gather feedback on the process to inform future planning and foster continual improvement in the CMP's processes. Details of all meetings with the municipality, local community, professionals, authorities, and other stakeholders are documented and annexed in this plan.

# *Section 3*

# Chapter 5: Strategic Planning

## Analysis(SWOT)

A SWOT analysis is crucial for interventions in archaeological sites as it provides a comprehensive understanding of a site's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. It guides decision-making, helps identify appropriate strategies, and ensures that interventions align with the site's unique qualities, promoting its long-term preservation, development, and sustainability. SWOT analysis provides a systematic framework for understanding the current state, potential, and challenges of an archaeological site. It enables the formulation of targeted strategies and fosters collaboration among stakeholders, which is essential for the effective protection and sustainable development of these valuable cultural heritage assets.

### SWOT analysis for Tell Umm Amer archaeological Site

#### Strengths:

- **Historical Significance:** Tell Umm Amer has a rich history and is recognized on the Tentative List of Palestine for cultural and natural sites of potential OUV. It is expected to attract visitors interested in its cultural, religious, and historical value.
- **Religious Value:** The Site is attributed to Saint Hilarion, a native of the Gaza region and the father of Palestinian monasticism. Hilarion is venerated as a saint by the Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches. A series of miracles were attributed to him.
- **Architectural Beauty:** The Site feature stunning Byzantine architecture, including its churches , crypt and other structures, which enhances its visual appeal and attracts tourists.
- **Picturesque Location:** Tell Umm Amer is situated near the seashore of Al Nuseirat, offering breathtaking panoramic views of the surrounding space, creating a beautiful and memorable experience for visitors.
- **Educational Value:** The Site provides opportunities for educational and research activities, allowing visitors to learn about the emergence of Christianity in Gaza and the history of the oldest monasteries in Palestine as well as its architecture and cultural heritage.
- **Accessibility:** the location of the Site is accessible to all age categories with no mobility limitations.
- **Tourism Potential:** Tell Umm Amer is located in an urbanized area that attracts a large number of visitors, providing an opportunity to attract domestic tourists, boost the local economy, and raise awareness about cultural heritage.



- **Educational Value:** The Site serves as an educational resource, offering insights into the past, different civilizations, tolerance, and accepting others. It provides many opportunities for research and academic studies.
- **Community Engagement:** The Site fosters a sense of community pride and engagement by showcasing the history and heritage of the local area.

#### **Weaknesses:**

- **Infrastructure Limitations:** The lack of visitor facilities and amenities, such as restrooms, parking lots, or a visitor center, may affect the overall visitor experience and limit the Site’s capacity to accommodate school or university visitors.
- **Preservation Needs:** The Site requires ongoing preservation efforts to maintain its historical and architectural integrity, including regular maintenance, restoration, and conservation measures.
- **Preservation Challenges:** Al Nuseirat is one of the high-density, urbanized Palestinian refugee camps that have often undergone rapid development since 1948, which poses challenges to the preservation and conservation of the archaeological site.
- **Limited Space:** According to the master plan of Al Nuseirat, the Site is in an area categorized as “Residential B” for future development. This indicates a future for the area that leaves limited space for Site expansion, visitor facilities, or an interpretation center. Land expropriation is a long, complex, and expensive process.
- **Limited Interpretation:** The availability of interpretive materials, signage, and guided tours may be limited, affecting visitors’ understanding and appreciation of the Site’s significance.
- **Capacity Building:** There is currently a lack of trained staff and guides. It is important to address training programs to ensure effective Site management and a positive visitor experience.
- **Protective Shelter:** It is important to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the archaeological Site to determine the specific needs and requirements for a protective shelter, considering factors such as the Site’s vulnerability to weathering, erosion, and human impacts. It is important to seek the expertise of architects, engineers, and conservation specialists experienced in designing and constructing protective structures for archaeological sites.
- **Master Plan (land use):** The endorsed master plan on 31/10/2018 has a negative impact on Tell Umm Amer. It is important to address the current master plan and to adjust it to minimize any adverse effects on the Site’s integrity and significance.
- **Site’s Boundaries and Buffer Zone:** Neither the Site nor the current endorsed master plan includes a buffer zone surrounding the Site. Establishing buffer zones around the Site within the zoning plan is needed. Buffer zones act as protective barriers that can limit potential negative impacts from nearby development activities such as construction, pollution, and encroachment.

### **Opportunities:**

- ***Tourism Development:*** Tell Umm Amer presents opportunities for tourism development, attracting domestic and international visitors interested in cultural heritage and historical and religious tourism.
- ***Partnerships:*** Collaborating with international archaeological institutions, local tourism companies, heritage organizations, and academic institutions can lead to enhance Site management, promotion, and visitor experiences.
- ***Community Involvement:*** Involving the local community in Site management, interpretation, and tourism development can foster a sense of ownership and contribute to sustainable cultural tourism initiatives.
- ***Cultural Exchange:*** The Site offers opportunities for cultural exchange programs, workshops, and events, promoting intercultural understanding and cooperation.
- ***Collaboration with Urban Development, Municipality of Al Nuseirat, Ministry of Local Governance, and Owners:*** Collaboration between archaeologists, developers, and urban planners can result in better and more integrated development plans, adjusting the current master plan that preserves and incorporate the archaeological Site into urban landscapes.
- ***Enhanced Visitor Experience:*** The availability of a low density urban area surrounding the Site's boundaries offers opportunities to create visitor amenities such as interpretive center, guided tours, and interactive exhibits, enhancing the overall visitor experience.

### **Threats:**

- ***Natural Deterioration:*** Environmental factors such as weathering, erosion, and natural disasters pose a threat to the preservation of the Site's structures and features.
- ***Domestic Educational Tourism Pressures:*** A significant influx of school visitors, if not managed properly, can lead to overcrowding, wear and tear, and potential damage to the Site.
- ***Urbanization and Development:*** According to the endorsed master plan of 31/10/2018, expected surrounding urban developments may encroach upon the visual setting and result in creating a denser area surrounding the Site.
- ***Inefficient Management Model:*** Governmental institutions are managing the Site with limited resources and an absence of management structure. A management model is required to meet the long-term protection and development goals at Tell Umm Amer.
- ***Lack of Future Funding:*** Insufficient financial resources allocated for Site conservation, maintenance, and promotional activities may hinder the long-term protection and development of the Tell Umm Amer Site.

- ***Armed Conflict:*** Ongoing armed conflict between Palestine and Israel poses a serious threat to the Site. This has reached an extreme during the current 2023-2024 war on Gaza and the mass destruction caused to most of Gaza's cultural heritage sites. The Tell Umm Amer site is under severe threat in this conflict, which may result in the partial or total destruction of the Site.

This SWOT analysis provides a preliminary understanding of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with Tell Umm Amer Site. Further detailed analysis considering specific local conditions, stakeholder perspectives, and ongoing preservation efforts will be necessary to develop a comprehensive and tailored strategy for the Site's protection and sustainable management and development.

# *Chapter 6: Planning Strategies*

Planning strategies for archaeological sites are essential for their preservation and sustainable management. These strategies aim to balance the need for scientific exploration with the responsibility to protect and promote cultural heritage. This CMP includes key effective planning strategies. These strategies will help ensure the preservation and appreciation of Palestine's shared cultural heritage for years to come.

The approach behind the Vision Statement is sustaining and conserving the OUV of the Site and its environs. The Vision Statement also emphasizes involving the local community in its protection, development, and management, increasing the benefit for future generation while maintain its authenticity.

## **6.1 Vision Statement**

Tell Umm Amer is a unique cultural heritage site of international significance where visitors can experience tangible links to the ascetic lifestyle, the foundation of monasticism, and the artistic achievements, daily lives, and creative expressions of the people who once inhabited this sacred space. Recognizing this, the goal is to protect, conserve, promote, develop, and enhance appreciation of the Tell Umm Amer Site, supported by a robust management framework that will ensure its sustainable preservation for future generations.

## **6.2 Mission Statement**

Preserving Tell Umm Amer is a shared responsibility. The sustainable conservation of the Site and its value, authenticity, and integrity are a fundamental commitment of stakeholders towards the local community and its heritage. Together, we can develop the Site of Tell Umm Amer for future generations, protecting and enhancing its unique cultural heritage while fostering a better understanding of the cultural heritage of the Site.

## **6.3 Objectives and Actions**

The main aim of the Conservation Management Plan is to ensure the best possible conservation practices for the Site. The Plan shall tackle the protection of the Site from weather conditions, future interventions, and rapid development and address the need for improved facilities and services at the Site. This Plan shall involve all local stakeholders, including the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, the Ministry of Local Governance, and the Municipality of Nuseirat. The Plan will contribute to raising the local community's awareness about the importance of providing sustainable maintenance, protection, and promotion of the Site.

The main objective of the CMP is the protection and conservation of the Site as the prime cultural heritage site in Gaza. The Site is already on the Tentative List of Palestine for cultural and natural Sites of potential OUV, which means it already has a strong element of protection. This will become even stronger if Palestine decides to nominate it. These are key elements for a Site of such importance:

1. Protect and conserve the heritage of Tell Umm Amer and maintain its cultural significance, integrity, and authenticity.
2. Enhance awareness of Tell Umm Amer and its significance for the local and international communities.
3. Enrich the visitor experience at Tell Umm Amer.
4. Promote economic prosperity and tourism development.

### **6.3.1 Protect and conserve the heritage of tell Umm Amer and maintain its cultural significance, integrity, and authenticity**

Conservation efforts, including maintenance and repair works, will be undertaken to enhance and preserve the significance of the Site. Efforts shall focus on the preservation of the historical character of the surviving elements of the Site and its historical fabric. When change is required to meet safety or environmental needs, alterations will be kept to a minimum. For all works, including maintenance, repair, and rebuilding, methods and materials will be employed that do not compromise, or at least minimize the impact on, the historical character and legibility of the structures of the archaeological site. When possible, other than with exact like-for-like repairs, works should be reversible or at least not prevent alternative future solutions. Works on existing historical fabric and structures will be undertaken using materials that match the historical ones in terms of material, quality, profile, color, and finish as closely as possible with available materials.

Works involving the addition of new structures (protective shelter, visitor center, administration building, and surrounding buildings in the buffer zone) will match the scale and shape of the relevant historical structures using high quality materials and design.

#### **Conservation Policies**

Conservation is at the heart of the management of any heritage site, especially one as significant as Tell Umm Amer. **Table 4** (below) sets out a concise series of conservation policies with associated actions that should govern all works and decisions about the Site. They should act as guiding principles within the context of the Conservation Philosophy and inform all conservation actions.

Policy	Reason	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Ensure all decisions affecting the archaeological fabric and setting of Tell Umm Amer are based on a sound understanding of the significance of the Site and/or individual elements potentially affected</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– To preserve the significance of the Site</li> <li>– To give the value of the heritage assets due consideration in decision-making</li> <li>– To ensure that there is a coherent basis for decision-making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Use the CMP to inform decisions</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Enhance the legibility of the Site</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– To enhance the significance and understanding of the Site</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Increase/control building permits in the buffer zone area</li> <li>– Use interpretation to make the uses of spaces in the Site clearer</li> <li>– Make the differences in historical periods (Roman, Byzantine, or Islamic) of structures clearer when the opportunity arises</li> <li>– Ensure future change is readable as a phase of change. This can be achieved through the incorporation of the date when works took place rather than the use of contemporary materials</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Ensure all staff at Tell Umm Amer understand the significance of the Site and the approach to its conservation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– To encourage staff to contribute to its conservation</li> <li>– To enable staff to explain its significance to visitors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Provide a base level of conservation training to all staff</li> <li>– Ensure all staff have access to the CMP and are encouraged to read it</li> <li>– MoTA staff should also be provided with training to understand the significance of Tell Umm Amer and the approach to its conservation</li> </ul>

Policy	Reason	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Maintain good relationships between relevant key stakeholders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– To facilitate a coordinated approach to the conservation of the Site</li> <li>– To encourage the development of a collective approach to the conservation and presentation of the Site</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Conduct an annual stakeholder meeting</li> <li>– Maintain regular Site management committee meetings</li> <li>– Maintain regular communications between the Site management team and other stakeholders</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Maintain an ongoing record of maintenance and project works including EbaF and PUI activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– To facilitate a transfer of knowledge about works undertaken on the Site</li> <li>– To provide a record for future study of works and changes carried out</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Develop a maintenance and works log</li> <li>– Ensure the log is centrally saved so it can be accessed by relevant parties and so that it can be passed on from one Site manager/ directorate at MoTA to the next</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Ensure timely maintenance repairs and restoration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– To preserve the historical fabric for as long as possible</li> <li>– To ensure the safety and appearance of the Site</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Develop a Maintenance Management Plan to plan routine maintenance</li> <li>– Address defects resulting from major weather events immediately</li> <li>– Evaluate the need for restoration and undertake when fabric is at the end of its life</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Ensure that the condition and appearance of the Site is maintained to a high standard in the long-term</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– To preserve the significance of the Site and its individual elements</li> <li>– To take a long-term view to ensure that works are durable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Consider the long-term durability and presentation of materials in the prevailing climatic conditions</li> <li>– Source materials that have been tried and tested in the same or similar environment</li> <li>– Ensure that modern structures are concealed as far as possible</li> </ul>

Policy	Reason	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– All proposed works should be subject to a heritage impact assessment prior to implementation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– To ensure works have been designed and will be carried out to minimize their impact on the significance of the Site and where possible enhance the significance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– A written heritage impact assessment should be prepared by PUI or a qualified professional consultant</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Adopt the CMP and ensure its implementation and dissemination</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– To make use of the information and advice contained within this document</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Facilitate the completion and adoption of the CMP</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Review and update the CMP regularly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– To ensure the appropriate and coordinated conservation of the Site</li> <li>– To ensure that new information is incorporated into the CMP and the advice is amended accordingly</li> <li>– To ensure the ongoing relevance of the CMP</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Use the CMP when planning maintenance works, change or interpretation proposals</li> <li>– Ensure a hard copy of the CMP is kept at the Site, at NM, and at MoTA for use by staff</li> <li>– Commission the consultant, HHCP, to review the CMP every five years or after any major change is undertaken</li> </ul>

**Table 4:** Conservation and maintenance policies

***Adopting a master plan that defines the Site boundary and buffer zone***

A Master plan for Tell Umm Amer should be designated to protect and sustainably manage the Site’s OUV, recognizing its significance for humanity and future generations. Adopting a new master plan underscores the Site’s recognition and a commitment to fulfilling the responsibilities associated with the need to protect the Site and its authenticity and integrity.

Tell Umm Amer is vulnerable to various threats, including natural disasters, climate change, and urban development. A master plan provides legal and regulatory mechanisms to protect these sites from physical harm and degradation. A dedicated master plan prohibits unauthorized activities, illegal excavations, and construction within the Site’s boundaries or buffer zones. This helps prevent damage to Tell Umm Amer’s remains and artifacts.



### ***Defined Site boundaries and a buffer zone***

Site boundaries and a buffer zone are crucial for Tell Umm Amer's protection and preservation. These boundaries help prevent encroachment, control development, and mitigate potential threats to the Site's integrity.

The ***Site Boundaries*** are today defined via a concrete wall that surrounds the Site except for a short segment on the northern side that is enclosed by a steel fence due to being intersected by a 25-meter-wide road. Current boundaries include all elements of the Site discovered so far. It is important to conduct future excavation to ensure the inclusion of all possible archeological findings in the Site boundaries. In addition, the Nuseirat Municipality and MoTA shall endorse the existing border of the Site, which includes the area acquired by the State and the portion of street that includes archaeological remains.

The Site and the current endorsed structural plan do not include a buffer zone surrounding the Site. Thus, defining the Site's boundaries and establishing buffer zones around the archaeological Site within the zoning plan is needed. Buffer zones act as a protective barrier that can limit potential negative impacts from nearby development activities such as construction, pollution, or encroachment.

There are two potential scenarios aimed at protecting the Site based on adjusting 2018's master plan. These adjustments include re-planning the roads around the Site, regulating building and urban development around the Site, and expropriating land parcels adjacent to the Site, taking into consideration and avoiding gentrification consequences. There is a need for better management of the buffer zone through physical planning regulations and guidelines to ensure compatible land use and development.

The scenarios were established through a collaborative process involving the Site management staff, MoTA, PUI, local communities, professionals, and relevant stakeholders to ensure effective conservation and sustainable management practices.

It's important to note that the establishment of core and buffer zones are not specific to World Heritage Sites but are an essential element of potential World Heritage Sites.



**Map 15.** Tell Umm Amer core zone and buffer zone boundaries (CCHP)

### Scenario 1

- Cancel the 10m street adjacent to the southern side of the Site and leave an open-ended 8m street to serve the two residential buildings south of the Site.
- Minimize the width of the eastern street from 10m to 5m.
- Close the 25m street adjacent to the Site on the northern side and integrate the street to be part of the Site.
- At the same time, leave an open-ended 8m street to serve the two parcels that open onto the current 25m street.
- Land expropriation and compensation (1224m<sup>2</sup>).
- Land expropriation of the northern 25m street.
- Regulate buffer zone by changing the Residential B designation to residential tourist housing (2,5 floors, 40% of the parcel as built-up area, parcel area not less than 500m<sup>2</sup>).
- Protect the agricultural zone as a frozen urban development area.

Scenario (1) to expand the boundaries of TELL UM AMER site  
(SAINT HILARION) - 2023



**Map 16.** Scenario 1: Site boundaries with minimal land expropriation and merging streets to the Site (CCHP 2023)

## Scenario 2

- Cancel the 10m street on the southern side and merge it to be part of the Site boundaries.
- Close the 25m street adjacent to the Site on the northern side of the Site and merge it to be part of the Site.
- Merge the eastern 8m street.
- Land expropriation of 4 parcels adjacent to the Site from the north (2483m<sup>2</sup>).
- Land expropriation of 2 parcels adjacent to the Site from the south (1106m<sup>2</sup>).
- Land expropriation and compensation for 5 parcels adjacent to the Site to the east (2527m<sup>2</sup>).
- Land expropriation of the northern 25m street.
- Regulate buffer zone by changing the Residential B designation to residential tourist housing (2,5 floors, 40% of the parcel as built-up area, parcel area not less than 500m<sup>2</sup>).
- Protect the agricultural zone as a frozen urban development area.
- Total land expropriation is 6306 m<sup>2</sup>, which includes the private lots to be added to the Site boundaries.

Scenario (2) to expand the boundaries of TELL UM AMER site  
(SAINT HILARION) - 2023



**Map 17.** Scenario 2: Site boundaries (CCHP 2023)

In both scenarios, buffer zones should be regulated through:

- Government decision on land expropriation and compensation according to the Palestinian Law on land expropriation for public benefit.
- A cabinet decision to freeze the Nuseirat–Tell Umm Amer Zoning Plan of Oct 2018.
- A new Physical Zoning Plan adjusting streets surrounding the Site.
- New regulations and guidelines for land use and development within the buffer zones.
- An adjusted land use and zoning plan to match the above-mentioned scenarios.

### **Control of Future Interventions**

Avoiding future negative impacts on the OUV of the Site is a key issue for the CMP. INCA did a feasibility study for the benefit of PUI in 2020 regarding the future needs of the Site of Saint Hilarion. Several interventions were proposed, including the shelter and the solar panels. The CMP addressed these interventions and includes a preliminary assessment and main guidelines for these interventions as follows:

## **Sheltering archaeological Sites and constructing Solar panels**

ICCROM's guidance on preserving archaeological sites stresses a holistic multidisciplinary approach that considers the cultural, environmental, and social dimensions of heritage preservation. These values help guide decisions related to sheltering archaeological sites in a way that respects their significance and ensures their preservation for future generations.

Decision-makers need to consider a range of options for site protection, not just shelters. Long-term care need not be high-tech but needs to be consistent over time. Shelters lacking proper attention cause more problems than they solve and should not be installed.

The journal *Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites* published a special issue on protective shelters in 2002 (Matero). It was a major milestone in the literature on the topic, conjuring up the same mix of hope and despair to be found in frontier activities in other sectors, with much progress made and some battles in the 20 years since.

Heritage and sheltering measures for archaeological sites depend on significant technical advances that have many positive precedents to draw on. However, wider factors affect the ability to do a good job. These factors are often more difficult to pin down and manage. The main approach in deciding on sheltering archaeological sites is the heritage values and significance and the capacity to manage continuity and change therein.

Aslan et al. (2013) noted: "A shelter must be regarded as an intervention with its own aesthetic, technical and environmental impacts rather than just a benign preventive measure". This proved prescient, as work on shelters in the decade thereafter went on to show issues that emerged strongly from the case studies brought to the 2013 ICCROM's Symposium on Protective Shelters for Archaeological Sites.

The 2017 ICCROM's symposium backed up the conclusions of Aslan et al. and added that sheltering should be assessed from values-based approaches and solid analysis of heritage values and attributes. Furthermore, it is important to integrate values and management considerations into decision-making processes of whether to shelter and if so, how.

## **International guidelines for sheltering archaeological Sites**

The International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) provides guidance and principles for the preservation and sheltering of cultural heritage, including archaeological sites. When deciding whether to shelter archaeological sites, ICCROM emphasizes the following core values and principles:

- A. **Cultural Significance:** The primary consideration should be the cultural significance of the archaeological site. It is essential to recognize and respect a site's historical, cultural, and archaeological value as a key part of the world's cultural heritage.
- B. **Preservation of Authenticity:** Preservation efforts should prioritize maintaining the authenticity and integrity of an archaeological site. Any shelter or protection measures should not compromise the site's original character or historical context.
- C. **Sustainability:** The design and implementation of shelters should align with sustainable practices. Considerations should include the use of environmentally friendly materials, energy-efficient design, and minimal disruption to the natural surroundings. Preservation efforts should be geared toward ensuring the long-term sustainability and protection of the site. This includes planning for ongoing maintenance, monitoring, and funding.
- D. **Regulatory Compliance:** All sheltering initiatives should comply with local, national, and international laws and regulations governing cultural heritage preservation and environmental protection.
- E. **Community and Stakeholders Involvement:** Local communities and stakeholders often have strong connections to archaeological sites. Their perspectives, knowledge, and values should be considered during the decision-making process and the implementation of sheltering strategies. See Annex 2 for guidelines on designing shelters for archaeological sites.

#### **Recommendations for the Tell Umm Amer sheltering project:**

Sheltering should prioritize sensitive parts of the archaeological site (Baths complex, mosaic pavements, and part of the ecclesiastical ensemble). It is important to leave part of the site as an open-air archaeological site (such as the inn, saqia, atrium, and monks' quarter). Reconstruction of the columns at the atrium might be good to consider.

The design should be adaptive with minimal intervention, simple design, light structure, harmony with the surrounding landscape, reversibility, control of environment-appropriate temperature and humidity, and protection from rain, storm water, sand movement, and bird nesting and dropping (MoTA, JICA, and Matsuda Consultants International Co 2015).

Soil testing, geotechnical investigation, site seismicity, and earthquake mitigation should be considered when designing the shelter. The the local community and stakeholders shall be engaged in the design process. The design shall be in harmony with existing and proposed elements at the site such as the visitor center, the museum, the current administrative building, and surrounding fences.

The protective shelter funded by the British Council in 2019/20 has protected an important element of the Site and shall be maintained. It replaced the temporary protective shelters constructed in 2002, funded by UNESCO, that covered the mosaic pavements.

Based on archaeological and architectural analysis, **Map 13** shows the most important Site elements that need to be covered: the mosaic pavements, the bath complex, and the churches. The covered area is recommended to be between 2300 m<sup>2</sup> to 3000 m<sup>2</sup>.



**Map 18.** Important Site elements that need to be covered. Source: (CCHP 2023)

### **Solar Panels in the Site:**

While solar panels are generally considered a sustainable and clean energy source, they can have some negative impacts on archaeological sites and their surroundings if not carefully planned and managed (ICCROM 2017). Here are some potential negative impacts of solar panels that we should strive to avoid:

- A. **Visual Impact:** Solar panels can alter the visual landscape of an archaeological site, especially if the panels are installed in a way that disrupts the site's historical or aesthetic character. This visual intrusion can detract from the site's cultural significance.
- B. **Physical Impact:** The installation of solar panels may require digging foundations, placing support structures, or modifying the ground around the site. These physical changes can have a direct impact on archaeological features and deposits, potentially leading to damage or disturbance.
- C. **Microclimate Changes:** Solar panels can create microclimates by casting shadows and altering wind patterns. These changes can affect the site's environmental conditions, potentially leading to moisture accumulation, temperature fluctuations, or altered vegetation growth, all of which can impact the preservation of archaeological materials.
- D. **Chemical Leaching:** Solar panel components such as photovoltaic cells contain materials that could potentially leach chemicals into the surrounding soil or groundwater over time. This leaching could adversely affect archaeological materials and the site's ecosystem.
- E. **Accessibility and Visitor Experience:** If solar panels are installed near or within an archaeological site, they can affect the overall experience of the site. Visitors may be deterred by the presence of solar panels, or their ability to appreciate the historical and cultural significance of the site may be diminished.
- F. **Cultural Sensitivity:** Archaeological sites often have cultural, social, and spiritual significance to local communities and stakeholders. The installation of solar panels without consulting and considering the views of these stakeholders may be culturally insensitive.

### **Recommendations on Tell Umm Amer's solar panel project:**

To mitigate negative impacts on Tell Umm Amer archaeological site, it is essential to conduct a thorough site assessment after receiving the preliminary design of solar panels and their shape, function, orientation, and attributed equipment and wiring.



Solar panel installation should be implemented as part of the shelter’s architectural and structural design. Solar panel design, placement, and implementation should not adversely affect the cultural significance of the site and the visitor experience. Considerations must include minimizing visual impact, avoiding sensitive areas, and implementing monitoring and mitigation measures as needed. Horizontal-fixed and non-visible panels are recommended.

Ultimately, the decision to install solar panels near archaeological sites should be made with a holistic understanding of the site’s cultural significance, preservation needs, and the potential environmental and visual impacts of the renewable energy installations. For example, transparent solar panels, high U-values

for good energy performance of buildings, or Building Integrated Photovoltaics (BIPV) can be used instead of conventional materials. In addition, the assessment shall take the whole system into consideration, such as the availability of a transformer for the system at the Site. Proper planning and collaboration can help strike a balance between sustainable energy goals and the protection of archaeological heritage.



**Fig 47.** Transparent solar panels (PUI)

### **Risk Preparedness**

Tell Umm Amer, like any archaeological site, is subject to risks such as natural disasters and armed conflict. Most of the Site area is state-owned, but part of the Site and its buffer zone has a complex ownership structure that can influence the risk assessment. Risk preparedness is an ongoing process that requires continuous evaluation and improvement with respect to surrounding urban development and changes in the political and legal environment in Gaza. **Table 5** below offers a list of recognized risks that are directly affecting the Site’s condition and measures to manage these risks and safeguard the Site.

Identified risks	Risk management	Level
Decay and destruction of archaeological elements due to lack of conservation measures and severe climate factors	Annual evaluation and assessment of the Site conditions. Effective fundraising and implementation of projects for Site conservation and preservation	Low
Possible injury of tourists due to inadequate or non-existent safety measures	Providing safety protocols with a general planning document; placing fences around specific structures; organizing and signaling walking pathways	Low
Natural disasters and armed conflict	Develop a disaster preparedness plan that addresses potential natural or armed conflict disasters: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Store artifacts in secure and stable locations away from potential hazards</li> <li>– Implement measures to protect the Site and its features from damage during emergencies</li> <li>– Create a detailed emergency response plan that outlines procedures to follow in case of theft or other incidents</li> <li>– Train Site staff and volunteers in emergency response protocols</li> </ul>	Medium
Inadequate community engagement in protecting the Site, lack of community understanding of the Site values	Education of the local community (pamphlets, school seminars, public event speaking) of consequences of urban development and other threats	Low
Insufficient support by the municipality toward the archaeological site	Increase interest and commitment of the Municipality to Site development	Medium
Lack of consensus among stakeholders on Site boundaries and buffer zones	Legal protection by applying special building regulations that comply with the relevant national and international laws and regulations related to archaeological site protection	Medium
Intensified Israeli attacks, including looting, bulldozing, and air strikes	Immediate ceasefire in Gaza, and ensure the UN agency's recognition of the importance of the Site and its protection through international law	High

**Table 5:** Identified risk and risk management measurements

### **6.3.2 Enhance awareness of Tell Umm Amer and its significance for local and international communities**

Boosting awareness of Tell Umm Amer and highlighting its significance for both the local community and international audiences requires a strategic, multi-faceted, sustained and integrated approach, combining educational and community engagement strategies. The impact of these strategies should be assessed regularly to adjust the approaches accordingly. Community outreach activities are a key tool to increase community appreciation for the Site and to ensure their contribution to its protection. The CMP proposes to focus on conducting the following awareness-raising activities:

- A. Conduct Site visits for all sectors of the community, in particular school and university students. The aim of these visits is to promote the Site and ensure better recognition of its cultural heritage value by the local community.
- B. Organize and implement workshops for the local community to inform them about the cultural heritage sites of Gaza, the community's role in protecting and developing these sites, and the expected benefits of these actions.
- C. Create a website and social media pages. These tools can help disseminate information about the Site for locals as well as internationals. They should be designed to enable interaction with the local community and the exchange of information.
- D. Organize on-site events such as exhibitions and musical and art performances. These events shall aim to promote the Site and increase the number of its visitors.
- E. Incorporate an educational outreach program for schools. Students are the future generation and will have a key role in preserving and promoting heritage sites in Gaza. This can be done through school curricula, including a built-up heritage theme in school activities, and increasing the capacity of school teachers in developing these activities.
- F. Produce documentary short films to promote the Site for all sectors and to better inform locals and internationals about the importance of the Site, its value, and the need for its protection.
- G. Encourage the use of Site facilities for community events. The existing and proposed facilities within the Site can serve as hub for community activities such as workshops, seminars, and school activities. The use of these facilities shall contribute to increasing the number of visitors to the Site.

Another goal is strengthening cooperation and networking initiatives between the Site management team and cultural institutions working in the antiquities sector, such as the Culture and Free Thought Center, The Gaza Association for Culture and Arts, and the NAWA Association. Three Focus Discussion Groups (FDGs) were conducted in local communities where these associations are active. These associations work with children and empower women through cultural activities such as folklore, handicrafts, freehand drawing and coloring, traditional “Dabkeh” dancing, and a booklet for children published by INTIQAL in cooperation with the Cultural and Free Thought Association. The children themselves participated in putting their ideas and content into the booklet. Teachings on traditional food dishes have been conducted at the Site as well, and women from NAWA conducted a traditional eyeliner workshop at the Site (the traditional Kohlah). See **Table 6**:

Activity	Status	Beneficiaries
Site visits	Ongoing	All age groups
Awareness raising	Short- and long-term	All age groups
Online awareness raising campaign	Short- and long-term	All age groups
Online events 2	Short- and long-term	All age groups
Palestinian Heritage Day (online event)	Planned on Medium and long-term	All age groups
Academic perspectives on strengthening the protection of Cultural Heritage	Ongoing	Youth
Voluntary work at Tell Umm Amer	Ongoing	Youth
Free-hand drawing competition	Dec. 2020 – Feb. 2021 and planned in future	Children
Events in Saint Hilarion Monastery	Short- and long-term	All age groups
Youth engagement and Cultural Heritage events in the Gaza Strip		Youth
Palestinian Heritage Day (traditional breakfast)	Done and planned in future	Youth
International Day of Solidarity with Palestinian people	29-30/11/2021 and planned quarterly	Youth
International Women’s Day	06/03/23 and can be seasonal	Youth

Activity	Status	Beneficiaries
Open Days	Short- and long-term	Youth
Open Day in cooperation with Al Qattan Center	Done and planned in future	Youth
Open Days in cooperation with Nawa Cultural Association	Done and planned in future	Youth
Participation in conferences	Occasionally	Site management team
Integrated Reconstruction and Post-Trauma Impact on Communities and the Socio-Economic Aspects of Recovery	Ongoing	Women and children
Interactive booklet	Ongoing	Children & youth
Mock excavation activity	Done and planned in future	Children

**Table 6:** Community outreach activities

## Capacity building

Capacity building to protect an archaeological site involves enhancing the knowledge, skills, resources, and infrastructure of individuals and organizations responsible for Site preservation and management. It aims to create a sustainable framework for safeguarding the site's historical and cultural value. The following are some key capacity-building strategies that should be utilized to protect and develop the Tell Umm Amer archaeological site.

### A. *Training and Education:*

Provide specialized training programs and workshops for archaeologists, Site managers, and local stakeholders. Training should cover various aspects such as excavation techniques, artifact handling, preservation methods, and Site management.

The training program consists of three components:

1. **Cultural mediation, enhancement, and animations:** This part includes a training courses in the fields of: Guiding visitors, Guiding children, Developing educational tools for children, 3D initiation, virtual tours, highlighting archaeological collections, museography, the scientific and cultural journey, scenography and signage, communication skills, long-life skills, animation, operation of an archaeological site, French language courses, English language courses, curation, site management, sustainable tourism planning, and development of legal and policy frameworks.

2. **Restoration and built heritage:** Anastylis of elevation in squared blocks, restoration of traditional masonry, consolidation of painted plaster, restitution of marble pavement slabs, consolidation of limestone flooring, restoration of mosaic pavement, installation of mosaic pavement, and curation of movable artifacts.
3. **Archaeology:** Archaeological survey techniques preliminary to construction work, techniques of archaeological excavation, management of archaeological excavation, stratigraphic reading (identification drawings and cards), archaeological drawing, archaeological monitoring of construction work, application of photogrammetric surveys to archaeology, sorting of artifacts after excavation, sorting of artifacts after excavation, consolidation and restoration of objects, object drawing (freehand and by computer), production of archaeological documents, excavation reports, photographing of objects, creation of an archaeological database of the Site and usage, zoo-archaeology, funerary archaeo-anthropology, numismatics, treatment of ceramic objects (cleaning, restoration, and packaging), treatment of metallic objects (cleaning, restoration, and packaging), treatment of glass objects (cleaning, restoration, and packaging), and the management, inventory, storage, and packaging of artifacts.

#### ***B. Equipment and Furniture:***

Equipment and furniture at the Site should be functional, well-organized, and conducive to efficient work processes, research, and communication between staff members and researchers.

*Visitor center equipment and furniture:* A visitor center is a facility designed to provide information, services, and amenities to visitors at various locations such as national parks, museums, tourist attractions, and historical sites. Here are some essential items the visitor center at Tell Umm Amer should offer:

*Information Desks/Counters;* Display Boards and Interactive Screens; Seating Areas; Brochure Racks and Literature Stands; Signage; Audio-Visual Equipment; Touchscreen Kiosks; Souvenir/Gift Shop Displays; Reception/Check-In Area; Restrooms; Informational Banners and Posters; Furniture; Visitor Registration and Ticketing Counters; Storage Cabinets and Lockers; Wi-Fi and Charging Stations; Drinking Fountains or Water Dispensers; and Outdoor Amenities.

*Site museum equipment and furniture:* The Site Museum or exhibition equipment and furniture will be more limited compared to larger sites, but it will still aim to provide a welcoming and informative experience for visitors. Here are some essential items that might be offered at Tell Umm Amer's Site:

Display Cases; Wall Display Panels; Artifact Labels; Audio Guide Systems; Informational Brochures; Reception/Information Desk; Seating; Lighting Fixtures; Signage; Display Easel; Security Systems; Educational Materials; Cleaning Supplies; Climate Control; Office Equipment; Visitors Book; learning tools for kids, and Donation Box.

*Administration equipment and furniture:* The administration area of an archaeological site serves as the central hub for managing various aspects of the site's operations, research, and visitor management. Here are some essential equipment and furniture items that should be offered in Tell Umm Amer's administration area: Office Desks and Chairs; Computers and Laptops; Filing Cabinets; Printers and Scanners; Meeting Table and Chairs; Whiteboards or Bulletin Boards; Storage Shelves; Safe or Lockable Cabinets; Maps and Site Plans; Drafting Table (if applicable); Research Library; Archaeological Tools; First Aid Kit; Safety Equipment; Visitor Information Desk; Staff Break Area; Environmental Control Equipment; Security Systems; and Waste and Recycling Bins.

*Artifacts storage equipment and furniture:* Proper storage of archaeological artifacts is crucial for their preservation and protection. The artifacts storage area at Tell Umm Amer should be well-organized, secure, and designed to minimize the risk of damage or deterioration. Here are some essential equipment and furniture items to be offered for the benefit of Tell Umm Amer's artifacts storage area: Artifact Shelving; Acid-Free Boxes and Containers; Archival Tissue Paper; Artifact Trays; Acid-Free Plastic Bags; Hanging Racks; Artifact Handling Gloves; Sealable Containers; Desiccants; Racking Systems; Artifact Identification Tags; Shelving Labels; Artifact Photography Setup; Rolling Carts; Artifact Inventory and Management Software; Workstations and Tables; Environmental Monitoring Equipment; Lockable Cabinets; Fire Suppression Systems; and Conservation Equipment.

### **6.3.3 Enrich the visitor experience at Tell Umm Amer and prolong the Time of visit**

Enhancing the visitor experience at Tell Umm Amer and prolonging the time of their visit involves creating an immersive and educational environment. This is important for several reasons, as it contributes to both the preservation of the Site itself and the overall cultural and educational value. This goes beyond entertainment, as it plays a vital role in preserving cultural heritage, fostering education, and contributing to the overall well-being of both the Site and the local community. Below are essential components that aim at enhancing visitors' experience at the Tell Umm Amer archaeological site.

### **Interpretation and Site facilities:**

A few interpretation panels located around the Site provide information about the history of the Site and what the spaces were used for. PUI and INTIQAL staff also provide guided tours themed around the history of Tell Umm Amer. The interpretation panels have deteriorated due to weather factors. The film room was open during daylight hours by the PUI staff or the Site's guards. MoTA and local University professors occasionally conducted lectures on the Site's history and architecture.

An explanation of the different areas of the Site with historical photographs would help improve understanding of Tell Umm Amer. This could be done through a model or leaflets. Offering activities such as making art projects or handicrafts whilst at the mosaic lab would encourage guests to stay longer.

The visitor center should include displays not only on the history of Tell Umm Amer but also on other heritage aspects of Al Nuseirat including exploration, flora and fauna, and other educational subjects. It is recognized that the interests of visitors are changing with younger people being less interested in history and more interested in climate change, restoration, indigenous people, and scientific research. Many visitors are also interested in the people who currently live in or immigrated to the Wadi Gaza area in 1948.

Effective interpretation of an archaeological site should create meaningful connections between the past and the present, fostering an appreciation for cultural heritage and the importance of preserving it for future generations.

### **Action on Interpretation:**

- Provide interpretation relating to any major activities for visitors.
- Improve the interpretation available for visitors at the entrance, pathways, major spaces, and the visitor center.
- Consider the installation of a display that is specifically intended to make clear the historical development and significance of Tell Umm Amer.
- Provide a communication plan and training on communication skills.
- Consider the needs and interests of different visitor groups such as schoolchildren, tourists, scholars, and locals. Design interpretation methods that engage and educate these audiences effectively.
- ***Storytelling:*** Craft compelling narratives around the Site, its history, and the people who lived there. Presenting stories from different perspectives can help visitors relate to the past on a personal level.
- ***Site Layout and Signage:*** Design the layout and install informative signage that guides visitors through the Site while providing historical context and explanations of key findings.
- ***Education Programs:*** Develop educational programs and workshops to engage schools and students in learning about the Site's significance and the field of archaeology.



- **Digital Technology:** Utilize digital technology such as virtual reality, augmented reality, or interactive online platforms to enhance the interpretation and accessibility of the Site's information.
- **Interpretive Events and Activities:** Organize events, guided tours, and hands-on activities to encourage participation and active learning. INTIQAL conducts different cultural activities at the Site.
- **Temporary Exhibitions:** Feature rotating exhibitions that showcase new discoveries or ongoing research at the Site, encouraging repeat visits.
- **Community Events:** Collaborate with local communities to organize cultural festivals, fairs, or reenactments that celebrate the Site's historical heritage.
- **A Planned Site Museum:** A museum within the boundaries at the west-north corner of the Site is planned to house artifacts, replicas, and interactive exhibits related to the Site's history and culture. It will offer an opportunity to display and interpret items that may not be directly on-site, providing visitors with a deeper understanding of the archaeological context.
- **Education and Research Facilities:** Research and educational institutions such as the Ebafe de Jérusalem can be located as part of the museum or the existing building that hosts the PUI activities at the Site. The school facilitates ongoing archaeological investigations, studies, and conservation efforts. These facilities may include laboratories, classrooms, libraries, and offices for researchers and students.
- **Visitor Amenities:** Depending on the Site's location and visitor needs, amenities such as restrooms, picnic areas, cafes, and gift shops can be provided to enhance visitor comfort and convenience. These amenities contribute to a positive visitor experience and can generate revenue to support Site maintenance and preservation.



Fig 40. Guide Panels at the Site (PUI)

## **Accessibility and Traffic Control**

Ensuring accessibility and managing traffic control at and around Tell Umm Amer are crucial aspects for preserving the Site's historical and cultural significance while allowing visitors to experience and learn from it. The following considerations and strategies are aimed at achieving accessibility and traffic control at the Site.

### **Accessibility:**

- Create clear, well-maintained pathways and trails that are wide enough for people with mobility aids to navigate comfortably.
- Use stable and non-slip surfaces to prevent accidents.
- Install ramps where necessary to provide access to people with special needs.
- Install clear signage with accessible fonts, contrasting colors, and braille for those with visual impairments. Provide information in multiple formats, such as audio guides and tactile maps.
- Designate accessible parking spaces close to the entrance. These spaces should be well-marked and wide enough to accommodate vehicles with ramps.
- Construct accessible restrooms equipped with grab bars, wide stalls, and other necessary features for individuals with disabilities.
- Train staff to assist visitors with disabilities and provide mobility aids like wheelchairs.

### **Traffic Control:**

- Limit the number of visitors at any given time to prevent overcrowding, which can cause damage to fragile archaeological remains.
- Implement a reservation system with timed entry slots to manage visitor flow and prevent large crowds from forming at the entrance.
- Consider offering guided tours with trained guides who can control the pace of the tour, ensure visitors stay on designated paths, and provide context about the archaeological site.
- Designate specific areas where visitors are allowed to photograph the archaeological features, ensuring they don't encroach on fragile areas.
- Install barriers and low fencing around sensitive areas to prevent visitors from accidentally damaging artifacts or structures.
- Have well-defined emergency procedures in place to handle situations like medical emergencies, evacuations, or security breaches.
- Balancing accessibility and traffic control at Tell Umm Amer requires careful planning and coordination to develop a comprehensive strategy that respects the Site's historical value while providing a safe and meaningful experience for all visitors.

### **6.3.4 Economic Prosperity and Tourism Development**

Tourism development for Tell Umm Amer involves balancing the preservation of the cultural heritage of the site with the need to attract and educate visitors. The objectives and actions for such development should focus on sustainable tourism, conservation, and community involvement. Tourism development of the Site depends on conducting conservation and protection measures, interpretive activities, carrying out the capacity plan to manage visitors' flow, community involvement actions, encouraging the private sector to invest in cultural tourism in the area surrounding the Site, and upgrading and maintaining facilities and other infrastructure to ensure a smooth visitor experience.

Heritage should be viewed as an asset to the local community, Gaza, and Palestine in general and not a financial burden. Both Gaza and the West Bank contain so much cultural heritage that has contributed richly to the history of mankind, it gives these areas an importance on a universal level beyond that of much larger countries. Furthermore, the funding for the maintenance of this heritage, in the case of Gaza, is primarily international and thus not a financial burden on the local government. Tell Umm Amer has already given substantial economic prosperity to Gaza. Substantial international funding has been given to the Site, and substantial added value has accrued through the numerous projects that have been achieved. The Site has projected financing that will mean more economic prosperity in Gaza. Furthermore, Tell Umm Amer has provided many jobs to local professional craftsmen and unskilled workers. The number of locals employed is set to increase substantially as the major project gets underway. It is envisaged that even once the project is finalized, there will be a need for a large local workforce to manage the Site and undertake the continuous maintenance program (Celaire R. Consultant and INCA Consultants 2021).

### **6.4 Action Plan: immediate, medium, and long-term (2023-2028)**

With generous funds from the French Government (AFD), Première Urgence Internationale (PUI), in collaboration with the Palestinian Ministry of Tourism (MoTA), has developed this action plan to identify opportunities for and address risks to the significance, condition, and integrity of the cultural heritage of Tell Umm Amer, as covered in previous chapters of this CMP. The plan was informed by the results of previous studies, excavations result, previous conservation activities that took place at the Site, proposals for development and protective covering, and issues raised by the local community and stakeholders during CCPH's robust CMP working process.

Arranged by the significance value of Tell Umm Amer's cultural heritage aims and objectives, the plan includes a brief description of a proposal, identifies the party responsible for delivering the work, projects a timescale for completion, and where relevant, references international, and national, or local laws, regulations, charters, and policies.

The action plan was written to align with:

- The mission, vision, and values articulated in the MoTA Strategic and Development Plan (2017-2023)
- The Palestinian Antiquities Law (adopted 1929)
- The Temporary Ancient Antiquities Law No. 51 (adopted 1966)
- The Palestinian Tangible Cultural Heritage Law No. 11 (adopted 2018)
- The Palestinian Cultural Heritage Charter 2013 (guidance document)
- UNDP Sustainable Development Plan and Sustainable Goals—2030
- Charter for the Protection and Management of the Archaeological Heritage (Adopted 1990)
- Salalah Guidelines for the Management of Public Archaeological Sites (Adopted 2017)
- Cities Planning Law No. 28 (adopted 1936)
- The Environment Palestinian Law No. 7 (adopted 1999)
- Al Nuseirat Structural Plan (adopted 2018)

### **The bigger picture and the future**

The CMP is the first document for the Tell Umm Amer Site that includes a community engagement and communications strategy and management plan. The plan outlines the Site's approach to site management and includes policies and actions to maintain high standards in the following areas: protective shelter, site boundaries and buffer zone, access, safety, maintenance, tourism development, interpretation, risk preparedness, capacity building, conservation, restoration, community involvement, marketing, and communication.

The action plan will be reviewed annually to reflect current funding and strategic positions and to maintain the Site's outstanding universal value and achieve its cultural heritage aims and objectives. A detailed action plan is presented in **Table 7: Action Plan 2024-2029**.

**Table 7: Action Plan 2024-2029**

<b>Theme 1: Conservation, Protection and Maintenance</b>					
<p><b>Objectives:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enforcement and activation of the existing legal framework set for managing and protecting the Site of Tell Umm Amer</li> <li>• Regular monitoring and maintenance of the physical attributes of the Site and performing necessary interventions when needed</li> <li>• Ensure the sustainable conservation of the Site</li> </ul>					
<b>Actions and suggested activities</b>	<b>Implementing agencies</b>	<b>Priority</b>	<b>Target for implementation</b>	<b>Figures/ Funding</b>	<b>Output/success measure</b>
<b>Action 1.1:</b> Endorse Site boundaries and buffer zone and set guidelines for future interventions within these two zones					
<b>Activity 1:</b> Endorse Site boundaries	MoTA, MoLG, NM	Short-term	2024	NA	Site boundaries are recognized and protected by stakeholders
<b>Activity 2:</b> Government decision on land expropriation and compensation land according to the Palestinian Law on Land expropriation for public benefit	MoTA	Short-term	2024	Palestinian Authority, MoF and Lands Authority	Site to be enlarged to include all heritage elements
<b>Activity 3:</b> New master plan shall be prepared for the Site defining its boundaries and buffer zone and building regulations	NM and Consultant	Short- and medium-term	2024-2026	€ 20,000	A master plan to be submitted to the central planning committee

### Theme 1: Conservation, Protection and Maintenance

<p><b>Activity 4:</b> Endorsement of new master plan for the Site area, define land-use planning guidelines for the buffer zone</p>	MoTA, MoLG	Short-term	2024	€ 3,000	A new building regulation for the Site Area shall be enforced to protect the Site
<p><b>Activity 5:</b> Develop land-use guidelines for the buffer zone</p>	MoTA, NM, MoLG	Short-term	2024	MoTA, NM, AFD €13,600	Cultural heritage's Zone Ordinances
<p><b>Activity 6:</b> MoTA and NM to establish and enforce zoning regulations for the buffer zone</p>	MoTA, NM, MoLG	Short-term	2024	MoTA, NM, AFD	Manual of zoning regulations and land-use planning guidelines for the buffer zone at Tell Umm Amer area
<p><b>Activity 7:</b> Monitor and assess compliance of new construction of Site and buffer zone with the adapted building regulations</p>	NM, Site Manager, Local Community, government agencies	Short and long-term	2024-2029	NA	The city engineering shall submit regular reports for MoTA, MoLG for new permits and interventions at buffer zone
<p><b>Action 1.2:</b> Ensure the sustainable maintenance of the Site</p>					
<p><b>Activity 8:</b> Prepare a maintenance plan and manual for the Site of Tell Umm Amer</p>	Consultant	Short-term	2024-2025	€ 30,000	Maintenance plan and Manual are endorsed by MoTA
<p><b>Activity 9:</b> Conduct of regular maintenance for the Site</p>	PUI	Short and long-term	2024-2029	€ 60,000	Maintenance is being implemented by stakeholders

### Theme 1: Conservation, Protection and Maintenance

<p><b>Activity 10:</b> Replace the temporary structures which covers the mosaics pavements by a new durable, sustainable, and heritage friendly structures.</p>	PUI and MoTA	Short-term	2024 - 2027	€ 25,000	Replacing the old cover of the mosaic's pavements (100 m <sup>2</sup> )
<p><b>Action 1.3:</b> Ensure that all restoration and maintenance activities to be undertaken on the Site are of the highest quality meeting international standards, and are in accordance with the adopted by laws, regulations, and international conventions and charters adopted by the Palestinian Authority</p>					
<p><b>Activity 11:</b> Preparing building materials and constructions guidelines for restoration and future interventions</p>	Consultants in coordination with MoTA/ UNESCO	Short-term	2024-2025	€ 10,000	Guidelines shall be available at MoTA for all stakeholders
<p><b>Activity 12:</b> Endorse guidelines to control restoration activities and future interventions at the Site.</p>	MoTA	Short-term	2025	NA	Guidelines shall be endorsed and enforced
<p><b>Action 1.4:</b> Implementation of all the necessary conservation and maintenance works</p>					
<p><b>Activity 13:</b> Restoring damaged marble tiles</p>	PUI	Short-term	2026-2027	€ 65,000	Restoring/ replacing all the damaged marble tiles
<p><b>Activity 14:</b> Restoration of the mosaic's pavements at the Site</p>	PUI	Medium-term	2026-2027	€ 150,000	400 m <sup>2</sup> of damaged/ to be restored mosaic pavements

### Theme 1: Conservation, Protection and Maintenance

<b>Activity 15:</b> Restoration and consolidation of the baths structure	PUI	Short- and medium-term	2026-2027	€ 150,000	1000 m <sup>2</sup> construction of terracotta bricks to be restored and consolidated
<b>Activity 16:</b> Deteriorated sandstones to be restored including grouting and plastering's work.	PUI	Short- and medium-term	2025-2027	€ 70,000	Restoration and reconstruction interventions in the Site to be accomplished according to the conservation plan (1200 m <sup>2</sup> )
<b>Activity 17:</b> Restoration/ reconstructing of the columns or capitals looted between 1992-1995	PUI	Long-term	2028	AFD (Available) € 150,000	4-5 looted atrium columns and capitals to be reconstructed according to international reconstruction standards
<b>Action 1.5:</b> Support continuous research that enhance the understanding, management and conservation of the Site					
<b>Activity 18:</b> Research, document and conserve the intangible cultural heritage associated to the Site	INTIQAL / MoTA/Local community organizations	Medium- and long-term	2026-2029	€ 27,000	An inventory of intangible cultural heritage will be prepared
<b>Activity 19:</b> Prepare an inventory of all the movable heritage of Tell Umm Amer	PUI/MoTA	Medium- and long-term	2026-2029	€ 40,000	A special inventory of movable heritage associated to Tell Umm Amer will be prepared
<b>Action 1.6:</b> Control future interventions at Site (Protective shelter, Solar panels, and visitor centre, Site Museum)					



### Theme 1: Conservation, Protection and Maintenance

<p><b>Activity 20:</b> Conduct a thorough assessment of the archaeological Site, including its condition, vulnerability, and historical significance</p>	Cultural Heritage Consultant	Short-term	2025-2026	NA	Assessment report shall be submitted to UNESCO through MoTA
<p><b>Activity 21:</b> Ensure that the design of future interventions comply with all relevant laws, regulations, and ethical standards</p>	Cultural Heritage Consultant	Short-term	2025-2026	€ 35,000	Impact assessment Report shall be submitted to UNESCO through MoTA
<p><b>Activity 22:</b> Conduct Geotechnical investigation, Site seismicity, and earthquake mitigation</p>	Soil Test Consultant	Short-term	2026	€ 30,000	Soil mechanical characteristics, and investigation study shall be delivered to MoTA
<p><b>Activity 23:</b> Design a shelter that meets the specific needs of the Site while minimizing its visual and environmental impact</p>	PUI and Architect consultant with CH experience	Short-term	2026-2027	€ 250,000	Design of the protective Shelter shall be approved by MoTA, NM and UNESCO
<p><b>Activity 24:</b> Design a visitor center and Site Museum to enrich Tell Umm Amer's educational and community role, engineering and project monitoring</p>	PUI and Architect consultant with CH experience	Short-term	2026-2027	€ 250,000	Design of the Visitor center, and Site Museum shall be approved by MoTA, NM and UNESCO

### Theme 1: Conservation, Protection and Maintenance

<p><b>Activity 25:</b> Provide sheltering sensitive parts of the archaeological Site (Roman baths' complex, mosaic pavements, and part of ecclesiastical ensemble)</p>	PUI and MoTA	Medium-term	2028-2029	€ 2,200,000	Construction of the protective shelter more than (3500 m <sup>2</sup> )
<p><b>Activity 26:</b> Carefully plan the placement and design of solar panels, which must not affect the cultural significance of the Site and the visitor's experience</p>	PUI and consultant	Short-term	2026-2027	€ 30,000	Detailed feasibility study of solar panels project shall be submitted to MoTA and MoENR

### Theme 2. Capacity Building

- Develop and implement training courses in the field of archaeological excavations, managing artifacts, restoration, database and promoting and managing the Site. The courses shall target Site operators and stakeholders

Actions and suggested activities	Implementing agencies	Priority	Target for implementation	Figures/Funding	Output/success measure
<p><b>Action 2.1:</b> Organize and implement training activities targeting stakeholders of the Site in the field of restoration and consolidation of built heritage</p>					
<p><b>Activity 27:</b> Training course in the field of archaeological excavations</p>	Ebaf/PUI/MoTA	Short-term	2026-2029	€ 300,000	35 local professionals will be trained (MoTA staff, students, and future Site team)

## Theme 2. Capacity Building

<p><b>Activity 28:</b> Training course in the field of management, inventory, storage, and packaging of artifacts</p>	Ebaf/ PUI/INP/ MoTA	Long-term	2026-2028	€ 70,000	5 local professionals will be trained (MoTA staff, and future Site team)
<p><b>Activity 29:</b> Training course in the field of consolidation, treatment and restoration of objects</p>	Ebaf/ PUI/INP/ MoTA	Medium-term	2026-2027	€ 35,000	15 local professionals will be trained (MoTA staff, and future Site team)
<p><b>Activity 30:</b> Training course in the field of creation of an archaeological database for the Site</p>	Ebaf/PUI/ MoTA	Long-term	2026	€ 15,000	5 local professionals will be trained (MoTA staff, and future Site team)
<p><b>Activity 31:</b> Training courses in the field of restoration. anastylosis of elevation in squared blocks, restoration of traditional masonry, restoration of paint plaster, limestone and marble flooring</p>	Ebaf/PUI/ MoTA	Medium-term	2026-2029	€ 80,000	5 local professionals will be trained (MoTA staff, and future Site team)
<p><b>Activity 32:</b> Training courses in restoration and installation of a mosaic pavement</p>	Ebaf/PUI/ MoTA	Medium-term	2026-2027	€ 50,000	5 local professionals will be trained (MoTA staff, and future Site team)

## Theme 2. Capacity Building

<b>Activity 33:</b> Training courses in curation of movable artifacts	Ebaf/PUI/MoTA	Long-term	2029	€ 3,200	5 local professionals will be trained (MoTA staff, and future Site team)
<b>Action 2.2:</b> Develop and implement training courses in the field of management of built-up heritage					
<b>Activity 34:</b> Training courses in the field of guiding visitors	Ebaf/PUI/et autres	Medium-term	2026-2027	€ 5,800	5 local professionals will be trained (MoTA staff, and future management team)
<b>Activity 35:</b> Training courses in the field of 3D initiation and virtual tour	PUI/Ebaf/Santiago/Insa/Mota	Long-term	2028	€ 35,000	3 local professionals will be trained (MoTA staff, and future management team)
<b>Activity 36:</b> Training courses in the field of scenography and signage	Ebaf/PUI/INP/Louvre/MoTA	Long-term	2029	€ 26,000	5 local professionals will be trained (MoTA staff, and future management team)
<b>Activity 37:</b> Training courses in English and French language	IFG/PUI/MoTA/others	Short-term	2026-2028	€ 30,000	15 local professionals will be trained (MoTA staff, students, and future management team)
<b>Activity 38:</b> Training courses in the field of curator and Site management	Louvre/PUI/MoTA	Long-term	2029	€ 30,000	4 local professionals will be trained (MoTA staff, and future management team)
<b>Action 2.3:</b> Create and inviting environment for visitors and staff through the enhancement productivity and wellness within the workplace, and to guarantee a safe and enjoyable visit to the Site					
<b>Activity 39:</b> Provide the visitor center by equipment and furniture	PUI/MoTA/Consultant	Long-term	2029	€ 300,000	Furniture, equipment, and information materials

## Theme 2. Capacity Building

<b>Activity 40:</b> Equip the artifacts storage by equipment and furniture	PUI/ MoTA/ Consultant	Long-term	2029	€ 90,000	Furniture, equipment, and information materials
<b>Activity 41:</b> Provide the administration building by equipment and furniture	PUI/ MoTA/ Consultant	Long-term	2029	€ 95,000	Furniture, equipment, and information materials

## Theme 3: Enhance awareness of Tell Umm Amer and its significance for local and international communities

### Objectives:

- Raising awareness among the local community in the Gaza Strip in general and the Nuseirat area about the value of heritage sites and Tell Umm Amer in particular and the need to preserve this heritage

Actions and suggested activities	Implementing agencies	Priority	Target for implementation	Figures/ Funding	Output/success measure
<b>Action 3.1:</b> Promote the Site of Tell Umm Amer for local community					
<b>Activity 42:</b> Encourage local visits to discover the Site and increase sense of belonging towards it	MoTA, PUI and Municipalities in Gaza	Medium-term	2027	€ 1,000 per month	Recruit 2 local tourist guides to promote the Site
<b>Activity 43:</b> Implement field visits for school and universities students to inform them about the Site and its values	MoTA, &PUI	Medium-term	2027	€ 1,000	2500 students shall visit the Site

**Theme 3: Enhance awareness of Tell Umm Amer and its significance for local and international communities**

<b>Activity 44:</b> Implementing awareness workshops for the local community about the importance of this Site	PUI, NM and MoTA	Medium-term	2026-2028	€ 32,000	30 Awareness workshops to be held for the local community in Gaza Strip
<b>Activity 45:</b> Organize on-site exhibitions related to Palestinian heritage	MoTA, PUI, Heritage societies.	Medium-term	2027	€ 38,000	10 exhibitions will be organized on the Site
<b>Activity 46:</b> Design a special website to promote the Site in three languages including drawings and photos of the Site	MoTA, PUI and NM	Medium-term	2025-2026	€ 5,000	Website of Tell Umm Amer is launched
<b>Action 3.2:</b> Incorporate an educational outreach program targeting the Heritage of Gaza to be an integral part of school curricula					
<b>Activity 47:</b> Coordinate with the Ministry of Education to incorporate the theme of built-up heritage with the school activities and education	Cultural organizations, PUI, Ministry of Education and schools' students and teachers	Long-term	2027-2029	€ 15,000	The national curriculum is developed to include cultural heritage. Site visit to Tell Umm Amer Site shall be organized for students
<b>Activity 48:</b> Conduct lectures for schoolteachers on the value and importance of cultural heritage	PUI, Culture NGOs, MoE	Long-term	2027-2029	€ 20,000	20 lectures shall take place

**Theme 3: Enhance awareness of Tell Umm Amer and its significance for local and international communities**

<p><b>Activity 49:</b> Training of schoolteachers on promoting the Heritage Sites in Gaza, in particular Tell Umm Amer and surroundings</p>	MoE	Medium-term	2027-2029	€ 5,000	15 school teachers shall have the capacities to promote heritage Sites for students
<p><b>Activity 50:</b> Production of documentary film on the history of Tell Umm Amer Site</p>	MoTA, PUI under the supervision of the scientific committee	Short-term	2027-2029	€ 50,000	Documentary film on the history of the Site shall be available for visitors and local community
<p><b>Action 3.3:</b> Ensure local community engagement with the Site of Tell Umm Amer</p>					
<p><b>Activity 51:</b> Conduct events (art performances, concerts, etc.) on the Site</p>	PUI, Cultural NGOs and Ministry of Culture	Medium-term	2027 - 2029	€ 50,000	10 events shall take place at the Site attracting 1,000 people
<p><b>Activity 52:</b> Conduct cultural activities for children (coloring and drawing workshops, etc.)</p>	PUI, MoTA and Cultural societies	Long-term	2027 - 2029	€ 10,000	2,500 children shall participate in on-site activities
<p><b>Activity 53:</b> Use the Site museum and visitor center for community activities and events, such as lectures and workshops</p>	PUI & MoTA	Long-term	2029-2030	€ 10,000	1,000 participants shall attend activities and events at the Site museum

#### Theme 4: Enrich the visitor experience at Tell Umm Amer to prolong the length of visits

##### Objectives:

- Improve services and amenities at the Site and ensure safety measure
- Enhance the interpretation and information at the Site
- Improve the aesthetic value of the Site

**Action 4.1:** Implement measures to facilitate sustainable access for arrival to the Site respecting its setting, significance, and environs, having regard to traffic and parking issues, public transport, cycling, pedestrians, etc.

Actions and suggested activities	Implementing agencies	Priority	Target for implementation	Figures/ Funding	Output/success measure
<b>Activity 54:</b> Creation of parking areas to serve the Site visitors	NM, MoTA	Medium-term	2029	To be secured through the UNDP projects and MFD € 100,000	Parking lots for at least 10 cars, 3 busses, and another bicycle parking area shall be provided
<b>Activity 55:</b> Installation of directional signs	MoTA, NM	Short-term	2029	€ 15,000	20 directional signages on the main roads shall be installed
<b>Activity 56:</b> Design the landscape of the Site	Consultant Architect	Short-term	2028	€ 40,000	Design of landscape including Site barrier shall be conducted
<b>Activity 57:</b> Provide a Visitor and museum at the Site	PUI, MoTA	Medium-term	2028-2029	€ 1,500,000	the visitor center, Site museum (400 m <sup>2</sup> ) shall be Constructed
<b>Activity 58:</b> Design and create on-site itineraries	PUI, MoTA	Medium-term	2026	€ 125,000	200 m <sup>2</sup> steel and wood platform should be installed at Site
<b>Activity 59:</b> Develop measures to promote safe movement of visitors	PUI, MoTA	Medium-term	2028-2029	€ 13,000	150 m of steel protection to be installed



#### Theme 4: Enrich the visitor experience at Tell Umm Amer to prolong the length of visits

<p><b>Activity 60:</b> Enhance accessibility at the Site for people with special needs</p>	MoTA and PUI	Medium-term	2025-2026	AFD € 130,000 to be re-estimated	Pathways and trails with mobility aids.  Ramps where necessary.  Signage and information in multiple formats.  Designate, and mobility aids like wheelchairs.
<p><b>Activity 61:</b> Ensure Visitor flow control at the Site</p>	MoTA and PUI	Medium-term	2025-2026	MOTA (to be secured) € 95,000	Barriers and low fencing around sensitive areas, emergency procedures in place to handle situations like medical emergencies, evacuations, or security breaches
<p><b>Action 4.2:</b> To manage and enhance visitors experience on the Site by providing services and amenities</p>					
<p><b>Activity 62:</b> Provide Outdoor Amenities</p>	MoTA and PUI	Medium-term	2025-2026	€ 115,000	Picnic tables, benches, or gazebos in nearby outdoor areas
<p><b>Activity 63:</b> Establish central hub for managing various aspects of the Site's operations, research, and visitor management</p>	MoTA and PUI	Long-term	2028	€ 50,000	Existing Building shall be adapted to be used for Administration
<p><b>Activity 64:</b> Keeping, preserving, and protecting Tell Umm Amer movable archaeological artifacts</p>	MoTA and PUI	Long-term	2028	€ 200,000	100 m <sup>2</sup> of building storage for archaeological artifacts shall be constructed

#### Theme 4: Enrich the visitor experience at Tell Umm Amer to prolong the length of visits

<p><b>Activity 65:</b> Create visual continuity, Site integrity, and harmony among the natural landscape, fences, and constructions at the Site</p>	PUI and MoTA	Long-term	2028-2029	€ 100,000 to be re-estimated	Implementation of adaptive design of fences around the Site
<p><b>Activity 66:</b> Greening and planting within the Site boundaries, west and northwest areas</p>	PUI/MoTA	Long-term	2029	€ 120,000	Minimal 1500 m <sup>2</sup> of landscape to be initiated within and around the Site
<p><b>Activity 67:</b> Setting management Plan for solid waste in the Site and its surrounding</p>	Site Management team and NM	Short-term	2027-2029	€ 5,000	Solid waste to be managed and the environmental/visual impact of trash disposal to be treated

#### Theme 5: Governance System

##### Objectives:

- Improve management of the Site
- Set a management structure to run the Site

##### Action 5.1: Establishing the governance structure at Tell Umm Amer

Actions and suggested activities	Implementing agencies	Priority	Target for implementation	Figures/Funding	Output/success measure
<p><b>Activity 68:</b> Establish a steering committee</p>	MoTA	Short-term	2024	MoTA	The steering committee has been founded

### Theme 5: Governance System

<b>Activity 69:</b> Establish a Site Management Committee	MoTA and PUI	Short-term	2024	AFD (financed as part of the CMP)	The SMC shall be set
<b>Activity 70:</b> Establishing a Citizen Advisory Committee	MoTA, NM, and PUI	Short-term	2024	AFD (financed as part of the CMP)	CAC shall be established
<b>Activity 71:</b> Establish a Scientific Council	MoTA and PUI	Short-term	2024	AFD (financed as part of the CMP)	SC shall be established
<b>Activity 72:</b> Establish a Site Management Unit	MoTA, Directorate of Sites and World Heritage Unite (WHU)	Long-term	2028	MoTA (financed as part of the CMP)	Staff to be recruited during the training program of the AFD's project
<b>Action 5.2:</b> Secure long-term planning and create a sustainable management for Tell Umm Amer					
<b>Activity 73:</b> Emergency Preparedness Plan	PUI	Medium-term	2026-2027	€ 18,000	EPP for the Site shall be endorsed
<b>Activity 74:</b> Prepare Tourism Management Plan	MoTA	Medium-term	2027-2028	€ 15,000	TMP for the Site shall be endorsed
<b>Activity 75:</b> Develop a framework of Monitoring and Assessment	MoTA and PUI	Long-term	2028-2029	€ 5,000	MAS for the Site shall be endorsed (5 years)
<b>Activity 76:</b> Review and Revision of the CMP	MoTA	Short-, Medium- and Long-term	2024-2029	€ 35,000 (to be secured by MoTA)	Annual reviews and associated reports

## Theme 6: Economic Prosperity and Tourism Development

### Objectives:

- Generate job opportunity for local communities
- Increase attraction for visitors
- Enhance the perception of the Site by visitors

**Action 6.1:** Tourism staff to be created. Task the tourism staff to carry out the Tourism Strategy and Action Plan, leading tourism initiatives and activities among the local community, municipality, and private sector

Actions and suggested activities	Implementing agencies	Priority	Target for implementation	Figures/ Funding	Output/success measure
<b>Activity 77:</b> Allocate and approve full-time Tourism staff positions	MoTA	Short-term	2026	MoTA (Annual budget)	Tourism director and two employees to be recruited by MoTA
<b>Activity 78:</b> Organize meetings with the stakeholders to discuss tourism development, upcoming events	MoTA, and the stakeholders	Medium-term	2027-2030	MoTA (Annual budget)	Quarterly meetings
<b>Activity 79:</b> keep record of visitors to the Site, and tackle the target group	MoTA	Long-term	2027-2029	MoTA (Annual Budget)	A system for tracking visitor arrivals is set
<b>Action 6.2:</b> Encourage and develop sustainable forms of visiting, activities, and spending spare time at the Site boundaries, which do not jeopardize the Site's protection objectives					
<b>Activity 80:</b> In cooperation with the stakeholders, develop a seasonal package of cultural activities	MoTA, MoC, NM, and Cultural NGOs	Medium-term	2027-2030	MoTA and Private sector	Cultural activities such as, outdoor concerts, temporary arts, handcrafts exhibitions, and art performances shall be conducted

## Theme 6: Economic Prosperity and Tourism Development

<p><b>Activity 81:</b> In cooperation with providers, create packages/arrangements of offers for various groups</p>	MoTA and private sector (transport providers and tourism agencies)	Long-term	2029	MoTA and Private sector	Packages for school kids, domestic (family) weekend leisure time program, and international guests
<p><b>Activity 82:</b> Organize Thematic activities at the visitor center's facilities and the Site museum</p>	MoTA and tour guiders	Long-term	2029-2030	MoTA, Site manager, and tourism staff	Facilitating a space for workshops, conferences, training courses, children's summer camps, children and women's handcrafts/scientific creative workshop, and meetings with catering services
<p><b>Action 6.3:</b> Generate a sustainable economic revenue. Implement revenue-sharing mechanisms to ensure that a portion of tourism income benefits local community</p>					
<p><b>Activity 83:</b> Constructing a special solar panel to generate electricity</p>	MoTA, ENRA, and PUI	Medium-term	2028-2029	AFD € 850,000 To be re-estimated	Produce between 0,5-0,75 Mega kw electricity
<p><b>Activity 84:</b> The Site shall encourage multiplier sustainable economic effect surrounding the Site</p>	Private sector, MoC, and international agencies	Long-term	2028-2029	Can be raised through the Private sector initiative	Handcrafts center and hostel
<p><b>Activity 85:</b> Create community-based tourism through PPP</p>	CBOs	Long-term	2028-2029	€ 100,000 through donor agencies	10 tourist projects shall be encouraged through sub grants

# *Chapter 7: Management System, Monitoring And Maintenance*

The management, monitoring, and maintenance of an archaeological site are essential components of its long-term preservation and responsible stewardship. These aspects work together to ensure the protection, study, and sustainable use of cultural heritage. This chapter proposes a system for effective management, monitoring, and maintenance which are integral to the long-term sustainability of Tell Umm Amer. It includes a well-defined management system that provides the framework for overseeing and safeguarding the Site. This chapter presents a mechanism of monitoring that involves systematic observation and assessment of the archaeological site to track its condition and the effectiveness of management strategies.

## **7.1 General Directorate for Site Management in Palestine**

All archaeological and heritage sites in Palestine are the responsibility of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities according to the laws of Palestine. In line with MoTA's vision to enforce cultural heritage laws in Palestine, in addition to Palestine's ratification and accession to several international conventions, especially the World Heritage Convention of 1972, MoTA created a General Directorate for Site Management and World Heritage Sites in Palestine. MoTA includes this directorate as part of its organizational structure. The mandate of the General Directorate is to manage, maintain, and monitor all Palestinian heritage sites and inscribe World Heritage Sites and sites on the Tentative List. This responsibility is shared with local authorities and municipalities but always under the direction of the Directorate for Site Management. In the field of site management, the Directorate:

1. Provides all supplies and equipment needed in cultural heritage open-visit sites
2. Eases the execution of management and conservative plans
3. Prepares periodic reports about the needs and workflow on the site
4. Oversees the guard, guidance, and reception duties on the site
5. Proposes development plans for the sites, including the conservation of their cultural value and the development of services
6. Raises awareness about the significance of the cultural heritage
7. Develops interpretation and presentation plans for cultural heritage sites

## 7.2 Site Management and Monitoring

Archaeological site management and monitoring are crucial aspects of preserving Tell Umm Amer. Proper management and monitoring measures help protect the Site from damage and deterioration while facilitating accessibility to the Site for visitors and scholars. These considerations include, but are not limited to:

- Ensuring that the Site is legally protected through local, national, and/or international laws and regulations. Tell Umm Amer should be designated by the Palestinian Government as a protected area, such as a national archaeological park
- Passing a governmental resolution that clearly demarcates the site boundaries and buffer zone to prevent encroachment by urban development; fencing or signage can help establish these boundaries
- Implementing regular Site monitoring using a combination of on-site inspections and remote surveillance, such as cameras and sensors to detect any unauthorized activities or threats to the Site
- Regularly inspecting and maintaining Site infrastructure, including walkways, fencing, signage, and visitor facilities and promptly addressing any damage
- Developing a plan for responding to emergencies such as natural disasters, war, or vandalism to minimize damage and loss
- Maintaining records and regularly reporting on the condition of the Site and ongoing conservation efforts and relaying any significant findings to relevant authorities and the public
- Being prepared to adapt management strategies as circumstances change, taking new threats, technologies, and research findings into consideration

Each management plan for heritage sites has a generated system on how the entire conservation and management process would be monitored. By establishing a monitoring system, it will be possible to follow site dynamics, possible challenges, and considerations for enhancements. Conservation and management activities should follow the action plan proposed in the CMP. The Site management team should be responsible for the monitoring of the project and the Site and generate reports every three months. Reports on the CMP action plan and activities follow the following indicators:

- ***Input indicators:*** resources spent and works achieved for the realization of planned activities (human, financial, technical)

- **Output indicators:** works conducted professionally with provided resources without interrupting the Site’s OUV and integrity; non-seen activities and ad hoc challenges should be evaluated/monitored as risk-preparedness activities
- **Result indicators:** Benefits achieved for Site visitors and the local community
- **Influence indicators:** Intervention and developmental effects produced through the realization of planned activities

Tell Umm Amer’s management and monitoring governance structure requires a multi-disciplinary approach involving archaeologists, conservationists, historians, the local community, and government agencies. It is essential to strike a balance between preserving the Site’s integrity and making the Site accessible for educational and research purposes and visitation. As each site in Palestine has its own circumstances, significance, and requirements, MoTA seeks to set up specialized bodies for managing each site as needed, where the monitoring and maintenance of each site will be processed on two levels: decision-making and technical.

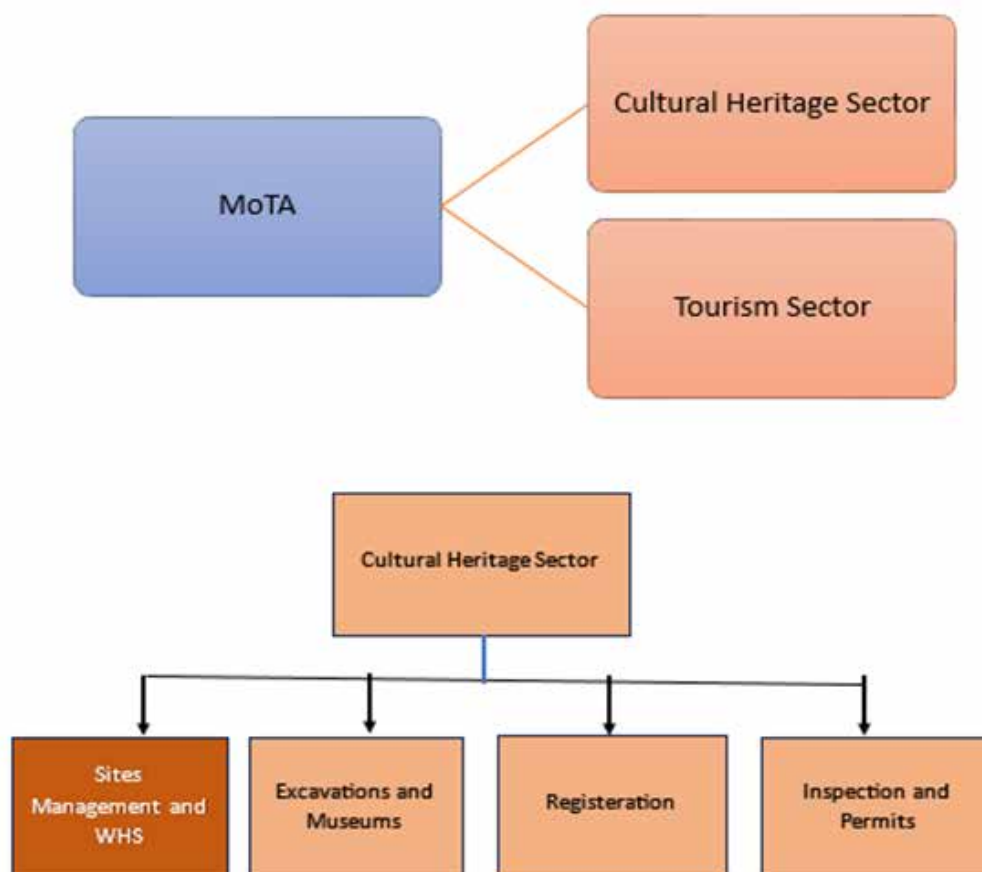


Fig 49: Structural organization of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities 2021



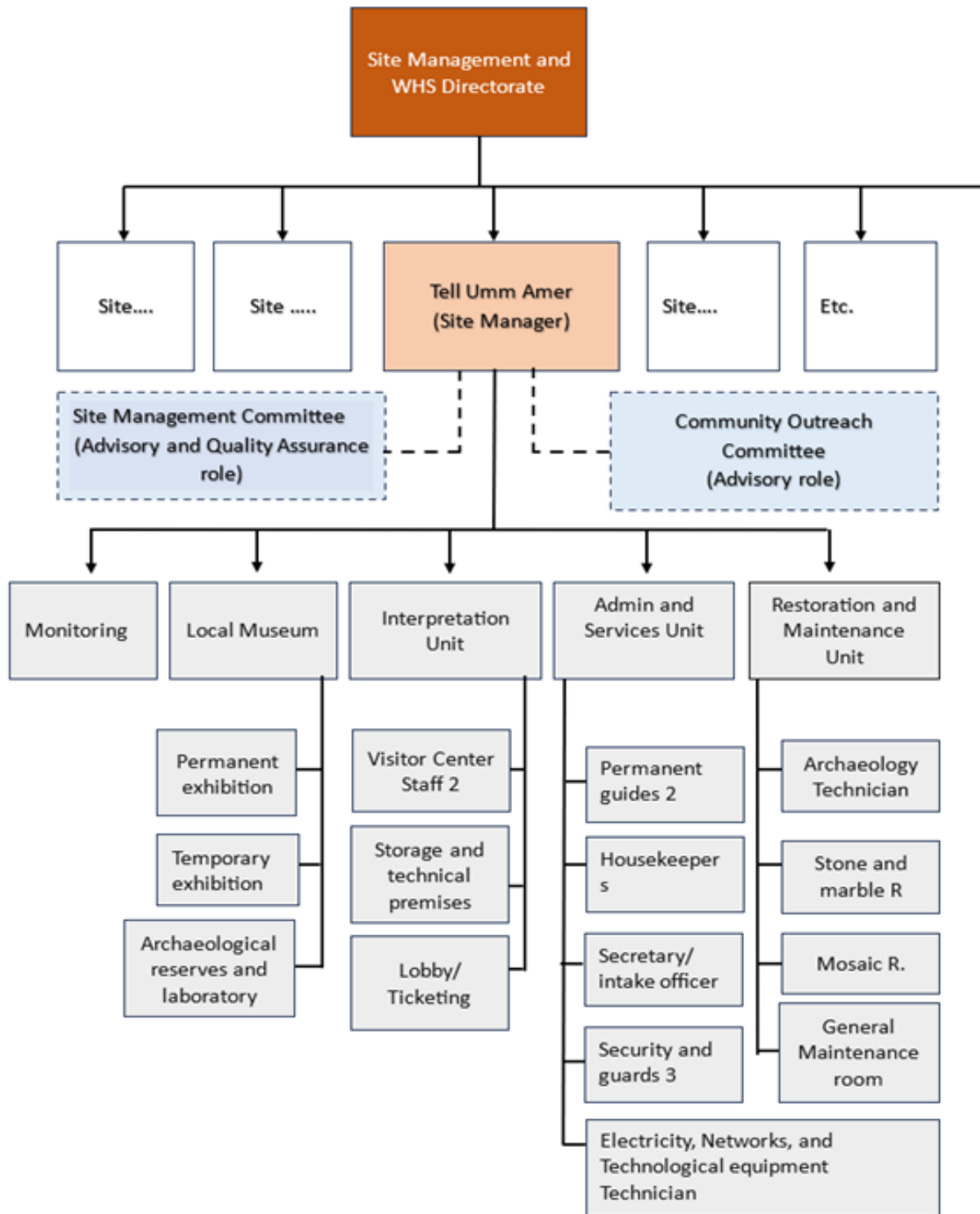
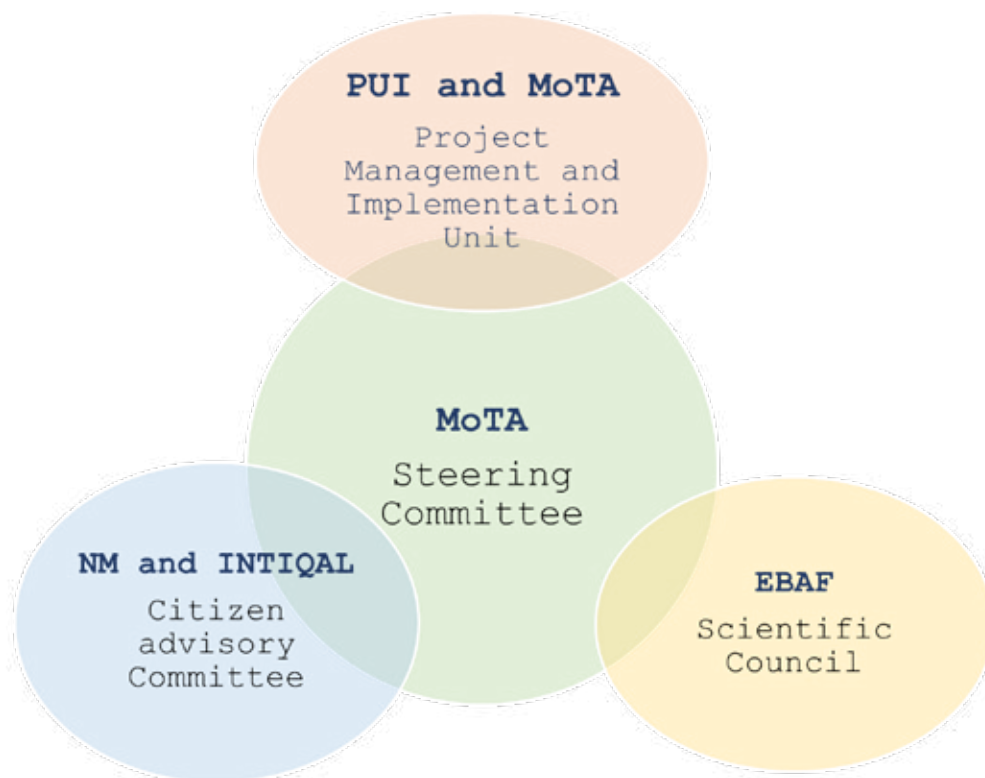


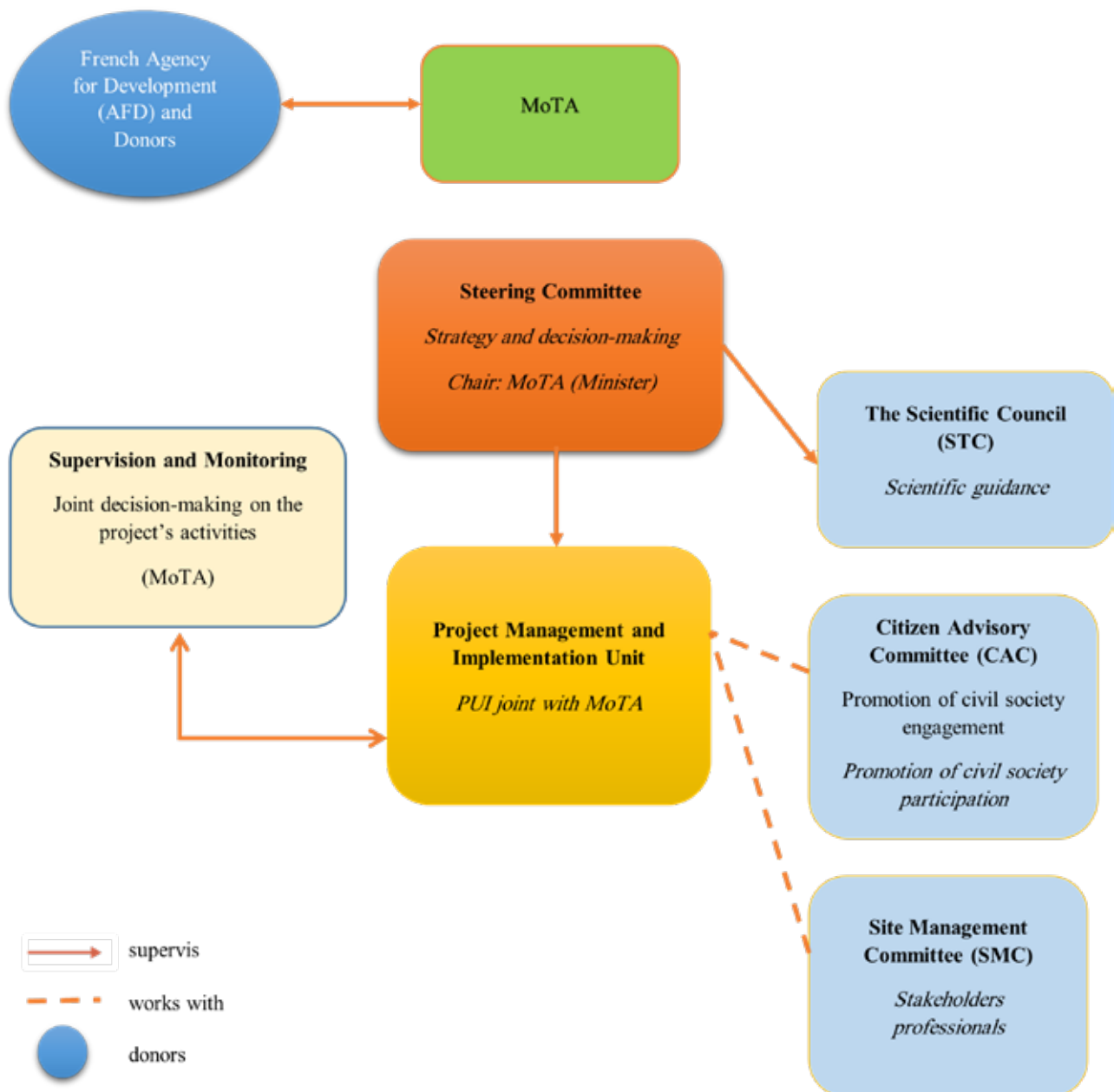
Fig 50: Structural organization of the Tell Umm Amer Management

### 7.3 Site Governance

- **Structural Organization:** The CMP Governance System is the formal structure that oversees the project approach, reveals clear governance structures that influence the protection of Tell Umm Amer “Saint Hilarion Monastery”, and offers a perspective on potential steps toward ensuring these structures work for the protection, conservation, and management of the Site.
- **Main Stakeholders:** MoTA, PUI, EbaF, NM, MoLG, Local Communities, and Universities, Local CBOs
- **Lead Agency:** Joint leadership between MoTA and Premiere Urgence Internationale (PUI). Their main responsibilities are:
  - Overall responsibility for project coordination
  - Communicating programmatic, financial, and compliance requirements to all Partners
  - Coordinating and consolidating reporting
  - Facilitating a coordinated approach within the steering committee



**Fig 51.** Relationship among the PMU, NM and INTIQAL, PUI, and MoTA



**Fig 52:** Governance structure of the AFD's (5years) project

### 7.3.1 Steering Committee (SC)

The steering Committee consists of five active members (implementation partners): MoTA- Chair, PUI, Ebaf, National Expert, National Advisory Center, and two advisory members: UNESCO and Agence Française de Development (AFD).

MoTA is the chair for the management of this Committee, which recruits a national technical and management advisor to represent the professional side and will report to MoTA and the steering committee on the project's development during the project's period. The PUI, in coordination with MoTA, will be responsible for overall coordination efforts between the different stakeholders and committees. Their main duties:

- Oversee the strategic orientations required for the implementation of the project’s activities
- Make all necessary decisions in relation to the implementation of the project by the partners, other than as otherwise explicitly provided in these bylaws or any Agreement
- Action follow-up: Evaluate the progress of the Action and financial performance
- Overall strategic guidance: policies and common approaches to the implementation and further development of the Activities, including resource mobilization
- Operational oversight: Facilitate coordination among committee members, addressing Project Management and Implementation Unit issues and challenges; new partnership introduction; Preparing possible governance scenarios to establish sustainable Site management
- Steering Committee meetings at least four time a year, and when necessary

### **7.3.2 Site Management Committee (SMC)**

The Site Management Committee for a Conservation and Management Plan (CMP) serves as a collaborative and informed decision-making body, combining technical expertise, community involvement, and adaptive management to protect and manage a cultural site effectively and sustainably. Its role is critical to ensure the conservation of the site, which is essential for fostering cultural identity, tourism, education, and the well-being of the local community. The Committee has several important objectives and responsibilities, including:

1. Participating in developing management strategies
2. Participating in establishing a monitoring and evaluation framework to track the effectiveness of the CMP’s implementation
3. Involving relevant stakeholders, including local communities, government agencies, NGOs, and experts in the planning and decision-making process
4. Identifying potential threats to the Site and developing strategies to mitigate them
5. Ensuring that the CMP aligns with relevant laws, regulations, and policies related to cultural heritage conservation and protection

A Site Management Committee for a CMP is typically a group of experts and stakeholders who collaborate to develop, review, and implement the plan. The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities leads the committee. The composition of the SMC consists of 11 professionals and includes individuals with expertise in the following areas:

1. Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (1 chair)
2. Scientists/Archaeology experts (2 members - EBAF & National archaeologist)
3. Première Urgence Internationale (PUI)
4. Government representatives
5. Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities Site Manager
6. Ministry of Local Governments
7. Municipality of Al Nuseirat
8. Community stakeholders (2 members)
9. Conservation and Monitoring Specialist

### **7.3.3 Project Management and Implementation Unit (PMU):**

The PMU is a joint leadership unit between MoTA and Première Urgence Internationale and includes two permanent active members: PUI coordinator and MoTA's technical representative. Their main duties are:

- Overall management and implementation of the project's activities
- Providing technical management guidance for implementing the activities and the related strategy as defined in the committee proposal and in line with SC's recommendations
- Ensuring the quality and timely implementation of activities
- Following up on Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability & Learning (MEAL), procurement, compliance, auditing, and programmatic and financial requirements
- Planning and evaluating all trans-sectoral and/or committee-level activities, both internal and external
- Organizing a capacity-building program for the future Site Management Team
- Meeting at least on a monthly basis

### **7.3.4 The Scientific Council (STC)**

The STC acts as an entity independent from the implementation and therefore will not include implementation partners as members. It refers directly to the Steering Committee. Eight members will be nominated by MoTA, PUI and EbaF according to their scientific experience in Palestine and the area.

Their Duties are:

- Advisory role
- Responsible for ensuring the scientific coherence, performance, and academic guidance for the project

### **7.3.5 Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC)**

Co-chaired by INTIQAL and the Municipality of Nuseirat (technical level) in Gaza. List to be established between the two co-chair organizations and may include notably (but not restricted to): Community-based/Civil-society/Nongovernmental organizations (involved or linked to the project), students and teachers from partner universities, and local residents of targeted areas. Their duties are:

- Consultative entity
- To propose activities and communications and share data about the Site
- Submit proposals to SC
- Meet at least three times a year

### **7.4 Mechanism of the Management System**

The site management committees are based on the principle of the most inclusive representation possible. They therefore include representatives of local authorities, the main sponsor of the project, the academic world, the local population, and the main management team of the Site. The Steering Committee may decide to alter or increase/reduce representation on the committees. Decisions should be taken by consensus as much as possible. The working languages of the committees should be Arabic and English.

### **7.5 Reviewing and Reporting**

The CMP of Tell Umm Amer is a dynamic document that will change as management priorities shift, as conditions change on site, and as other factors come into play. Regular monitoring of delivery of the Site Management Committee, together with the objectives and actions identified in the plan and annual reporting, will ensure the sustainability of Tell Umm Amer for present and future generations.

It is recognized that, with varying management priorities and other factors stemming from the complexity of land ownership, Site boundaries, and the proposed buffer zone, the relevance of the CMP may change over time. As such, the effectiveness of the implementation of the plan will need to be reviewed by:

- Reassessing the plan after three years
- Monitoring the progress of actions in the Action Plan
- Assessment of the effectiveness of each action in achieving its objectives

As these steps are taken, relevant sections of the plan may need to be updated and reissued. Through continued monitoring by MoTA, PUI, and other stakeholders, the protection of the cultural significance of Tell Umm Amer can be enhanced and a sense of pride can be encouraged, thus ensuring the preservation of the unique qualities of this important site.

# *Chapter 8: Conclusion*

The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities of Palestine requested that a Conservation and Management Plan be prepared before further interventions were done at the Site of Tell Umm Amer, which is one of the most important heritage sites in Gaza. The aim is that the substantial funding offered by donors, most notably the French Agency for Development (AFD), ensures a correct intervention strategy on the site according to international standards of conservation and to ensure effective management for the future of the Site.

The CMP is also needed in view of the fact that the Site is on the Tentative List of Palestine for cultural and natural sites of potential OUV, which already gives the site an internationally recognized status, especially if the State of Palestine decides to continue with the process to nominate it to the World Heritage List.

The CMP looks at what was achieved at the Site and what was proposed by the Première Urgence Internationale (PUI). MoTA and the AFD contracted the Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation (CCHP) as a consultant to create this comprehensive technical CMP.

The Site has already had various interventions such as substantial archaeological excavations. Part of the funding has also been allocated for permanent or temporary shelters. Funding was achieved through UNESCO, French and British Government agencies, and other NGOs. The French NGO PUI has been involved in protection and preservation activities in the Site for several years. The project also aims at constructing other ancillary buildings, including a visitor center and a Site museum.

The CMP was prepared through a dialogue process of constant interaction and sound cooperation among the Team Members. This was based on on-site missions and on regular weekly Internet meetings. The Team presented an Inception report, an Interim report, and a report of the Missions that went to Gaza.

The Team gave a lot of importance to interaction with the local authorities as is normally the case, but even more since Gaza is a special case governed by local authorities who have to face very difficult administrative problems in a territory completely surrounded by a hostile state. Thus, great importance was given to interaction with local Ministries, the Municipality that administers the area where the Site lies, the local community, and other stakeholders.

**Expected outcomes of the plan:** The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities set very clear outcomes for the plan through four main components to be studied and acted upon. These are:

1. The Construction of an interpretation center to ensure permanent cultural and touristic activities and the protection of fragile remains by a sheltering roof to protect them
2. An ambitious training program regarding youth and MoTA staff in heritage preservation, restoration and valorization, cultural mediation, site management and technical maintenance, and scientific and cultural programming
3. The setup of a communication plan and outreach activities aimed at promoting the Site of Tell Umm Amer outside the Gaza Strip through the establishment of exhibitions and innovative tools
4. Identification of different scenarios for the Site boundaries and buffer zone through a proposed master plan for the Site zone and to establish a coordination mechanism with MoTA based on the Conservation and Management Plan. Governance model recommends establishing a Citizen Advisory Committee, Scientific Council, and Site Management Committee. This is in pursuit of a sustainable and stable governance framework for the management of the Site and its long-term development.

The Terms of Reference specifically requested that the CMP aim at establishing a comprehensive framework to ensure the effective management, protection, and conservation of the Site based on a participatory process and a shared vision for the future.

- **Studies prepared by the team:** The CMP has shown the need to better understand the history and importance of the Site. Therefore, substantial importance has been given to the history and development of the Site over the years. Studies were also conducted on the state of conservation of the archaeological remains of the Site, the architectural interventions made, the archaeological covers, and the program of site conservation. Particular importance was given to the training program offered by PUI and EbaF to local professionals and craftsmen.
- **State of conservation:** Both the archaeologists and the architects in the team studied the specific state of conservation of the Site and has found the Site is good state of conservation.

The archaeologists have given a detailed report regarding the interventions that have been done. These comments are found in the respective Chapters of the Plan. They have also given ample ideas about future interventions.

The architects have provided all the necessary information regarding the physical elements of the Site, including scenarios on Site boundaries, buffer zones, and future interventions in the Site. They developed professional criteria regarding the construction of the protective shelter, visitor center, current structures, landscape, and facilities.



However, elements of the Site are vulnerable to climatic conditions and need to be sheltered. Walkways, and signage need constant maintenance. Substantial resources must be aimed at training local staff to maintain the Site to acceptable international standards.

Most of the artifacts that have been found have been moved to Ebaf magazines where they are being studied and documented. These will be important elements of the proposed museum at the Site.

- ***Authenticity and integrity:*** The Site has a high level of authenticity and integrity. The interventions have not altered these very important elements. The minimal reconstruction that was undertaken was mainly to consolidate existing structures, such as the chapels.
- ***Attributes of the Site:*** The Team has studied the attributes of the Site for a possible nomination. The Site contains many important attributes that make it a good candidate to be inscribed on the World Heritage List. The Site has clear outstanding universal value as one of the earliest known Christian monasteries and due to the complexity of the Site. It teaches a great deal about the monastic movement in the first centuries of the Christian faith and about adapting to other ways of life in the region, as the baths and other structures continued to be used for centuries. Whilst the conservation project is not finalized, the Site already has substantial attributes. It is hoped that the rest of the Site will be excavated in the near future. The protection of the Site and a good management system are very important elements for an eventual World Heritage nomination.
- ***Protective shelter and use of solar panels:*** PUI proposes that vulnerable archaeological parts of the Site be covered by a shelter and that invisible solar panels be placed above these shelters. There is no doubt that a protective shelter needs to cover vulnerable parts of the ruins, and both the team archaeologists and heritage experts prefer to follow the ICCROM and international standards in terms of a protective shelter covering only fragile and vulnerable parts of the Site, and not the whole Site. The solar panel proposal offers a sustainable future financial resource. It has been subject to substantial study and discussion in view of the visual impact of such panels in such a sensitive site. There are options on whether the panels could be flat or vertical, rendering a more substantial visual impact. This matter needs to be studied further from a technical point of view and regarding how to minimize the visual and the environmental impact.
- ***Site Museum and Visitor Centre:*** There is general agreement of the importance of these elements, but again, not enough information is available as to the eventual plans or design of these structures which must have minimal visual impact on the Site. Further architectural studies are recommended before any final decision is taken.

- **Training program for local staff:** This important matter will be a continuation of training already being provided by PUI and Ebaf but must be now channeled into permanent jobs for local professionals and craftsmen. As requested by MoTA, a program of training for future management of the Site must also be given priority.
- **Outreach program:** MoTA had emphasized an outreach program. Initial outreach has shown that the Site is not as well known locally as it should be. It was concluded that much more needs to be done so that the local community understands they are the owners of this important heritage site. Under present political circumstances, it would be almost impossible to hope for international tourism to the Site, so the CMP emphasizes the need for widespread local involvement and interest in the Site. A detailed local “touristic” program is therefore being emphasized.
- **Promoting the Site:** The Action Plan includes proposals about promoting the Site, mainly through the social media, a website, and other means. However, the CMP has not gone into the possibility of exhibitions in Jerusalem and the West Bank or outside Palestine as the artifacts are still being studied and documented. The CMP suggested ways to promote the Site on the local level: school visits and collaboration with local universities, on-site cultural activities, social media engagement, educational programs, a visitor center, publications and awareness materials, an online presence, community involvement, and media relations are some of recommended activities aimed at promoting the Site.
- **Governance system:** The future management system for the Site is of the utmost importance, and this element has been studied and substantially discussed. A governance system has been set up in cooperation with the stakeholders. According to MoTA (the Site’s owner and the governmental agency that has the mandate over site management in Palestine), there will be two phases of management. In the first phase, the conservation and rehabilitation project funded by the AFD will have its own organizational structure to manage the project for a five-year span. After completion of this project, the second phase will begin as PUI will permanently transfer management of the site to MoTA and its administrative structure.
- **Master Plan:** The existing land use plan for the area of the Site needs to be adjusted. A new master plan shall be prepared and endorsed by the responsible bodies. The plan shall ensure minimal construction in terms of building height and the ratio of built-up area surrounding the Site. The plan shall also define the Site boundaries and a buffer zone to protect the Site. The CMP has proposed two scenarios addressing these issues.

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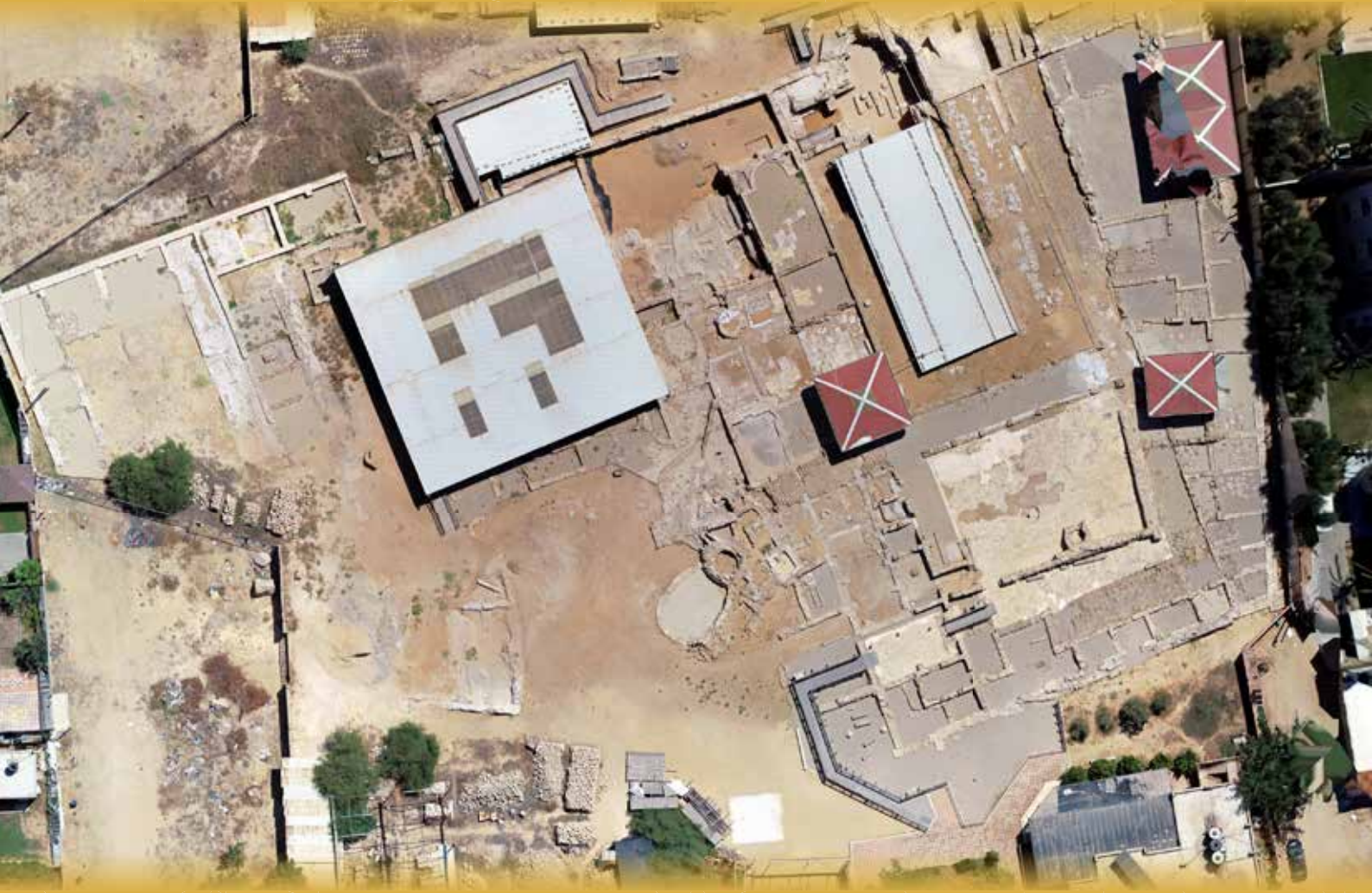
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# Conservation and Management Plan for Tell Umm Amer, “Saint Hilarion Monastery” Annexes and Appendices



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# *Executive Summary*

Saint Hilarion Monastery at the archaeological Site of Tell Umm Amer in Gaza (the Site) is on the Tentative List of Palestinian heritage sites of Outstanding Universal Values and has the potential to be inscribed on the World Heritage List in the near future. This Conservation and Management Plan analyses its cultural significance and provides policies and strategies to guide future management, use, conservation activities, and interventions at the Site.

The statement of significance included in Chapter Two concludes that the Site has a universal significance due to being one of the earliest known Christian monasteries and certainly the most complex. The architecture of the chapels, the organized complexity of the baths and other amenities, and the beautiful mosaics bear witness to a well-organized society with excellent artisans of their time capable of exploiting local materials.

The ruins of Saint Hilarion Monastery are the most outstanding cultural heritage site in the Gaza Strip, Palestine. It bears witness to the importance of Gaza as a port in antiquity and as a major transit hub to and from the Terra Santa. This fascinating historical Site is also linked with Saint Jerome, a contemporary saint who translated the Bible into Latin (Miniac 1992) and wrote a biography of Saint Hilarion.

This Conservation and Management Plan has been prepared under the direct guidance of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and in cooperation with the PUI and personnel of the MoLG, MoTA, and Nuseirat Municipality in Gaza. The Plan provides guidance for future interventions at the Site and its surrounding and proposes activities, policies, and by-laws that shall contribute to conserving the Site and developing it for the benefit of the local community and to enrich the experience of visitors.

# *ANNEX 1 Religious Context: Religion and Monasticism in Gaza*

Monasticism in Gaza has a rich history dating back to the early centuries of Christianity. The Gaza Strip was home to a significant Christian monastic community during the Byzantine period. Monasticism in Gaza can be traced back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century when Christian ascetics and monks began to settle in the region. Many were drawn to desert areas for a life of solitude, prayer, and asceticism.

Tell Umm Amer “Saint Hilarion Monastery”, often considered one of the originators of monasticism in Palestine, was established in the Gaza area around 329 AD. Saint Hilarion is renowned for his ascetic lifestyle and is credited with influencing the development of monasticism in the region. Gaza became a significant center for monasticism, attracting famous Desert Fathers and Mothers—spiritual leaders and monks known for their wisdom and teachings. They sought the solitude of the desert to engage in contemplative prayer and spiritual discipline.

Although not directly associated with Gaza, St. Sabas (439-532 AD), a prominent monk and abbot, had an important impact on the monastic tradition in the broader region, including the Holy Land. His teachings and establishment of the Great Laura monastery near Jerusalem influenced the development of monasticism in nearby areas, including Gaza.

The monastic communities in Gaza faced various challenges, including occasional persecution by authorities and invasions by external forces. Over time, the prominence of monasticism in Gaza declined, particularly with the rise of Islam and changing political landscapes. However, in the modern era, there have been efforts to revive and preserve the monastic heritage of the region. See **Table 1** below.

<b>Period / Date (AD)</b>	<b>Event or intervention</b>
<i>c. 310-330</i>	Many Christians concentrate in Maiuma, the port of Gaza, and Emperor Constantine gives it the status of an independent city with its own bishop. The measure is canceled by Emperor Julien the Apostate except for the bishop.
<i>c. 320-330</i>	Foundation of the Monastery of Hilarion at Tell Umm Amer
<i>c. 360</i>	Foundation of a monastery at Bethlelea by disciples of Hilarion
<i>c. 390</i>	After his departure from Egypt, Silvanus founds a monastery near Gaza, in the torrent of Gerar.
<i>c. 395</i>	The Christian community in Gaza has only 280 members and pagan cults are flourishing.
<i>c. 395-420</i>	Bishop Porphyry of Gaza
<i>c. 402</i>	Porphyry manages, with the help of the imperial power, to destroy the eight temples of Gaza, the main one of which, dedicated to Zeus Marnas, is replaced by a church.
<i>c. 440</i>	Foundation of the monastery of Zenon, a disciple of Silvanus, at Khirbet Se'arta
<i>c. 440</i>	After his departure from Egypt, Abba Isaiah founded a monastery near Beth Dallatha, about 6km from Tabatha.
<i>c. 445</i>	Foundation of the monastery of Peter the Iberian near Maiuma
<i>c. 451</i>	Council of Chalcedon, rejecting Monophysitism
<i>c. 500</i>	Foundation of the monastery of Severus, a disciple of Peter the Iberian, near Maiuma

<b>Period / Date (AD)</b>	<b>Event or intervention</b>
<i>c. 500-520</i>	Foundation of the monastery of Seridus near Tabatha, home to Barsanuphius, John and Dorotheus
<i>c. 519</i>	The occupants of the Monophysite monasteries (founded by Isaiah, Peter the Iberian and Severus) were expelled during the Chalcedonian repression following the accession of Emperor Justin and had to take refuge in Egypt. This was also the case of the Persian nun Susan and five of her sisters who were then established in a women's monastery between Ascalon and Gaza. The Monastery of Saint Hilarion (according to archaeological sources) and of Seridus (according to historical sources), both located in Tabatha, were not affected. It is possible that it was the same monastery that changed its name at that time, but the hypothesis needs to be verified.
<i>c. 536</i>	In Gaza, Bishop Marcian inaugurates the Church of Saint Sergius, which plays an eminent role. Many other churches are reported in the city and its suburbs.
<i>c. 543</i>	Foundation of the monastery of Dorotheus (former monk in the monastery of Seridus), between Maiuma and Gaza
<i>c. 618-629</i>	Sassanian occupation of Gaza territory
<i>c. 637</i>	Muslim troops arrive in Gaza.
<i>c.731-732</i>	Dedication of a pavement in the church near Jabaliya, the ultimate attestation of a Christian cult still in operation

**Table 1:** Religious Context: Religions and Monasticism in Gaza

# *ANNEX 2 The anastylosis program at the Tell Umm Amer site*

The anastylosis program is well detailed and illustrated by numerous color photos in the following reference document: Elter 2022, *Rapport des activités de préservation et archéologique (2020-2021)*, Gaza, Aliph, MoTA, PUI, EbaF.

## **The Crypt** (Elter 2020, p. 34 and Elter 2022, p. 41 and 44)

The excavations carried out by the Gaza Antiquities service between 1997 and 2000 revealed an architectural ensemble for the crypt which had lost part of its elevations. During the winter of 2009-2010, part of the west wall of the crypt collapsed and the apses of the sanctuary slid into the crypt. The state of preservation of the church had become alarming, the apse and the choir, weakened, were in danger of collapsing into the crypt. An anastylosis of the west wall of the crypt and the vault of the south narthex was the best solution to avoid this major problem. Only a few blocks of the first beds of the vaults remained in place, hanging on the west walls of the north and south vestibules of the chapel. It was, however, possible to have a clear enough idea to restore the profile of the barrel vault. This information has been essential for the restitution of the vault of the South narthex. The anastylosis of the masonry was made with lime mortar (lime and quarry sand). To promote the circulation of water and its evaporation through the joints of the different masonry, the lime dosage was reduced for this part of the remains. As with all masonry restitutions implemented on the site, a setback of 0.02 m to 0.03 m between the exterior bare masonry of the old and new beds was marked. This difference was accentuated at the level of the contact joint between the existing parts and the new ones. It was intended to be hollower. The use of standard blocks used elsewhere on the site (see the pilgrim hostel) was not retained for the crypt. The layout of the existing elevations and the heights of the blocks still in place did not allow this.

The anastylosis work of the crypt was equally important for understanding the monument, the implementation techniques and their limits. From the quarry to the breaking of the blocks on the site, including the manufacture of formwork and cutting tools, the entire operational chain was constantly the subject of reflection, questioning and search for technical solutions in order to be as close as possible to the actions of the builders of the 6th century. Archaeologist and stonemason worked together and, over the days, the site has transformed into an experimental archeology laboratory useful for understanding the construction of the works of the rest of the monument.

### **The baptismal chapel** (Elter 2022, p. 59-60)

An anastylosis was essential for the preservation of the floors and pavements of the chapel, threatened by the risk of collapse of certain retaining walls. To achieve this, the restitution of the foundation wall and part of the first bed of the elevation was necessary. In order to restore in the most rational way and to respect the philosophy of the ancient construction of the place, the choice made was to resume the organization of the devices and blocks still in place in the southern foundation of the wall of the chapel and that of the walls which were linked to it. Distributed over seven beds (approximately 2 m high), 128 blocks of stone (marine sandstone) were necessary to restore the eastern part of the southern wall. They were made by the site's stone cutting and sawing workshop from stones extracted from quarries (northern Gaza Strip) that were specially opened for the project.

### **The pilgrim hostel** (Elter 2022, p. 84-87)

The pilgrim hostel was not affected by any specific danger (no collapse problem) apart from that of a road construction project. A preliminary leveling of that road was carried out by a bulldozer, without archaeological monitoring. This work involved the destruction of a large part of the elevations still in place on the east wing of the building. To avoid the continuation of such a road project, the anastylosis of this part of the archaeological site was carried out, at the request of the Director of Antiquities of Gaza, to restore the damaged level and give better visibility and understanding of the remains in order to highlight their interest.

Intact blocks recovered during the preliminary cleaning of the zone were reused during the anastylosis. Restitution in the destroyed parts required the installation of between 1 and 3 beds of dressed stone blocks. Initially, the thirty old blocks recovered during the cleaning were put back in place in the lower levels. For the rest of the elevations it was necessary to manufacture 450 blocks. The material used is similar to that used in Antiquity, that is to say sea sandstone or Kurkar (Sand stone). All of these blocks were made by the site's stone cutting and sawing workshop. The stone came from a quarry opened for the restoration needs of the site in the north of the Gaza Strip.

In order to distinguish, in the years to come, modern beds from old ones, a shrinkage of 0.02 m to 0.03 m of the new beds compared to the old ones was observed. The use of blocks called standards on the site and reserved for restitutions has also been generalized. The dimensions of these blocks were determined from the standard dimensions in use during Antiquity on the site. The dimensions used for these new blocks called "standards" are: 0.17 m wide by 0.27 m high by 0.54 m long. In order to optimize the quantity of stone used, the width of certain blocks could vary by a few centimeters between 0.15 m and 0.18 m in width. Only this dimension was left to the free will of the cutting workshop team.



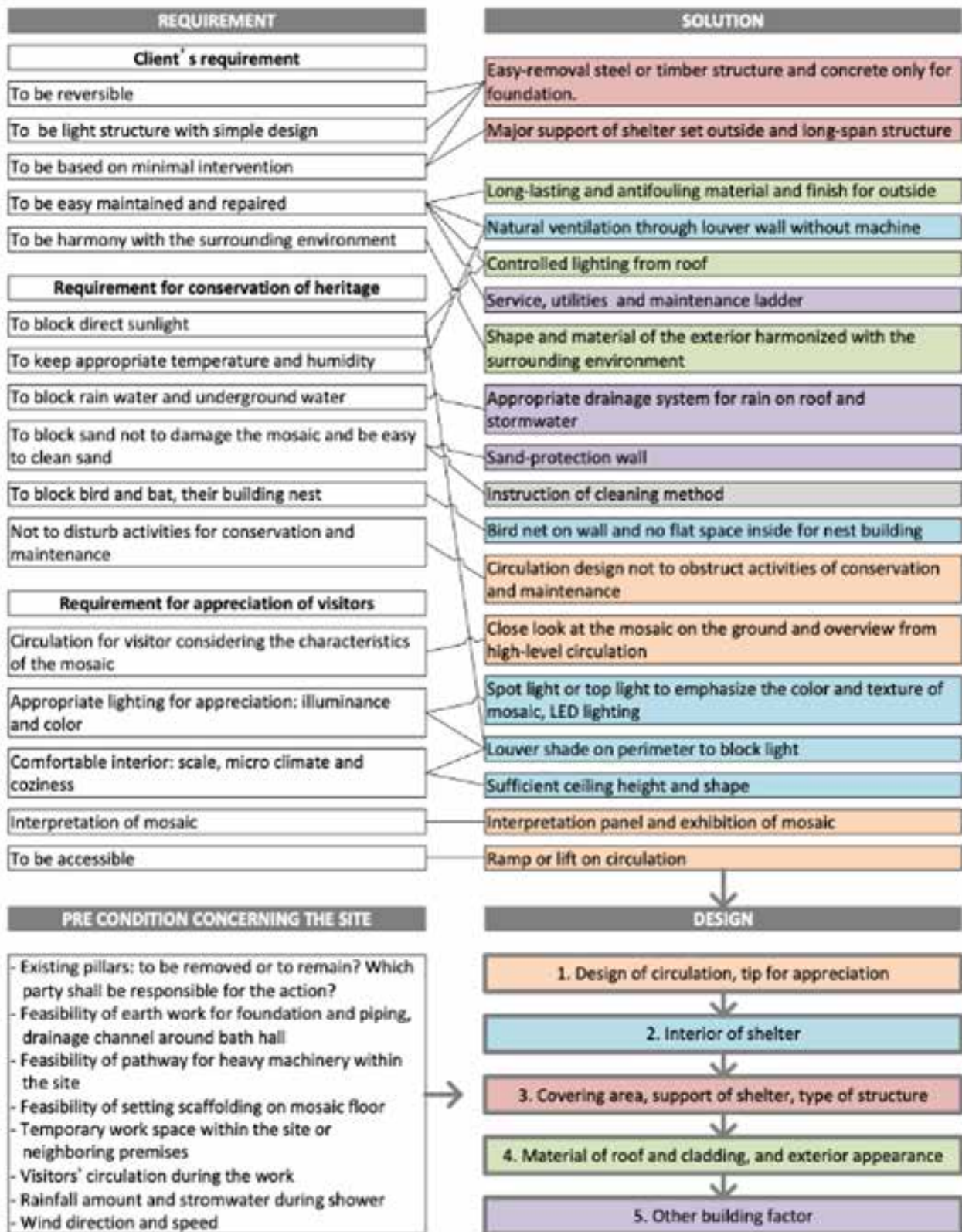
# *ANNEX 3 Guidelines on Designing Shelters for Archaeological Sites*

Designing shelters for archaeological sites is a complex process that involves careful consideration of various parameters to ensure the protection and preservation of these valuable cultural and historical resources. The specific parameters for designing shelters can vary depending on the site's characteristics and preservation needs, but here are some key considerations:

- A. Site Assessment:* A thorough site assessment should be conducted to understand the site's cultural and historical significance, environmental conditions, and preservation requirements.
- B. Site Type and Size:* Determine whether the site needs to be covered completely or whether there are open-air parts or other unique characteristics that will influence the shelter's design.
- C. Preservation Objectives:* Define the preservation and sheltering objectives, such as maintaining the site in its current state, allowing controlled access for research and education, or preventing further degradation.
- D. Environmental Conditions:* Analyze the site's environmental conditions, including temperature, humidity, rainfall, wind direction, and exposure to natural elements, to inform the shelter's design.
- E. Archaeological Materials:* Consider the types of archaeological materials at the site, such as artifacts, structures, or delicate organic remains, and design the shelter to protect them appropriately.
- F. Shelter Type:* Select the most suitable shelter type based on the site's characteristics and preservation goals. Common shelter types include:
  - Overhead structures (e.g., awnings) to protect against rain and sunlight.
  - Enclosed shelters or buildings for sites that require more comprehensive protection.
  - Submerged or underwater structures for underwater archaeological sites.
  - Permeable or semi-open structures to allow for controlled ventilation and reduce humidity.
- G. Materials Selection:* Choose construction materials that are durable, weather-resistant, and compatible with the site's surroundings. Materials should not introduce harmful chemicals or alter the site's environment.
- H. Site Access:* Determine whether controlled access is necessary for research, education, or cultural reasons, and design access points accordingly.

- I. *Security Measures*: Implement security features such as locks, alarms, and surveillance systems to deter vandalism and unauthorized access.
- J. *Climate Control*: Consider climate control systems, such as HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning), to regulate temperature and humidity within enclosed shelters if needed.
- K. *Lighting*: Design appropriate lighting systems to illuminate the site for research and visitor education without causing damage to delicate materials.
- L. *Cultural Sensitivity*: Respect the cultural and spiritual significance of the site by incorporating indigenous or local cultural considerations into the shelter's design.
- M. *Community Involvement*: Involve local communities and stakeholders in the shelter's design process to ensure their input and support.
- N. *Accessibility*: Ensure that the shelter is accessible to people with disabilities and complies with relevant accessibility standards and regulations.
- O. *Natural Landscape*: Consider integrating natural landscaping elements, such as native plants, around the shelter to minimize visual impact and promote environmental sustainability.
- P. *Maintenance and Monitoring*: Plan for regular maintenance and monitoring of the shelter to address wear and tear, damage, or changes in preservation needs.
- Q. *Interpretation and Education*: Incorporate educational and interpretive elements, such as signage or exhibits, to inform visitors about the site's significance and history.
- R. *Regulatory Compliance*: Ensure compliance with local, national, and international laws and regulations related to archaeological site protection and shelter construction.
- S. *Adaptive design*: Consider the potential for future adjustments to the shelter design based on changing conditions or new research findings.
- T. *Budget and Funding*: The design of archaeological site shelters should prioritize the long-term preservation of cultural heritage while minimizing environmental impact and ensuring responsible access and education. Collaboration among archaeologists, conservationists, architects, and local communities is often essential for successful shelter design and implementation.

Each requirement for the shelter and the solution to be considered to design the shelter are illustrated on the below diagram:



Source: MoTA, JICA, and Matsuda Consultants International Co., LTD, 2015

# *ANNEX 4 Survey Form (Quantitative Method)*

The objective of this survey is to collect data from the local community regarding their perceptions of the site, their perspectives on the site's future development, and how they could benefit from this process. Therefore, we ask you to contribute to filling out the questionnaire, knowing that all interventions will be dealt with in complete confidentiality and transparency.

- Gender:             Male                             Female
- Address:           Near the site                     Nuseirat                     Gaza Strip
- Age:                 18 – 28                             28 – 60                     Above 60
- Education:         High School                     University/College         Others

1. Do you have information about Tell Umm Amer – Saint Hilarion Site.

- Full knowledge
- Medium Knowledge
- Limited Knowledge
- Nothing

2. Have you visited Tell Umm Amer – Saint Hilarion site before?

- Yes, more than once
- Yes, once
- Never
- I don't know the site

3. If the answer is yes, did you feel that the site was worth visiting?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

4. If the answer is yes that is because:

- You have a passion for cultural heritage
- Curiosity
- Tourism and having a good time

5. Do you know that Tell Umm Amer site represents Saint Hilarion and is included on the Tentative List for Potential World Heritage Sites?

- Yes
- No

6. Can this site contribute to the development of the region?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

7. Which of the following services at this archaeological site would you prioritize, in order of importance?

The service	Degree of importance			
	1	2	3	4
Shaded areas				
Information center				
Sanitary facilities				
Cafeteria				

8. Which category would you like to target in order to revitalize the site?

- local community
- Tourists and visitors

9. The local community has the appropriate capacity to manage the site

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

10. The local community needs capacity building courses in conservation and management

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

11. In which fields does the community needs to raise its capacity?

- Preservation practices
- Site Management
- Discovery and restoration of the archaeological elements of the site
- Other fields

12. This archaeological site is important for the people of

- The local community of Nuseirat
- Gaza Strip
- Palestine
- The whole world

13. What degree of important does each element have as far as increasing community engagement with this site?

The element	Degree of importance			
	1	2	3	4
Site knowledge				
Work in the site facilities				
Benefiting from tourism activity at the site				
Strengthening the region's cultural identity				

14. In your opinion, has work on the site benefited the neighboring community economically?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

15. Is it possible that working on the site will improve the economic situation and create job opportunities?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

20. Opinions and other feedback to improve and maintain the site:

.....

.....

.....

# *ANNEX 5 Survey Results*

There is a lack of awareness of the site, as just 7% of respondents had full knowledge of the site, 10% had medium knowledge, 36% had limited knowledge, and 38% had never visited the site.

1. Asked about their knowledge of the site, only 7% had full knowledge of it, 10% had medium knowledge, 36% had limited knowledge, and 38% had never visited it.
2. Only 37% of respondents had visited the site. Among those who had, 23.4% strongly agreed it was worth visiting while 15.3% disagreed. The main reasons cited were passion for heritage (61.9%) and curiosity (28.6%). Fewer than 10% visited for tourism or leisure, likely due to the lack of amenities such as a cafeteria, cultural center, souvenir shops, or designated parking.
3. When surveyed about their awareness of Tell Umm Amer, 86% identified it as the site of Saint Hilarion and a potential World Heritage Site nominee. The remaining 14% admitted having no prior knowledge of the site.
4. Among respondents prioritizing improvements at the archaeological site, 69% deemed shaded areas most important, followed by sanitary facilities (39%), an information center (37%), and a cafeteria (29%).
5. Asked which direction they preferred for the site's revitalization, over 85% of respondents expressed a clear preference for targeting both visitors and the local community.
6. When asked about the local community's skills/knowledge/resources to manage the site, more than half (54%) answered affirmatively, while 38% disagreed.
7. Surveyed about capacity building needs, the local community identified conservation and management field courses (57.4%), site management (64.4%), and preservation practices (47.5%) as top priorities.
8. Regarding the importance of the archaeological site, 46% answered that the site is important to the world while 45% said it was important for Palestine as a state. These results highlight the community's strong desire for comprehensive training in protecting and stewarding their archaeological heritage.

9. Respondents identified four key elements crucial for increasing community engagement with the site: enhancing the region's cultural identity, promoting recognition of the site's significance, reaping benefits from tourism activity, and providing opportunities for work at the site.
10. Nearly half (46%) of respondents, especially those living close to the site, disagreed that they had personally benefited economically. However, 38% acknowledged economic benefits.
11. A majority (57.5%) of respondents agreed that site development would improve the economic situation and create job opportunities, while 42.6% strongly agreed.

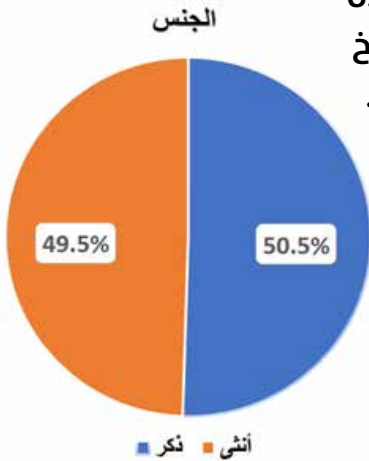
Regarding open-ended suggestions for site improvement and preservation, interviewees emphasized several key points:

- **Raising awareness:** Increasing public knowledge about the site's excavation and preservation efforts through various channels, including media campaigns, school visits, and awareness workshops for the local community.
- **Community engagement:** Encouraging local visits and promoting the site's cultural significance among residents through education and outreach programs.
- **Accessibility and amenities:** Improving infrastructure around the site by paving streets, providing lighting, and establishing tourist facilities in the Gaza Strip.
- **Development considerations:** Integrating the site into broader regional development plans and exploring recreational uses for surrounding lands.
- **Marketing and promotion:** Leveraging social media, pictures, and videos to attract visitors and revitalize the area.



## البحث الكمي:

تم اختيار ١٠٠ عينة عشوائية بطريقة مهنية لاجراء دراسة كمية حول احتياجات المجتمع والمتطلبات الأساسية للنهوض في موقع تل أم عامر- سانت هيلاريون وتطويره وتنشيطه على المستويات المختلفة.



تضمنت هذه العينة عدد من خريجي الجامعة الإسلامية وجامعة فلسطين من تخصصات مختلفة ذات علاقة (هندسة مدني، هندسة انشائي، التاريخ والآثار...) والذين لديهم خبرة سابقة في التطوع أو العمل في الموقع.

تم تقسيم العينة كما يلي:

٤٥ رجل وإمرأة من منطقة النصيرات - المنطقى الوسطى من الأعمار ١٨ سنة وما فوق.

١. منهم عينة من السكان حول الموقع.

٢. وعينة من سكان منطقة النصيرات.

٥٥ رجل وإمرأة من مدينة غزة والشمال من الأعمار ١٨ سنة وما فوق.

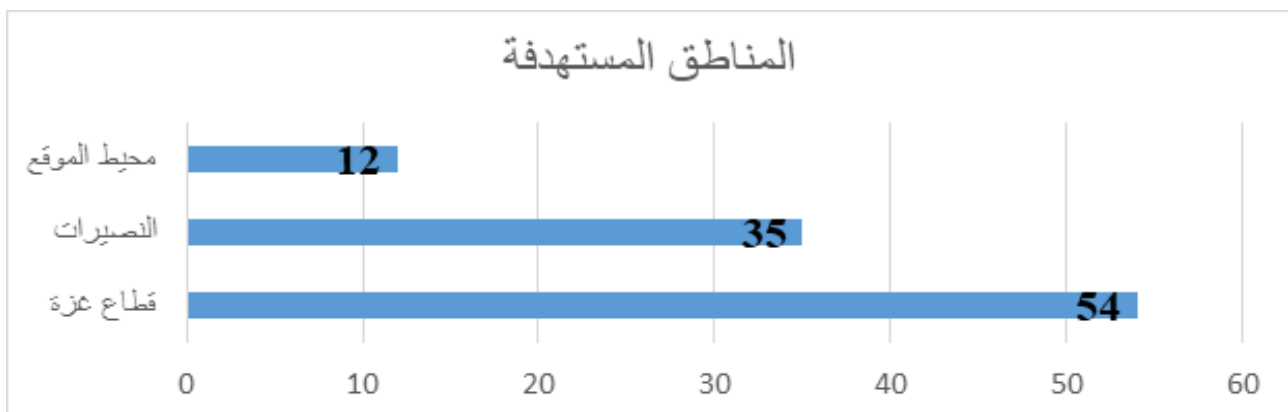
تم الاخذ بعين الاعتبار المساواة الجندرية خلال اختيار العينة. فكانت نسبة الإناث تساوي ٤٩,٥% الى ٥٠,٥% من الذكور.

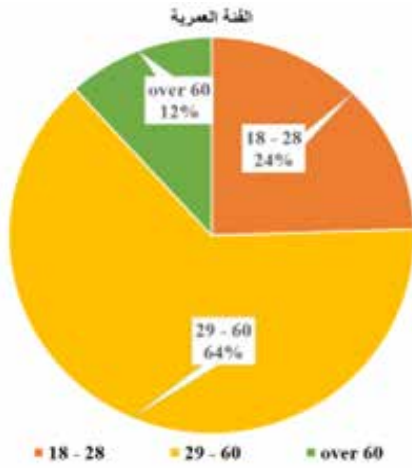
تم استهداف عدة مناطق لجمع البيانات والمعلومات اللازمة، وكانت مقسمة كما يلي:

١٢ حول موقع تل أم عامر - سانت هيلاريون.

٣٥ من منطقة النصيرات ليصبح المجموع ٤٧ استبانة.

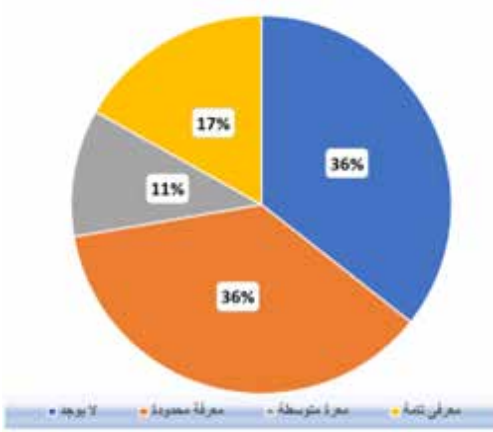
٥٤ استبانة من قطاع غزة.





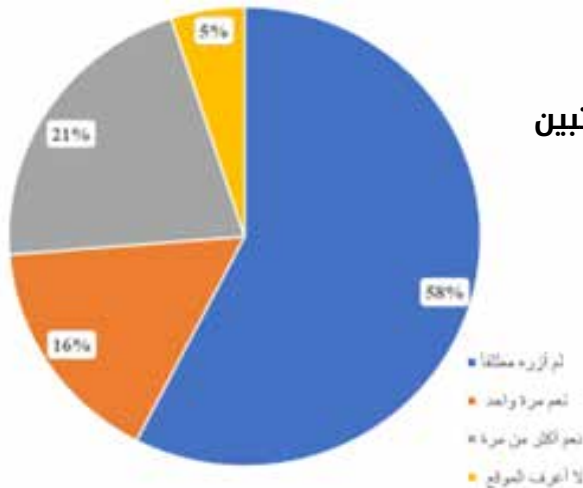
تم استهداف ثلاث فئات عمرية، وهي:

١. من ١٨ - ٢٨ سنة.
٢. من ٢٩ - ٦٠ سنة.
٣. فوق ٦٠ سنة.



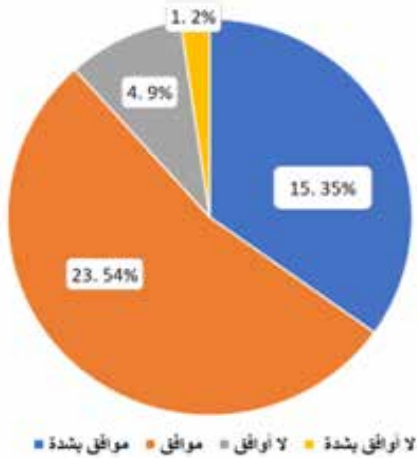
عند سؤال المجتمع المحلي وقياس مدى معرفتهم بالموقع كانت النتيجة كما هي موضحة بالشكل التالي :

- ١٧% لديهم معرفة تامة بالموقع
- ١١% لديهم معرفة متوسطة بالموقع
- ٣٦% لديهم معرفة محدودة
- ٣٦% لا يوجد لديهم أي معرفة بالموقع

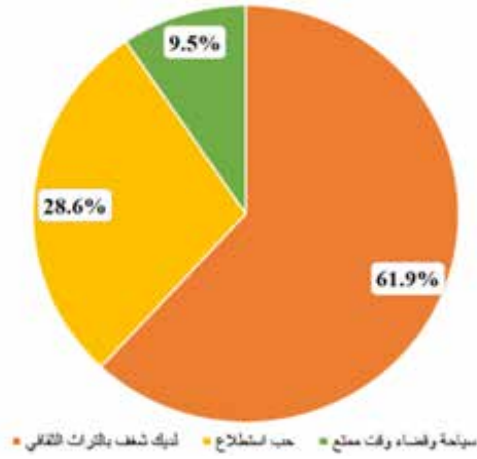


و عند سؤال المجتمع المحلي عن زيارتهم للموقع تبين الآتي:

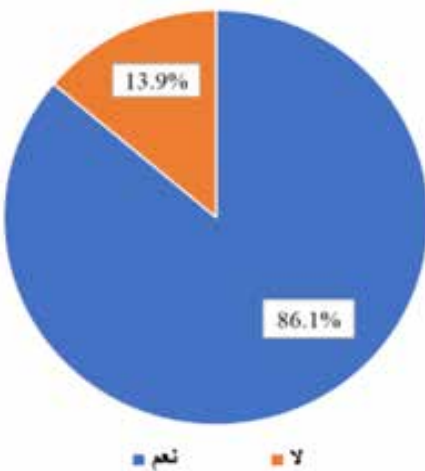
- ٥٨% لا يعرفون الموقع
- ١٦% لم يزوروه مطلقاً
- ٢١% زاروه لمرة واحدة
- ٥% زاروه أكثر من مرة.



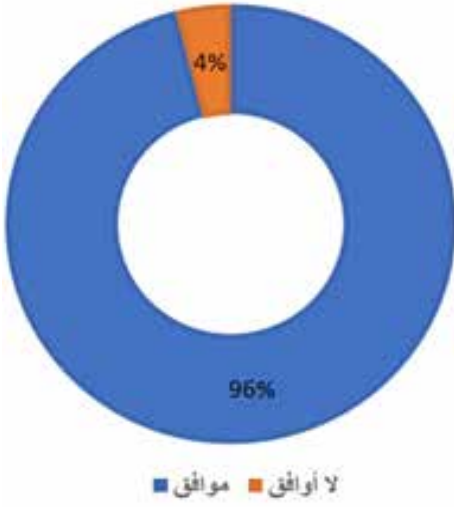
وهل أن الموقع يستحق الزيارة أجابوا:  
 - ١,٢٪ أجابوا لا أوافق بشدة  
 - ٤,٩٪ لا يوافقوا  
 - ٢٣,٥٤٪ أجابوا ب موافق  
 - ١٥,٣٥٪ أجابوا بموافق بشدة.



- ٦١,٩٪ من الإجابات كانت أنهم يودون زيارة الموقع لأنه لديهم شغف بالتراث  
 - ٢٨,٦٪ زاروه لحب الاستطلاع  
 - نسبة أقل من ١٠٪ أجابوا سياحة وقضاء وقت ممتع.

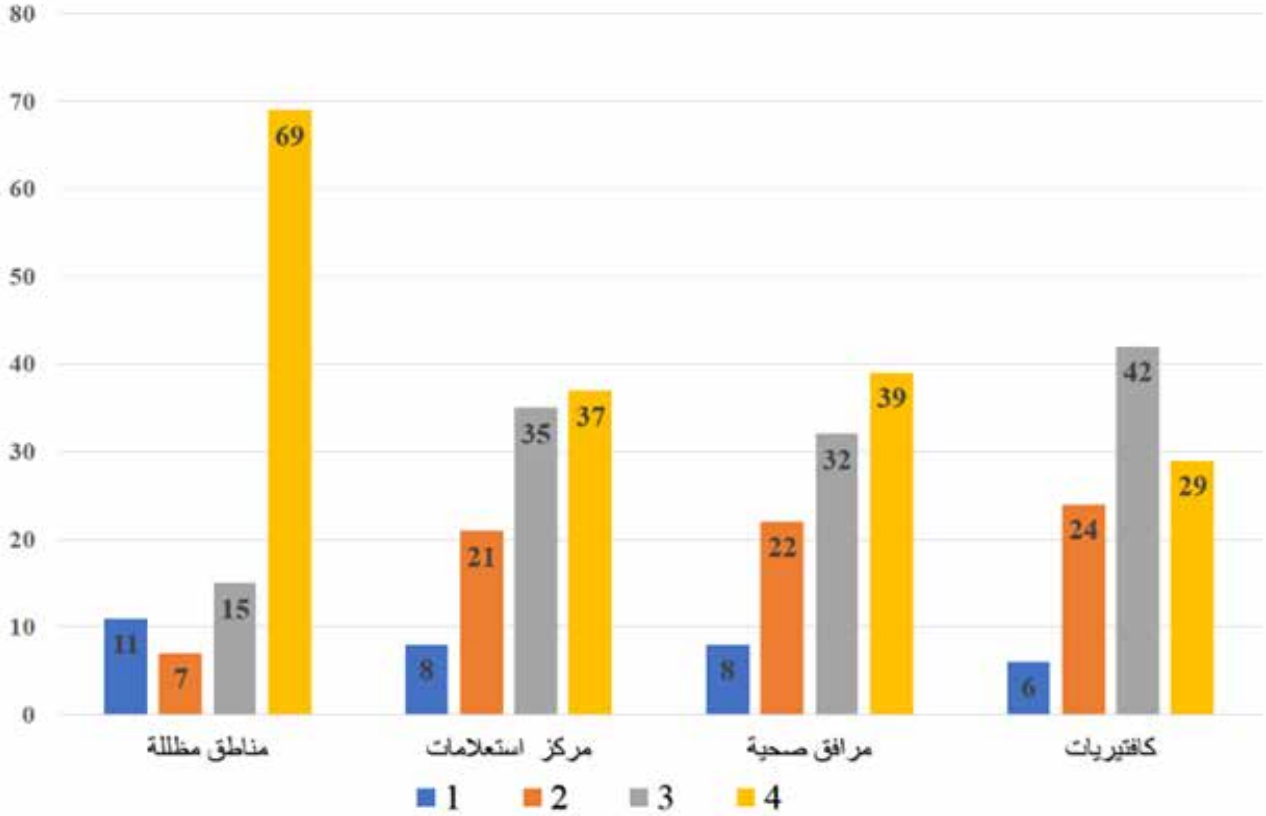


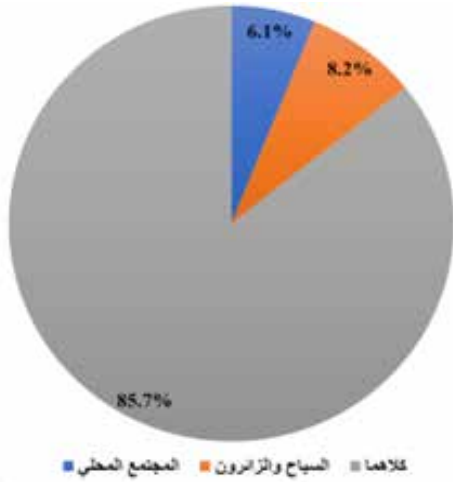
٨٦٪ من العينة أجابو بنعم عند سؤالهم عن معرفتهم بأن الموقع مرشح للإدراج على قائمة التراث الثقافي العالمي .



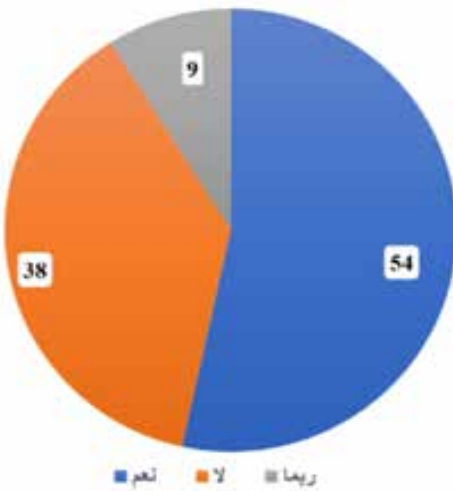
معظم العينة التي تم سؤالها عن الموقع ومساهمة في تطوير المنطقة جابوا بنعم نسبة 96%.

ما هي أولوية وجود الخدمات التالية في هذا الموقع الأثري

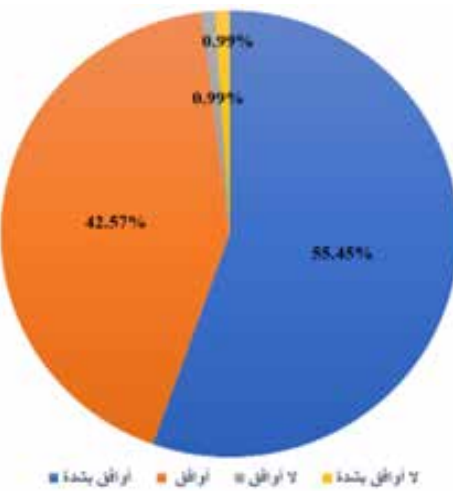




أجاب معظم أنهم يفضلون إحياء المكان من خلال استهداف السياح والزوار والمجتمع المحلي (كلاهما)



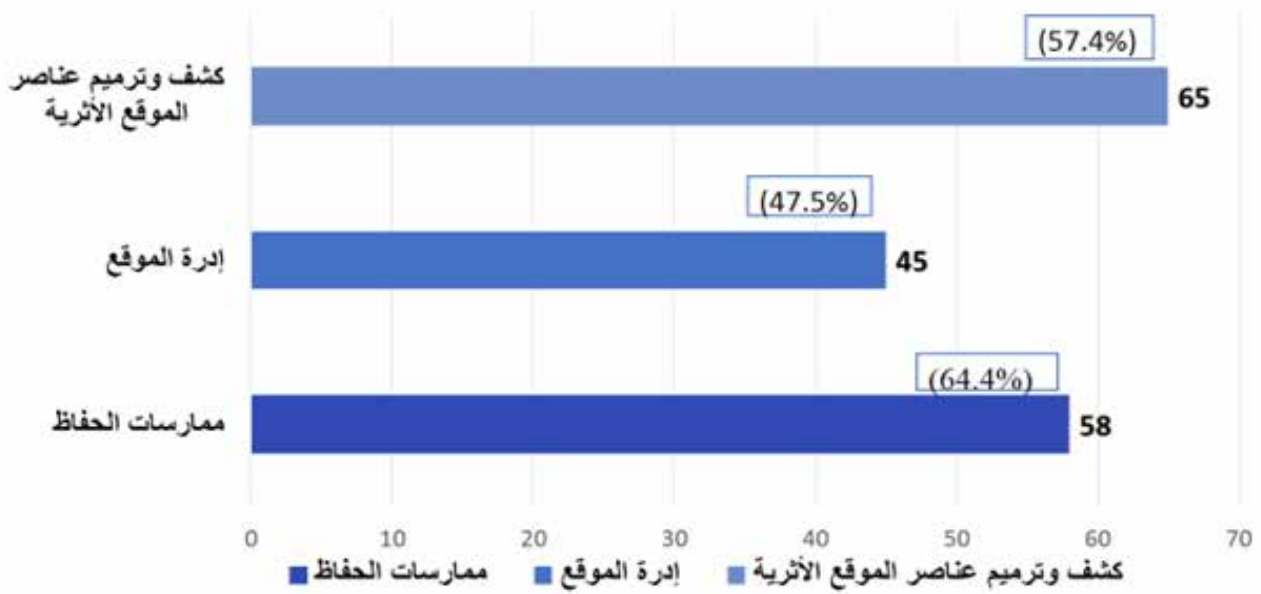
عند السؤال عن قدرات المجتمع المحلي لإدارة الموقع أجاب أكثر من نصف العينة 04% بنعم و38% أجابوا بلا.



بخصوص بناء قدرات المجتمع المحلي في مجال الحفاظ على التراث والادارة

- 00,4% أجابوا ب موافق بشدة
- 42,0% أجابوا ب أوافق

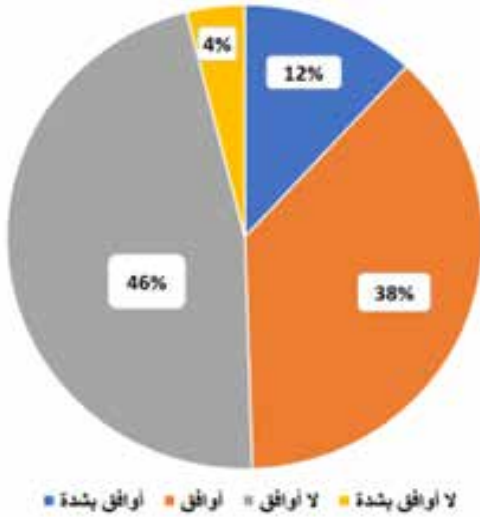
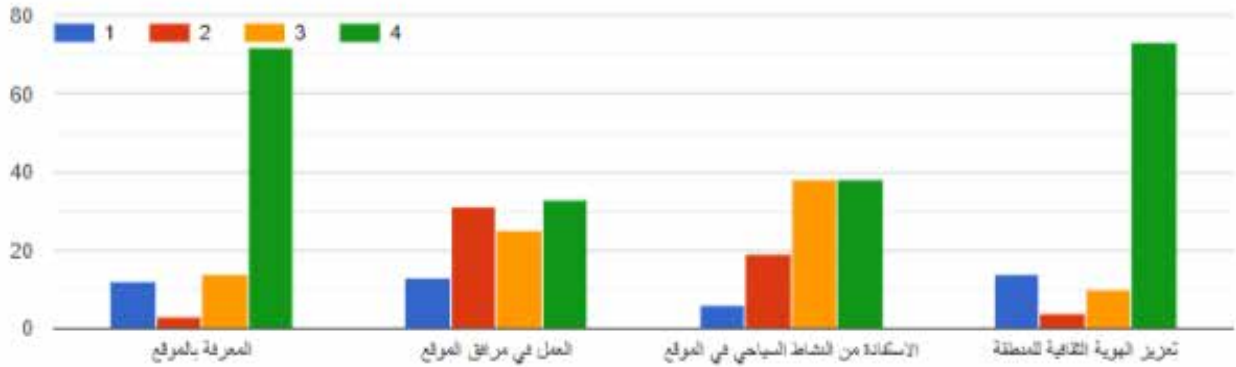
حدد المجالات التي يحتاجها المجتمع الى رفع كفاءته في هذا الموقع



أجاب ٤٦% من العينة بأهمية الموقع للعالم، كما أشاد ٤٥% بأهمية الموقع لفلسطين كدولة.

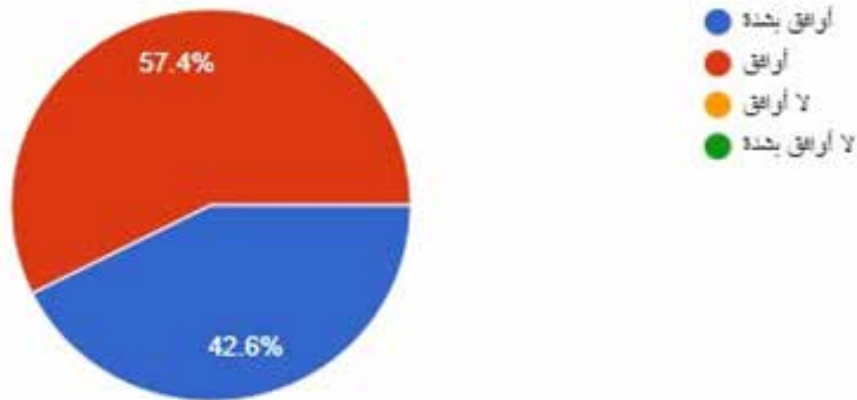


حدد درجة العناصر التي يمكن أن تزيد ارتباط المجتمع المحلي بالحفاظ على الموقع  
درجة الاهتمام (4 هو الأكثر أهمية)



حوالي نصف العينة والمجاورين للموقع ٤٦% لم يوافقوا على أنهم استفادوا من الموقع اقتصادياً، بينما ٣٨% أجابوا أنهم استفادوا اقتصادياً منه.

أجاب ٥٧,٤% أن الموقع أدى إلى تحسين الوضع الاقتصادي وخلق فرص عمل، بينما أجاب ٤٢,٦% من العينة بـ 'أوافق بشدة'



- بعض المقترحات والملاحظات من قبل العينة لتحسين الموقع والاحتفاظ به
- زيادة الوعي لدى المجتمع المحلي في قطاع غزة عامة ومنطقة النصيرات خاصة بالتنقيب الفعلي على الآثار
  - وحفظها من قبل الحكومة، عمل مكان سياحي في المكان نظرا لنقص المرافق السياحية في قطاع غزة.
  - تعبئة الشوارع المؤدية للموقع وحوله، انارة الشوارع حيث لا توجد انارة حاليا.
  - الترويج للموقع من خلال مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي وعرض صور وفيديوهات عنه.
  - تشجيع المجتمع لزيارة المكان ومعرفته.
  - توفير مظلات لفي الموقع لأن المنطقة شمس ولا توجد الا مظلة.
  - تحلية المياه في المنطقة.
  - احياء المنطقة لأن المنطقة بعيدة وغير أهلة بالسكان عن طريق تسهيل وجذب ناس لزيارة الموقع.
  - وضع خطط مستقبلية لتطوير المنطقة نفسها.
  - استغلال المكان وضم أراضي مجاورة واستخدامها في المجال الترفيهي.
  - تشجيع الزيارة المحلية لاكتشاف والمعرفة بالدير وتوعية المجتمع المحلي بالدير كآثار في فلسطين.
  - زيادة الوعي لدى المجتمع المحلي في قطاع غزة عامة ومنطقة النصيرات خاصة بالتنقيب الفعلي على الآثار
  - وحفظها من قبل الحكومة، عمل مكان سياحي في المكان نظرا لنقص المرافق السياحية في قطاع غزة.
  - تنظيم زيارات ميدانية لطلاب المدارس وتشجيعهم على معرفة الموقع.
  - حملات اعلامية لتعريف المجتمع في غزة بالموقع.
  - تنفيذ ورشات توعوية للمجتمع المحلي حول أهمية هذا الموقع.
  - تحويل الموقع إلى أرض معارض (ترفيه، سياحة، فندقية).



# *ANNEX 6 Results of Focus Groups*

Main findings of the three focus groups: Qualitative method

Regarding awareness of the site: Participants from focus groups clearly displayed awareness and keen interest in developing the site. Through various experiences including multiple cultural tours, a summer camp with CFTA, and repeated visits, their engagement is evident. Some even remarked on the continuous progress at the site with new discoveries every visit.

At Nawa Association, most had visited the site. Notably, they highlighted the lack of paved roads around the site, making private car access the only option and increasing the cost of visiting.

***Reasons for visiting the site:*** The majority agreed the site is worth visiting due to its unique historical value. It was described as presenting “new architectural heritage” and offering insights into the past. One participant mentioned being inspired by the site to create a mosaic and another found it illuminating of their ancestors’ lives.

***Revitalizing the site:*** Most respondents believed both the local community and tourists/visitors could contribute to revitalizing the site.

***Capacity building needs:*** There was consensus on the local community needing capacity building courses in conservation and management. All three options mentioned (preservation practices, site management, discovery/restoration of archaeological elements) received favorable responses.

Significance of the site: Participants declared the site’s importance to the world first, followed by Palestine.

***Increasing community engagement:*** Knowledge about the site emerged as the top element for boosting community engagement, followed by strengthening cultural identity, then the prospect of working at the site (with limited opportunities preferred).

Economic benefits: The majority agreed that the neighboring community could benefit from job opportunities at the site, though they acknowledged they haven’t experienced such benefits yet.

**Their recommendations:**

- a. Make the site known and appreciated as a global heritage treasure.
- b. Develop the site as a vibrant cultural destination.
- c. Organize awareness workshops for the local community, empowering them to become site ambassadors.
- d. Design an interactive website with rich media content in multiple languages to promote the site globally.
- e. Explore digital initiatives like e-books and online archives to share the site's story with a wider audience.
- f. Offer educational materials like brochures, booklets, and interactive exhibits for schools and universities.

When discussing ways of developing the site of Tell Umm Amer, they suggested two ways:

***Enhancing accessibility and facilities:*** This includes paving the surrounding streets, providing lighting, cleaning external areas, creating parking for buses and cars, erecting a museum nearby, offering shade to protect the heritage and visitors alike, and establishing an information center. Additionally, amenities like cafeterias, a children's cultural center, and a health center could benefit both visitors and the local community.

***Promoting the site's significance:*** As an archaeological treasure from the first centuries, Tell Umm Amer deserves recognition both locally and internationally. The Ministry of Local Government, the National Museum, and the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities should collaborate on a comprehensive development plan. Providing trained tourist guides can further highlight the site's value as part of our national heritage.

# *ANNEX 7 Results of Interviews*

## *Main findings of the three interviews with decision makers:*

Three interviews with Municipality of Nuseirat (NM) (Ahlam Azainaty), MoLG (Sobhi Iskaik), & MoTA (Dr. Jamal Abu Rydeh).

### *First interview with Nuseirat Municipality*

Ahlam Azainaty, from the Municipality of Nuseirat (NM), clarified that the NM does not manage the site. The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA) is responsible for its management.

Municipality of Nuseirat is currently uploading a three-dimensional visualization of the Tell Umm Amer site and the antiquities currently located there. This visualization will be uploaded as an explanatory video for students, explaining the features of this site.

The local community must be a partner of the municipality and the MoTA in the project from beginning to end, with neighborhood committees and residents invited to participate in its management.

It is good to involve the community to follow the main principle of development, which is that development only comes with participation, and this will revitalize the site.

Defining the site's future expansion and development with a clear vision will be crucial in attracting visitors and tourists. Providing services like cafeterias and shaded areas will ensure visitor comfort and enjoyment while visiting the site. One proposal suggests acquiring 10 meters from the 25-meter wide western street to create a park and cafeterias around the site. The revenue generated from this project would be reinvested in developing the infrastructure of the surrounding streets.

### *Second interview with MoLG*

Sobhi Iskaik from MoLG provided answers about implementing projects like entertainment areas and cafeterias around the site.

It is possible for the municipality to implement projects such as entertainment areas around the site and cafeterias because it has the power to do so. It has the power to prepare detailed plans for the area. The

law gives the municipality the right to prevent encroachments and make detailed plans through which it can limit construction around the site, which allows it to be able to transform the areas surrounding the site according to its vision that is appropriate for the area. This means that it is possible to make it a tourist area interspersed with cafeterias, parks, etc.

The municipality can contribute to the management of the site by preparing the surrounding roads to reach the site, cleaning them, adding street lighting, and providing infrastructure such as drinkable water for people in the area.

The site represents what the place used to be, so through educational and entertaining trips for children, we plant in them a love of the homeland and the Palestinian identity.

He proposed managing the site independently of authorities, relying on educated volunteers and community/heritage institutions.

The municipality has a regulatory role in access to the site, paving roads, and lighting. He added that the municipality is seeking to create infrastructure for the area around the site.

Regarding community development, he noted that the archaeological site should reflect national identity and attract tourists for economic improvement.

When asked if he decided to form a board for the site, he answered that they should be from educated people from universities and government institutions, volunteers, and businessmen. Those will manage it better than politicians because they have the language of dialogue.

“We want the project to become a reality, but we’re not the sole decision-makers.”

### ***Third interview with MoTA***

Dr. Jamal Abu Rydeh from MoTA acknowledged weak cooperation between NM and MoTA, citing disagreements over building the site’s northern wall. He indicated that this problem was resolved by MoLG.

MoTA and NM held several joint interviews and workshops to discuss paving and lighting the roads surrounding the site, as this work is under the responsibility of the NM. However, given the financial

situation of the municipalities, it is hard to finance and there is no implementation. He added that the planning department is ignorant of the value of the archaeological site. If it had been aware of the value of the antiquities found at this site, the roads and houses adjacent to the site would not have been like this.

The MoTA manages the Tell Umm Amer site; they employed a tourist guide and a guard at the site. He said he hopes NM will recruit temporary contract workers to clean the site and the roads leading to it.

The site is located within NM, and it is their only archaeological site. Therefore, the municipality is closer to the people than the MoTA, and it must protect and preserve the site.

NM can contribute to increasing tourism activity at the site by visiting cultural institutions within the municipality of Nuseirat and the central region, encouraging them to hold recreational and educational activities and camps for children within the site.

Enhance the Palestinian identity and educate young people by conducting educational and entertaining trips to Tell Umm Amer and to various archaeological sites.

If he is a decision-maker to manage the site, he said I will have a memorandum of understanding between ministries and municipalities because such a site requires everyone's help to preserve it.

We at MoTA have no objection to the management of the site by other institutions, as it is for the benefit of the MoTA and the local community. An example of this is what happened with the Nawa Foundation, where an agreement was signed between them and the MoTA to use Al-Khader in Deir Al-Balah for a period of 10 years as a children's library.

# *ANNEX 8 Inception Report*

15 June 2023

April 26th marked the signing of a contract between the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA) and the Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation (CCHP) for the preparation of a Conservation and Management Plan (CMP) for Tell Umm Amer “Saint Hilarion Monastery” site in Gaza.

This Inception Report outlines the first step toward achieving this critical Plan. This report outlines the detailed work plan, specific methodology, and dedicated project team for this endeavor. It details the proposed data collection activities and planned site-related actions and offers a concise history of Tell Umm Amer, highlighting its cultural heritage significance. Additionally, the report discussed the site’s importance and its relationship with the local community.

To ensure clear understanding, the report incorporates illustrative plans, diagrams, and relevant images. It also introduces the conceptual framework and methodology we employed, along with a detailed outline of our sources and key indicators.

The CMP preparation team, selected by CCHP, comprises local and international experts possessing extensive knowledge and expertise in developing a CMP. This required document assesses past interventions and future conservation and management needs for the site. Today, a CMP is recognized as the most essential tool for any site’s protection and preservation. Most team members are already familiar with the site through prior visits.

The Team is composed of:

*Dr. Raymond Bondin:* The international Project Expert and Team Leader brings vast experience with preparing such documents from an international perspective. He has collaborated extensively with UNESCO and its affiliates, particularly ICCROM (International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration) and ICOMOS (The International Council of Monuments and Sites). Notably, Dr. Bondin possesses prior experience working in Palestine and specifically with the site in Gaza.

*Arch. Issam Juha:* The Local Project Coordinator has collaborated with prestigious institutions to develop World Heritage nomination dossiers and management plans for World Heritage Sites (WHS). Supported by a well-organized office, he can effectively tackle the demands of this project.

*Dr. Akram Ilja:* The Architect and Cultural Heritage Expert brings a unique perspective to the team. Deeply rooted in Gaza, his international project experience grants him valuable insight into the site's complexities. He will focus on analyzing proposed continuations of the conservation project along with associated structural and land-use challenges.

*Dr. Wesam Alashqar:* The Local Architect and GIS/AutoCAD Specialist plays a crucial role in establishing accurate maps and drawings for a thorough understanding of the site. His extensive experience in local architecture and surveying equips him perfectly to fulfill this task. He will be responsible for meticulously collecting all necessary data.

*Dr. Mahmoud Balawi:* The Local Project Coordinator plays a crucial role in the project's success, particularly through managing local logistics and ensuring smooth coordination with all stakeholders. This includes political figures, experts, universities, and NGOs. His vast network of contacts, including within ministries and universities, is invaluable in facilitating collaboration and navigating local complexities.

*Dr. Hamdan Taha:* The Local Archaeology Expert boasts extensive experience in Palestinian archaeology. Having served as the Head of Antiquities and led numerous excavations, his knowledge of Tell Umm Amer and its connections to other Gaza sites is unmatched. He will be instrumental in reconstructing the site's rich history and highlighting its significance within the broader context of Palestinian archaeology.

*Dr. Jean-Sylvain Caillou:* The International Archaeology Expert brings his international perspective and experience in Gaza to support Dr. Hamdan Taha's work, fostering fruitful cross-cultural exchange and enriching the project's insights.

*Ms. Amal Abu Eiseh:* The Local Sociology Expert serves as a vital bridge between the project and the local community. Through outreach efforts and stakeholder engagement, she ensures that community voices are heard and considered throughout the process so that the project's success will resonate with local needs and aspirations. Description of Approach, Methodology, and Work Plan.

*Technical approach and methodology:* The CCHP view the Conservation and Management Plan (CMP) as a crucial opportunity to bolster the preservation of Tell Umm Amer, a heritage site in Gaza with potential Outstanding Universal Value (OUV). The increasing attention paid to the site stemmed from numerous excavation missions and interventions conducted by international organizations, with the valuable involvement of local experts. The CMP process incorporated thorough consideration

of the surrounding environment, the needs of the local community and visitors, and the vital preservation of the site's authenticity and integrity. This included careful attention to maintaining the inherent attributes of the site and its harmony with its surroundings.

A Technical Committee for the Plan shall be formed to follow up on the development of the CMP. The committee is composed of representatives of MoTA, PUI, the CMP team leader, the CCHP team representative, EBAF expert, an international heritage expert, a technical representative from NM, representatives of the local community, and academic experts to guarantee the best participatory practices and the legal endorsement of the outcomes. To meet the expected outcomes and deliverables of this project, the involved team will work on revising the relevant available data—surveys, maps, and studies—accompanied by field visits. This will be followed by further surveys that are needed to collect further data to fulfill the expected outcomes. This step shall be followed by analyzing and categorizing the collected data and preparing a thematic tool for setting the required conversation criteria that fulfill the UNESCO international standard for site preservation. This team will determine the applicable measures to establish a comprehensive framework based on the outstanding universal value and all related attributes to prepare the CMP.

During the plan preparation period, two missions to Gaza are planned. The First Mission shall take place in June 18–22 June, and all logistics are in place. Dr. Raymond Bondin, Arch. Issam Juha, Dr. Akram Ilja, and the local Gaza team will take part. Attempts are still being made to have Dr. Hamdan Taha join the mission as well. The Second Mission shall take place in the middle of September, and all team experts should participate. If necessary, a Third Mission will be organized in July for those team members who may not be able to join the First Mission.

There has been considerable delay in establishing the first site visit due to the ongoing war and delays in getting the necessary permits. It is planned that the First Mission will go ahead on June 18 and, if necessary, another visit will be planned for those who will get a visa later on.

The study team, composed of international and local experts, has rich experience in this field. There shall be two working locations: a main office in Bethlehem and a field office in Gaza. The international experts will make use of their visit to Gaza to stay for extra days in Bethlehem to discuss the findings with the team and develop the CMP. A weekly Zoom meeting is being held for project team members to enable all of the team to discuss the progress of the project and set an action plan for tasks to be accomplished.



During the first site visit of the experts, a workshop will be held with the local community. In addition to public awareness campaigns, cultural mapping activities will be held in Tell Umm Amer “Saint Hilarion Monastery” to enhance the importance of cultural heritage, with the aim of encouraging the local community to participate in the community mapping. The feedback collected through these activities shall be incorporated into the detailed CMP since it reflects the wishes of the final and largest number of beneficiaries of the plan and will express their vision and perceptions. All these phases and activities are subject to the following, which is the CCHP working strategy:

*Accumulated experience in previous projects:* The project team’s previous experience in similar projects shall play a major role in quality control during the preparation and planning phase. It shall also play an important role in preparing the CMP.

- *Teamwork:* The whole group participates in discussing the process and the team members support each other in the various tasks. Although discussions can take some of the team’s time, it has proven to be an excellent way to enhance outcomes in two ways: first, all team members are aware of the projected plan, and thus they can help each other in emergencies, and second, the team can use the opinions and advice of each other to achieve the best results within the available budget and time. Half of the project team are from the Gaza Strip and the other half have worked before in Gaza and are familiar with the Site of Tell Umm Amer “Saint Hilarion Monastery”. This shall smooth and facilitate the various activities and tasks and save time and effort. Team members from Gaza shall help with better understanding the needs and restrictions at the Site location and its surroundings.
- *Availability of sufficient data:* All existing documentation of the site, including its history and the history of excavations and all previous projects, is being collected in collaboration with PUI and EBAF. Existing reports and proposals have already been distributed among the group.

The availability of sufficient data, whether studies, surveys, reports, case studies, etc, shall play an important role in better understanding the Site. Networking with associations and experts from Gaza, such as IWAN Center for Cultural Heritage in Gaza and Silver Map Company – GIS Consultancy Centre, will add value to the project as they have access to appropriate data. It shall also contribute to accelerating the pace of the work during various phases of the project. Team members also have access to a large amount of data that will be an asset for this project.

CCHP shall work on collecting all available project data and in particular the following documents, maps, and Geo data for the study area within (1 km) around the site:

- Road network
  - Farm land
  - Land classification (government / waqf / private)
  - Public facilities
  - Contour lines (5 meter)
  - Archaeological sites in the Gaza Strip
  - Land use plan
  - Gaza satellite imagery (2022) (spatial accuracy 50 cm)
  - A panoramic view of the site from above (will be provided)
  - Site maps and drawing from previous projects after sitting with the French expert (expected within this week)
  - Views from sea and land
- *Conservation and Management policies:* This will include site setting, planning, visitor management, public facilities, shelter, protection, conservation, future archeological work, interpretation, off-site signage, future promotion of the site, tourism, education, community outreach, and a final action plan, all in cooperation with other members of the CMP.
- *Bibliography:* A comprehensive survey of the literature and historic sources about the site, including explorations surveys, archaeological excavation, conservation work, world heritage, and media coverage.
- *Work Plan:* The work plan outline spells out all the deliverables, tasks, milestones, funding, resources, and any other necessary information to achieve sound CMP outcomes. In other words, this work plan describes how the project is going to get done. It includes:
- Goals and project objectives
  - Project tasks
  - Task assignments
  - Milestones
  - Key deliverables
  - Timelines, including due dates

### **The project will be divided into several phases:**

- *Inception/Revision Phase: Desk review:* After signing the contract, an online meeting was held between the consultant core team (as the team includes international experts and locals from the West Bank and Gaza Strip) and the involved stakeholders to kick off the process and discuss the objectives of the project. Any specific requirements and necessary elements were communicated to the consultant. A desk review is required to fully understand the project objectives, principles, and acceptable practices. Desk review should include all previous plans and documentation of the Site, provided by the Gaza team, in addition to the questionnaires and survey forms of similar experiences in/out of Palestine. The PUI also shared several reports about the Site with the CCHP team.
- *Design of Questionnaires Survey forms:* The consultant developed questionnaires and survey forms, including open questions related to this specific site and its OUV and to the current state of urban development. The team prioritized key questions, focusing on the most significant issues, identifying and prioritizing key indicators for each question. A draft questionnaire form is attached with the report in ANNEX 3.
- Further data will be gathered through the proposed questionnaire and survey forms regarding the identified areas and the expectations and needs of the local community and stakeholders. Surveys for the Site will be conducted using international standards to determine the value and authenticity of the Site, including architectural, social, economic, historical, and heritage value. Surveys also determine the state of conservation of the Saint Hilarion Monastery.
- *Data Collection, Survey & Visual Inspection:* Structural Investigation shall be conducted for the Site components. The investigation shall be based on the type of the intervention and the structural/physical condition of the site. The excavation reports offered by the organization working at the site shall be an added value to identify the Site's condition. A State of the Conservation Report for the Site shall be prepared.
- *Data Collection and field survey:* Team members will collect data and information that will produce quantitative and qualitative results. Surveys will be done for all components of the Site and identify the site's value, physical attributes, and conditions of integrity and authenticity. The survey shall form the base for the preparation of the Conservation and Management Plan.
- *Mapping/sketching, photos:* Visualization techniques such as mapping/sketching and photos should be part of the survey. Surveyors will take into consideration the geomorphology, overlooks, and Site boundary and indicate the main surrounding features, major roads, and regional linkages, especially to surrounding archaeological, natural, or touristic sites and potential economical roots.

- *Cultural / Community Mapping*: In parallel with the survey of buildings and land parcels, Cultural mapping activities will take place. The aim is to register how the local community perceives the Site. It shall also serve as a tool to involve the local community in the planning process. Community mapping activities also result indirectly in raising the local community’s awareness of the importance of the Site and its role as a tool for development. The cultural mapping will take place in the shape of a workshop that will allow the team to directly interact with the local community, register their observations on the interviews and raise participants’ awareness about the Site and its potential to be inscribed on the World Heritage List of UNESCO as an important cultural asset. Most importantly, it will analyse various aspects related to the needs and requirements of the local community. Quantitative data should be disaggregated by gender and age group (children, youth, elderly) to the maximum extent possible. Qualitative data should indicate gender and age group wherever possible. Meeting with Stakeholders as part of the Cultural mapping will also take place, aiming to bring together the concerned stakeholders in order to discuss the various issues related to the Site and its needs and requirements, future vision, and strategies. Reports from stakeholder’s meetings are considered essential for the planning process since they reflect the shared vision of the various stakeholders.
  
- *Assessment and Analysis*: Data entry and the update of the GIS database: With all required information related to the Site, the new GIS database will be upgraded based on the GIS database that already exists from the NM, MoLG, Ministry of Agriculture, and Ministry of Land Authority. The team managed to obtain these maps over the course of months. During the First Mission, the team will check the available maps of the archeological site with the stakeholders working on the Site (PUI, EBAF).
  
- *Drafting of maps*: The team leader and the survey team will work closely with the GIS expert to exchange the necessary data and to draft all necessary analytical and thematic maps under the supervision of the cultural heritage experts. The GIS database will contain the level of intervention and the special regulations related to Site, and the CMP will be prepared accordingly. This database is considered an essential output of the project and shall serve as a tool for technical Local Government Units to manage the site.
  
- *Development of the CMP*: Drafting the CMP is based on the collaborative work of a well-established and designated team that shall work jointly with local authorities and the local community. It has been prepared based on survey results, analyzing collected data, visual assessment, and the current state of urban development.

- Two to three meetings shall be organized weekly to discuss and review the various drafts of the CMP and work on finalizing and preparing thematic maps based on the classifications. The Steering Committee shall be revising and updating proposed drafts before endorsement. In addition, it shall recommend future possible interventions at the Site in general, what can be allowed and what should be avoided that could affect negatively the value of the Site. A holistic Conservation and Management Plan, Risk Assessment Report, Operational Recommendation Plan, Management and Maintenance Plan, and Action Plan shall be included in the CMP.

### Work Plan

#### The preparation of Conservation and Management Plan for Tell Umm Amer “Saint Hilarion Monastery”-Gaza

Activity	Deliverable	April 2023		May 2023				June 2023			
		25	27	2	11	18	25	1	15	22	29
Contract signing											
Kick-off meeting Discuss the objectives of the project, and requirements (discussing the first mission to Gasa-collecting available data). Revising tasks/ who does what/ preparing contracts with the staff											
CMP's stucture, the mechanism for collecting the available data, and planning for the 1st vizit. Preparation and work plan											
Preparing for the first workshop(intro-ductory workshop and conducting the 1st workshop											
The advisory committee and technical committee formation.											
Initial review and revising relevant available documents. Field visit by local team and the team leader(Dr. Bondin recently made one week visit to the site and wrote a technical evaluation report on it)											
Discussing desk review progress, conceptual framework, survey, and sampling and key indicators											
Conceptual framework											
A proposed questionnarie, survey, and interviews + mechanism for conduction the surveys											
Introductory workshop											
Advisory committee meeting											
	Inception report and Implementation Plan										

Activity	Deliverable	June 2023				July 2023			
		1	15	24	29	6	13	20	27
1st visit to Gaza			Blue	Blue					
Site visit and status analysis				Yellow					
Meetings with the Municipality and Local authorities				Yellow					
Meetings with the non-governmental organizations and Universities				Yellow					
2nd workshop, SWOT's workshop site analysis, evaluation of status, meetings with local community and stakeholders				Yellow					
Community mapping activities				Orange	Orange				
Sharing recommendations in term of community awareness					Blue	Blue			
Heritage significance, community awareness, and local community/stakeholders' recommendations.					Green	Green			
Advisory committee meeting							Blue		
Interim report on Heritage significance of the site	Interim Report						Yellow		
					Green	Green	Green	Green	
Data analysis and assessment of current status				Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
Maps, boundaries, and buffer zones.					Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange
Legal and Institutional framework							Blue	Blue	Blue
Economic situation					Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	

Activity	Deliverable	August 2023					September 2023			
		3	10	17	24	31	7	14	21	28
2 <sup>st</sup> visit to Gaza		Blue	Blue							
Follow-up SWOT analysis and recommendations		Blue	Blue							
Planning strategies and proposed planning vision to the site area, boundaries, and buffer zone		Blue	Blue							
3 <sup>rd</sup> workshop: Development vision.		Blue	Blue							
Stakeholders' feedback and comments				Green	Green					
Management system, monitoring, and maintenance					Orange	Orange				
Technical committee meeting							Blue			
Draft CMP	Draft CMP							Yellow		
1 <sup>st</sup> Feedback workshop									Orange	
Sub-groups and professional meetings with the targeted groups										Grey

Activity	Deliverable	October 2023				
		3	10	17	24	31
Finalizing the final draft		Blue				
2 <sup>nd</sup> Feedback workshop		Green	Green			
Comments from the technical committee			Green			
Final Draft	Draft Draft			Yellow		
Technical committee meeting and comments on the draft: presentation by the team				Orange		
Final CMP	Draft CMP				Yellow	

- A) *Report:* Three reports shall be submitted: The Inception Report, an Interim Report, and a Final Report delivered at the end of plan preparation. The Interim and Final reports shall summarize activities of the project, including a documentation of all visits and meetings conducted, outputs produced, results achieved, obstacles encountered, and recommendations to improve future similar assignments.
- B) *Risk Mitigation:* The team has to work in a difficult environment with a complex political situation, which makes this project an unusually difficult one. As the Gaza Strip is known for its unstable political conditions and sudden complications and closures, CCHP has set multiple scenarios as alternative plans in case of any closures or difficulties that may affect the project and cause delays. Before conducting any event/activity, and after obtaining the required and necessary permits, CCHP will observe and monitor to make sure the site of an event/activity is safe and secured. This follows CCHP internal rules and protocol. Team members from Gaza will stay in continuous communication to have an updated assessment of the current situation in a designated area to maintain the safety of its staff.
- When international experts and project members from the West Bank are not able to obtain required permits to visit the site and do field surveys and assessments, the team from Gaza shall proceed with collecting the needed information based on the work plan and recommendations of the team leader. More than half of the team are from the Gaza Strip and have a good record of implementing projects related to cultural heritage and archaeological sites and are familiar with Tell Umm Amer in particular. The international experts will follow up remotely on the implementation. This ensures the successful implementation of the Plan and will contribute to the efficiency of the work process.
- C) In case of conflict situations, CCHP will work on shifting or postponing field work and proceed with virtual means and paperwork where needed until it is safe again to work on-site. An average of two weekly Zoom conferences and daily communication will take place between all team members and the two coordinators in the West Bank and Gaza.

*Coordination with local stakeholders:* Our working methodology follows an inclusive approach by engaging stakeholders in activities related to the preparation of the plan. A stakeholder workshop is one way to engage stakeholders, including those who are affected by, have a direct interest in, or are somehow involved with the problem identified during the situation analysis. The project team will invite stakeholders to short workshops to seek their input on proposed programs or to achieve consensus. Engaging and receiving input from stakeholders is critical to the success of the projected plan's activities. Conducting a stakeholder workshop helps the CCHP team elaborate the context to the local community and receive support from key players. A stakeholder workshop aims to:

- Build trust and understanding
- Gather information and fill gaps
- Better understand the local community
- Address challenges and communication channels

One of the first important tasks of the team will be to meet all local stakeholders to explain the aim of this project and its projected outcomes. The Team will do its best to involve all local stakeholders at every step and will organize an initial information session after the first team visit. A preliminary list of main stakeholders and local community representatives is as follows:

***- Municipalities responsible for the archeological sites***

1. Nuseirat Municipality
2. Gaza Municipality
3. Khan Younis Municipality
4. Rafah Municipality
5. Al Zahra Municipality
6. Deir Al Balah Municipality
7. Al Mughraqa Municipality
8. Wadi Gaza Municipality

***- Ministries that have an interest in the site***

1. Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities
2. Ministry of Local Government
3. Land Authority
4. Energy Authority

***- National / Local Organizations involved with the site recently***

1. PUI & INTIQAL program for youth
2. “Bonat Alghad” Youth Center
3. Basma Association for Culture and Arts
4. Youth “Roaya” Association
5. “Taghreedat” Youth Team
6. Kanaan Initiative for Digital Heritage
7. Islamic University of Gaza
8. Palestine University

***- Civil society cultural institutions***

1. Culture and Free thought Association (Athaqafa Walfikr Elhor)
2. Nawa Association for Culture
3. Mayasim “Alqarrara Museum”
4. Al Qattan Children Center
5. Tamer Association
6. Save the Youth Future Association (SYFA)



### ***-Site experts and specialists***

1. Mr. Ayman Hassouna
2. Mr. Fadel Elottol
3. Dr. René Elter

1. *Preliminary Desk Review:* The history of the site is being researched, including the excavations made in recent years. The Tell Umm Amer site, popularly known as “Saint Hilarion Monastery”, is an extremely important site in Gaza, which was an important port and a transit point for both goods and religious visitors to Christian and other sites in the Holy Land. Its position was an important crossroads, especially between Egypt, Palestine and Cyprus. This is the main reason why Hilarion established the very complex and extensive monastery on the site to meet the needs of pilgrimages. Further studies should be done, but it is undoubtedly one of the largest monastic complexes and one of the oldest Christian sites in Palestine.

– *Past excavations and conservation activity:* Within the framework of the preliminary desk review, initial investigations were carried out about the Site name, location, identification, legacy, excavations, and conservation works.

– *Name and Location:* The site of Tell Umm Amer identified with the “Saint Hilarion Monastery” is located on the coast in Nuseirat Village, 8.5 km south of Gaza City. Tell Umm Amer appears in different forms in modern archaeological surveys. A full investigation will be conducted on the etymology of the name in various archaeological surveys (Edward Robinson 1832, Van der Velde 1866, Survey of Western Palestine 1872-1878, British Survey 1944, Israeli Survey 1968, Palestinian Survey 1999, and the most recent Gaza Inventory in 2019). Some scholars locate Tabatha at the site of Khirbet Umm al-Tutt on the southern bank of Wadi Gaza, one kilometer away from Tell Umm Amer.

– *Historical identification:* The site is identified with ancient Tabatha, mentioned in the sixth century Madaba, represented by a single tower. It was also mentioned in other classical sources (Mark Diaconus, Sozomen and Jerome). Further research will be conducted using classical, Arab, and ethno-historic sources.

– *The Legacy of Saint Hilarion:* Founder of Monasticism in Gaza: The Palestinian monk and mystic Saint Hilarion, who was born in Tabatha near Gaza in 291 AD and died in Cyprus in 371AD, studied in Alexandria and was much influenced by the Egyptian monk Anthony. In 306 at age of 15, he returned to Palestine. He founded Palestinian Monasticism after Egyptian traditions, and established the first Palestinian monastery in 329 AD.

- Under religious persecution, during the reign of Emperor Julian (361-363 AD), he migrated to Cyprus where he died in 371 AD. His body was returned by monks to Gaza.

His main biography was written by Father Jerome in his book *Vita Sancti Hilarion* (Life of Saint Hilarion) in 390 AD. Hilarion is venerated as a saint by the Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches. A series of miracles were attributed to him. A cult of veneration spread to Europe, especially Italy and France. In Cyprus a feast day is dedicated to Saint Hilarion on October 21.

The first settlement on the site was established during the Roman era on Wadi Gaza close to the seashore. It appears on the Madaba map with the name of Tabatha, dating from the Byzantine to the early Islamic period (400-670AD). The Site consists of five churches, a burial site, a baptism hall, a public cemetery, an audience hall, and dining rooms. The monastery was provided with good infrastructure facilities including water cisterns, clay ovens, and drainage channels. Its floors were partially paved with limestones, marble tiles, and colored mosaics with plants and animal scenes. A great fifth-century mosaic was probably laid on the floor of a chapel. The floors include a Greek inscription decorated with circular motifs. In addition, the monastery was equipped with baths, consisting of Frigidarium, Tepidarium, and Caldarium halls. The wide space of these halls ensured that the baths could adequately serve the pilgrims and merchants crossing the Holy Land from Egypt to the Fertile Crescent through the main route of Via Maris.



**Fig 1:** Madaba map with the name of Tabatha

Tell Umm Amer (Tabatha) was the birthplace of Saint Hilarion, who received a splendid education in Alexandria and had gone to Antonius in the desert for further instruction. He founded his eponymous monastery in the third century and is considered the founder of monastic life in Palestine. The monastery was destroyed in 614 AD.



Fig 2: Tell Umm Amer (Tabatha) was the birthplace of Saint Hilarion

*Geographic location:*

- *34° Archaeological Excavation:* A series of excavations were carried out in the site. Two seasons of excavations were conducted by Israeli Authorities between 1991 – 1992. Following the transfer of authorities to the Palestinian side in 1994, a series of excavation were carried out in the site by the Palestinian Department of Antiquities and EBAF Between 1997 – 2001 and 2022 – 2006.

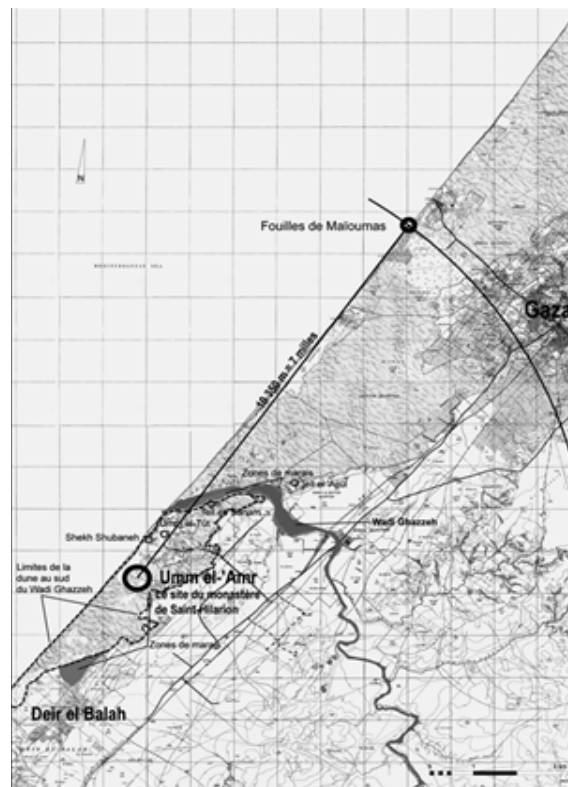


Fig 3: Tell Umm Amer (Tabatha)

- *A Potential World Heritage Site:* The site of Tell Umm Amer was listed in 2005 in the Inventory of Cultural and Natural Heritage Sites of Potential Outstanding Universal Value in Palestine as a Cultural heritage site that met criteria II, III and VI.
- *Justification for Outstanding Universal Value:* The monastery of Saint Hilarion is rare in its architectural elements and exceptional historical, religious, and cultural testimony. The monastery used to be an important station on the crossroads between Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and Mesopotamia.



**Fig 4:** Tell Umm Amer (Tabatha)

The site is tangibly associated with the phenomenon of the flowering of monastic desert centers in Palestine during the Byzantine period. Tell Umm Amer “Saint Hilarion Monastery” was perhaps a center of missionary work in the Gaza region, seemingly isolated in the desert but at the center of affairs at the communications crossroads.



**Fig 5:** Tell Umm Amer (Tabatha)

- *Criteria met*

**Cultural criterion (ii)**

Tell Umm Amer “Saint Hilarion Monastery” exhibits an important interchange of human values over an important period that relates to the emergence of Christianity in Gaza and in Palestine in general. The monastery became a center of cosmopolitan religion as a station on the trade route.

**Cultural criterion (iii)**

The ruins at Tell Umm Amer include one of the oldest monasteries in Palestine, so the Site bears a unique and exceptional testimony to Christianity in Gaza.

**Cultural criterion (vi)**

The site is directly associated with a significant story related to the origin of Christianity in Palestine and with an artistic mosaic of outstanding universal value.

- *Statement of authenticity and/or integrity:* Under Palestinian national cultural heritage legislation and according to the national register, the site is designated as high priority for protection and preservation. The Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage, in cooperation with local and international organizations, are protecting and preserving this important site.
- *Comparison with similar properties:* Monastic desert centers flourished in the Middle East during the Byzantine period, as exemplified by findings in the central Negev, in a site of regional Christian pilgrimages in the sixth century, in the Jordan Valley and el-Bariyah (Jerusalem Wilderness). However, Tell Umm Amer has a significant and unique narrative aspect that makes it difficult to compare with any other example.
- *Conservation Work (Desk review of the available data):* The Saint Hilarion Monastery is one of the oldest and largest monasteries in the Middle East of which substantial remains still survive. The site was first uncovered in early 90s and has been partially damaged by sand’s cut and fill activities. Since that time, many efforts had been made to protect and preserve the site and a series of conservation works were carried out. The conservation plan will include a study of the state of conservation of the site, including:
  1. Infrastructural work
  2. Masonry and mortar
  3. Mosaic pavements
  4. Archaeological objects recovered from the site

**Conservation activities at the Site were conducted by:**

1. The Department of Antiquities in Gaza has undertaken consolidation and emergency measures to protect the site from looting, illegal excavation, and structural deterioration.
2. UNESCO offered a professional to help protect the mosaics on the site and build an urgent shelter.
3. In cooperation with EBAF, systematic excavations and salvage excavations were done periodically between 2002 and 2020. Part of the mission's work was a restoration project between 2018 and 2020.
4. PUI has had a presence in the Gaza Strip since 2009 and has contributed to rehabilitating the Saint Hilarion Monastery. The site was in bad condition and in danger of disappearing due to the political polarization after 2007.
5. World Monuments Fund participated in a conference in Paris aimed at raising awareness of cultural heritage in Palestine. The Monastery of Saint Hilarion in Gaza was the focus of a two-day workshop at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris in March 2012. French and Palestinian authorities and heritage professionals gathered to discuss and present the archaeological and conservation activities developed both in the West Bank and in Gaza Strip to a group of experts and interested people. Despite the complexity of the political situation, the French-Palestinian group implemented projects to protect and preserve architectural and archaeological heritage sites in Gaza. Tell Umm Amer "Saint Hilarion Monastery" was a good example of community engagement in a conflict area.

Since November 2010, after the first phase of a condition assessment of the archaeological remains, emergency structural reinforcements were implemented at the site in the area of the crypt, which is in more danger due to the natural movements of a sand dune and the weight of the walls of the church five meters above. The first action to prepare the structural work was the cleaning, documentation, and detachment of one of the mosaic pavements on the east section of the south nave of the church. This was followed by archaeological excavations, the results of which will provide information on the creation and development of this monastic settlement starting from the early fourth century AD. To protect the work area from strong winter rains and create a more comfortable environment for archaeologists, restorers, and architects a large roof was built supported by a wooden structure

6. The British Council funded a 26-month project to rehabilitate the Tell Umm Amer "Saint Hilarion Monastery" and to protect the site from potential future damage. . The project aims to build protective roofs and walls.

Comprehensive on-site training was also implemented for cultural heritage professionals. Community engagement activities were conducted, such as on-site activities for local artisans and for students of archaeology and architecture from two universities in Gaza. Targeted awareness sessions were offered to local school groups and families to increase awareness of and engagement with the two sites.

7. PUI and ALIPH (2020–21). As a continuation of the preservation, mediation, and training program initiated in 2018 by PUI, a new campaign was carried out between March 2020 and February 2021. Supported by the British Council (DMCS) and the ALIPH Foundation, the conservation work was scientifically monitored by EBAF. Although initially planned to last 12 months, the intervention was reduced because it was interrupted between August and November 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The program included a variety of on-site activities, including restoration work, the anastylosis of ancient masonry, stone cutting, the removal of a mosaic pavement for restoration, archaeological excavation and processing of the data that resulted from it, etc. The team is made up of about thirty people (women and men). As in previous years, recent graduates from Gaza's universities (architecture and archaeology) were included. To reinforce the students' skills, each activity integrated a training component in, for example, the reading of stratigraphy, sorting, identification, and the drawing of ceramic objects.

The preservation and restoration work follows the work already done on the crypt between 2019 and 2020. The activity also involved, at different levels of intervention, the chapel, the North Baptistery, the churches, the hotel and the South installations of the monastery. More sensitive projects were carried out on the Site's mosaic pavements. One of them, from the choir of the primitive church, was removed before restoration. This pavement had partly collapsed in the cenotaph of Saint Hilarion between 2009 and 2010.

A mobile walkway was built to allow the team to remove various fragments without having to come in direct contact with the pavement. The fragments collected, after being numbered and listed, were placed in a 25 m<sup>2</sup> sand-filled box installed in the site's reception building for the occasion. There, the pavement was restored after different pieces of this giant "puzzle" were assembled. Once restored, the pavement was returned to its original position. The visitor experience was improved by the training of two guides and the installation of two interpretation rooms. These activities are disseminated on the net via "Intiqal 2030", created to facilitate exchange on the heritage of Palestine and in the region.



**Fig 6:** Archaeological investigations with the consolidation of the chapel's pavement. In the recess, the first floor of the chapel is visible: a mosaic carpet. (PUI)



**Fig 7:** The team sorting the furniture from the boreholes (PUI)





**Fig 8:** Protective covering over mud and brick structures (PUI)



**Fig 9:** Making mortar joints (PUI)



**Fig 10:** Block cutting and laying (PUI)



**Fig 11:** Reconstruction as consolidation work to the main chapel (PUI)



**Fig 12:** Reconstruction of the hostel wall (PUI)



**Fig 13:** Conservation and preservation activities (PUI)



**Fig 14:** Plaster preservation (PUI)



**Fig 15:** Mosaic protection and restoration (PUI)

8. International researchers have undertaken digital documentation of the Site, including E. Alby, R. Elter, C. Ripoche, N. Quere, and INSA de Strasbourg. To enable cultural appreciation of the Tell Umm Amer site with several identified phases of occupation, extensive archaeological excavation must be undertaken, including emergency excavations. Unfortunately, systematic studies are not always possible before the start of construction projects, including roads and buildings, due to the high population density. Modeling of pavements can create a three-dimensional image for analysis. The Site identifies thirteen floors documented years ago by silver photographs that were later scanned.
9. Since 1995, archaeological campaigns were undertaken at the Site in cooperation between Palestine and France. The École Biblique et Archéologique française (EBAF) excavations unearthed mosaics floors. Conservation and restoration interventions are counted by the workshop of the Musée Départemental Arles Antique (ACRM / MDAA), and EBAF proposed that a study of the pavements be undertaken in cooperation with the Centre Camille Jullian in Aix-en-Provence. Two international experts, Véronique Blanc-Bijon and Patrick Blanc, conducted interventions via the logistics of the Palestino-French archaeological cooperation mission to Gaza. Activities to preserve mosaics include:

- Training Palestinian conservators, which fostered the formation of a team of specialized Palestinian technicians able to make emergency interventions to safeguard ancient mosaics, to intervene in emergency situations, and to intervene during excavations in coordination with archaeologists. Four Palestinian restorers were trained in Arles to restore pavements and present them to the public on-site.
  - Training Palestinian restorers to document the mosaics, identify problems, establish protocols, determine necessary equipment, and propose a program of interventions.
  - Consolidation and cleaning procedures.
  - Pavements lifting and restoration.
3. *Community outreach programme:* These activities ensure that our objectives derive from the expectations and interests of the community, as support from the community is important for the success of the Plan. The sociologist will meet with the local community and reach out to all stakeholders, taking into consideration their opinions on the site. The project aims to protect, preserve, and promote the site in the Gaza Strip, serving the local community in Al Nuseirat and the Gaza middle area. The main direct beneficiaries are school and university students and the public population near the site, while the entire population of the Gaza Strip will benefit indirectly.
4. *Obstacles:* During the first month of the study, CCHP encounter the following difficulties:
1. The agreement was signed on short notice. CCHP required three weeks to gather the team and try to find suitable dates for the First Mission, which were very restricted due to the long period anticipated for issuing the permit.
  2. The exclusion of Dr. Vincent Micheal from the team after a long process to verify his availability this summer consumed significant time and caused inconvenience for team members.
  3. The negotiation process with the de facto authority after the cancellation of the project information day planned on the 23rd of May consumed lot of time and effort. CCHP has been left to handle this issue with no support from any side.
  4. The need to submit the Inception Report on the due date prevented CCHP from doing the necessary language editing.
  5. The war on Gaza has limited the team's ability to work and communicate due to electrical and internet disturbances, displacement, and bombardments.

# *ANNEX 9 Interim Report*

August 2023

## *1. Introduction*

On April 26, 2023, the contract was signed between the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and the Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation for the Preparation of the Conservation and Management Plan for the Site of Tell Umm Amer “Saint Hilarion Monastery” in Gaza. This report covers the activities implemented by the Centre from April 26 until the July 31, 2023.

## *2. The CMP Team and communication strategy*

- The formation of the team to undertake the CMP took longer than expected due to the late withdrawal of Dr. Michael Vincent from the team. The process of replacing him with Dr. Jean-Sylvian Caillou has been approved by MoTA. However, He was not able to participate in the First Mission due to the short notice.
- Once the project started, regular Zoom meetings were held. These meetings discussed the work on the CMP and aimed to reach consensus on the Site description, analysis, and the best approach for its conservation and management.
- The collaboration with PUI and EBAF have been satisfactory all along and have been crucial to ensure a good working relationship and to resolve some of the logistical problems.

## *3. Progress of the work*

- Before the First Mission could take place, part of the delay with the startup of the preparation of the Plan was that there were some concerns with local stakeholders in Gaza who were not fully aware of the CMP. These issues were resolved through the local Coordinator, Dr. Mahmoud Balawi, who explained what was being done. However, the issue of who will be involved in the actual project remains a matter of concern though the CMP. It is hoped that this matter will be clearer once the introductory workshop is held during the Second Mission.
- While the Inception Report was being prepared, concurrent research was conducted to assist in the initial development of certain chapters. This aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) and other attributes of the site, with a primary focus on the historical research and the significance of the Site within the broader context of Gaza and Palestine. The research further highlighted the site’s importance as an ancient Christian site. These findings were particularly evident in subsequent studies.

- Most of the geo data has already been collected as per the contract. These include:
  - Filming the Site with drones to establish geographic location. In addition to the collection of detailed plans and a Master Plan from NM, there are spatial maps from authorities related to all services, including satellite imagery from 2022.
  - Processing of 10 maps showing the boundaries of the Site and relation to the sea, 2018 Master Plan of surrounding region, overall map and heritage site location, land ownership map, traffic and street map, visual visibility map showing development around site, building height map of surrounding site, and three different scenarios for future protection of site.
  - The local coordinator held meetings with MoTA Gaza to explain the objectives and activities related to the CMP, ensuring cooperation at a high level. He was also responsible for organizing the missions, including coordination with Ministries, the Municipalities and other stakeholders. The three local experts visited the Site to learn more about the importance of the Site.
  - The Local social expert dealing with outreach has prepared and tested the Questionnaire about local community awareness and perception of the Site and its role for future development. The targeted sample is one hundred individuals distributed among youths, adults, elderly people, male and female, students, professionals, decision-makers, etc. Forty-five Questionnaire forms were filled out in Nuseirat, and fifty-five forms shall be filled out by people in Gaza living outside Nuseirat. This work will be analyzed quantitatively.
  - The International Architect analyzed the Site's core and buffer zones. Different scenarios have been developed to protect the Site for the future. Discussions are still ongoing with local stakeholders with regards to the buffer zone. Studies have been undertaken, together with the local archaeologist, to identify other archaeological sites in Gaza, especially those that have a connection with the Site under study. Studies have been made of the urban context of the Site and the impact of development pressures. An initial study has been done of the Site's outstanding universal values, authenticity and integrity. Studies have been done on the conservation of the physical structures, which will be updated after the Second Mission. The proposed future interventions on the sites have been discussed with the two organizations responsible for the site, PUI and EBAF. The first studies about anticipated future visitor flow and their impact have been completed.

- International Conventions that impact the Site have been studied and analyses in connection with the Site.
- A draft SWOT analysis has been prepared and shall be shared among local stakeholders and discussed during the Second Mission.



**Fig 16:** Visiting the Site of Tell Umm Amer “Saint Hilarion Monastery”

4. *Work Plan:* In accordance with the contract between CCHP and MoTA for the preparation of the CMP, CCHP prepared a comprehensive work plan to ensure the delivery of the deliverables on time. In accordance with the initial work plan, the following activities were set to be implemented by the end of July:

*In April:*

Kick-off meeting:✓

- A Kick-off meeting was held in Ramallah with the presence of the AFD, PUI, MoTA, CCHP and UNESCO to discuss the objectives and requirements of the project, assign the team members, and divide the tasks between them.

*In May:*

CMP Structure:✓

- The team defined the CMP’s structure and set a mechanism to collect all available data to conduct this CMP.



Preparation for the first workshop:

- The team set a date for the “Introductory workshop” to introduce the project to the community and stakeholders. It was planned to happen during the First Mission, but due to obstacles at the Site, CCHP’s team decided to postpone the workshop for the Second Mission.

Advisory committee and technical committee formation:

- The advisory committee was canceled for the CMP, since MOTTA formed a Steering Committee for the overall project of Tell Umm Amer Site funded by AFD.

Internal review for all the available documents: ✓

- CCHP team obtained and reviewed the data shared by PUI and EBAF.

Discussion of desk review progress: ✓

Conceptual framework: ✓

Proposed questionnaire: ✓

*In June:*

Introductory workshop: Delay

- The first workshop was scheduled to be held in June in the First Mission, but it was delayed for technical reasons. It will be conducted in the Second Mission.

Advisory committee meeting: Canceled.

Inception report:

- The inception report was submitted to the client, AFD and MoTA on the 15<sup>th</sup> of June.

First visit to Gaza: ✓

- The first visit to the Site was conducted from 18–22 June and included several Site visits to Saint Hilarion Monastery and many meetings with the municipality, the local authorities, and non-governmental organizations.
- Meetings with Universities were postponed for the Second Mission due to summer vacation.
- The First Mission’s report was submitted to the technical committee, including the mission’s program, all minutes of meetings held with the stakeholders, first visit findings, and recommendation for the Second Mission.



**Fig 17:** Meeting with the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities

- The First Mission allowed Team members to get to know each other more and resolve some issues raised through the course of implementation of the plan. More than that, it was important to understand the reaction of local stakeholders and to explain what was being done. In fact, the Mission had to be adjusted to include more meetings with the two primary Ministries involved [Tourism and Antiquities, and Lands] together with the Municipality. These were necessary because a main issue arose which was not expected or known beforehand and which has become the main obstacle to the CMP, namely the issue of what development is allowed around the Site and the difficulty of establishing a buffer zone.
- The First Mission also dedicated considerable time to establishing the outreach programme for the local community. Though this turned out to be more complicated than originally anticipated, great progress has been made and will be concluded by the Second Mission, when two seminars will be held with local stakeholders and surveys will be conducted with the local community, including the people who have property in the area. A questionnaire has been prepared for this work.
- The Team met with local contractors and solar panel specialists to identify difficulties that may be encountered once the main project is undertaken. A full report on this is part of the First Mission report.

#### Second workshop and community mapping activities:

- The second workshop and the community mapping activities were postponed, as the local community needs more time to be prepared for this workshop.

*In July:*

Sharing recommendation in terms of community awareness: being prepared.

Heritage significance, community awareness and local community recommendations: being prepared.

Advisory committee meeting: canceled.

Interim Report: ✓

Data analysis: ✓

Maps, boundaries, and buffer zone: ✓

Legal and Institutional framework: being prepared.

Economic Situation: ✓

5. *Justification for extension:* CCHP would like to suggest an extension in submitting the CMP.

There are several reasons:

1. The Israeli escalation in Gaza on May 9, 2023, negatively impacted work progress as its negative effects on society remained for weeks afterwards.
2. The delay in the First Mission to the site, which was due to the delay in obtaining permits.
3. The delay in the first installment, which affected project activities
4. Delay of the Second Mission to the end of August. Dr. René Elter had to be out of Gaza for couple of weeks, and his presence is important in this mission.
5. There were also delays due to concerns raised by the Local Authority before the First Mission and the need to sign a Memorandum of Understanding, which has affected the launch of project activities.

## Work Plan

### The preparation of Conservation and Management Plan for Tell Umm Amer “Saint Hilarion Monastery”- GAZA

Activity	Deliverable	April 2023		May 2023				June 2023				
		25	27	2	11	18	25	1	15	22	29	
Contract signing												
Kick-off meeting Discuss objectives and requirements of the project (discussing the First Mission to Gaza, collecting available data). Revising tasks/ who does what/ preparing contracts with the staff												
CMP's structure, the mechanism for collecting the available data, and planning for the first visit. Preparation and work plan												
Preparing for the first workshop (introductory workshop) and conducting the 1st workshop												
Advisory committee and technical committee formation												
Initial review and revising relevant available documents. Field visit by local team and team leader (Dr. Bondin recently made one week visit to the Site and wrote a technical evaluation report on it)												
Discussing desk review progress, conceptual framework, survey, sampling, and key indicators												
Conceptual framework												
Proposed questionnaire, survey, and interviews + mechanism for conduction the surveys												
Introductory workshop												
Advisory committee meeting												
	Inception report and Implementation Plan											

Activity	Deliverable	June 2023				July 2023			
		1	18	22	29	6	13	20	30
First visit to Gaza			■	■					
Site visits and status analysis				■					
Meetings with the Municipality and Local authorities				■					
Meeting with non-governmental organizations				■					
Meeting with MoTA, MoLG, Energy company, PUI, EBAF, UNDP, UNESCO				■					
Community mapping activities						■	■	■	
Sharing recommendations in terms of community awareness							■	■	
Heritage significance, community awareness, and local community/stakeholder recommendations.				■	■	■			
Technical committee to be formed							■	■	
Data analysis and assessment of current status				■	■	■	■	■	
Maps, boundaries, and buffer zones					■	■	■	■	
Chapter 1, 2, and 3							■	■	
Economic and social situation					■	■			
Political context of the site and Gaza territory. Description of the core and buffer zones. History of past excavations. Territorial framework and reference to other Gaza archeological sites					■	■	■		
Contextual State Statement of Significance							■	■	
Condition Assessment							■	■	
Planning strategies and proposed planning vision of the Site area, boundaries, and buffer zone						■	■	■	
Interim Report	Interim Report								■

Activity	Deliverable	August 2023					September 2023			
		3	10	17	27	31	7	14	21	28
Legal and Institutional Frameworks		■	■							
Structural Organizations			■	■						
Stakeholders' analysis and brainstorming on management strategies on eight themes		■	■	■	■					
Second visit to Gaza.					■	■				
Meeting with the Municipality and MoTA - Site boundaries and buffer zone scenarios - Adjustment of the structural plan					■	■				
Future excavations and development activities, Discussion panel with EBAF					■	■				
Workshop, SWOT workshop, site analysis, evaluation of status, meetings with local community and stakeholders					■	■				
Workshop with the local community: Community outreach					■	■				
Workshop on cultural-archaeological impact assessment					■	■				
Discussion Panel with PUI and UNESCO - Governance Model - Capacity building, Development activities, prospectus action plan					■	■				
Report on the Second Mission							■			
Zoom workshops: Development vision				■	■	■				
Planning strategies, Risk Preparedness, Interpretation, Sustainable Tourism, Visitor Experience, and capacity building					■	■	■			
Action Plan, immediate, medium-, and long-term						■	■	■		

Activity	Deliverable	September 2023		October 2023					November 2023				
		21	28	3	10	17	24	29	2	10	15	20	24
Management system, monitoring, and maintenance		■											
Follow-up SWOT analysis and recommendations			■										
Two days: Sub-groups and professional meetings with targeted groups				■									
Draft CMP					■								
Comments from the technical committee					■	■							
Final Draft						■	■						
Advisory committee meeting and comments on the draft: presentation by the team					■	■	■						
Third visit to Gaza								■	■				
Presentation of the CMP to the stakeholders								■	■				
Report on the Third Mission		■								■	■		
Final draft to be submitted	Final submission												■ ■

## 6. Steps for the next period

### *Second Mission*

- The conservation part of the CMP still has to be completed and depends very much on the Second Mission, which will take place at the end of August, and which aims to include a visit by the two archaeologists. They shall report on the interventions that have been done up to now, the state of conservation of the site, and proposals for future actions, including the addition of archaeological covers. It is hoped that the two archaeologists will visit other archeological sites in Gaza to explore possible connections with the Saint Hilarion Site in Gaza.
- The primary aims of the Second Mission are to conduct workshops with local stakeholders and the local community. The results of social surveys done by Ms. Amal Abu Eisheh about the local community's perception of the Site shall be presented. By the time of the Second Mission, we will conclude all data collection, and this will be part of the Mission report.

### *Third Mission*

- The Third Mission, the dates of which have yet to be established, will conclude all the discussions and in particular resolve the issue of the core and buffer zone for final reporting in the CMP.

### *Community outreach activities*

- The team shall work on conducting three focus group meetings with local communities and conduct five interviews with stakeholders to collect more information about the perception of the local community towards the Site of Tell Umm Amer.

### *Drafting the CMP*

- The work on drafting the Conservation and Management Plan shall continue. The focus in August and September shall be on completing the chapters related to Setting the Plan Objectives, defining the stakeholders and their responsibilities, and Setting the Action Plan for the conservation and management of the Site.



# *ANNEX 10 First Mission Report*

18–22 June 2023

1. *Introduction:* On the 26<sup>th</sup> of April, 2023, the contract was signed between the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and the Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation for the Preparation of Conservation and Management Plan for the Site of Tell Umm Amer “Saint Hilarion Monastery” in Gaza. Two to three missions to the Site are required in order to proceed with the plan. The team includes local and international experts who have wide knowledge and experience in creating Conservation and Management Plans for several historical sites.

## **The team consists of:**

Arch. Issam Juha	CCHP
Dr. Raymond Bondin	CCHP
Dr. Hamdan Taha	CCHP
Dr. Jean-Sylvian Caillou	CCHP
Dr. Akram Ilja	CCHP
Dr. Mahmoud Balawi	CCHP
Ms. Amal Abu Eishah	CCHP
Dr. Wesam Alashqar	CCHP

## **The team member who participated in the First Mission were:**

Arch. Issam Juha  
Dr. Raymond Bondin  
Dr. Akram Ilja  
Dr. Mahmoud Balawi  
Ms. Amal Abu Eishah  
Dr. Wesam Alashqar

Unfortunately, Dr. Hamdan Taha and Dr. Jean-Sylvian Caillou couldn't participate in the mission. Dr. Hamdan Taha couldn't obtain a permit to enter Gaza, and Dr. Jean-Sylvian Caillou was given too short notice for him to be able to participate. For the Second Mission, CCHP must obtain permits for team members who wish to participate. Local members must submit at least 40 days in advance of the mission and international members must submit 20 days before the mission.



**Fig 18:** Tell Umm Amer “Saint Hilarion Monastery” Site



**Fig 19:** Tell Umm Amer “Saint Hilarion Monastery” Site

2. *Mission Objectives:* The main objectives of the First Mission were as follows:
1. Discover the Site, its value, and its attributes. It was important for the team to obtain a direct understanding of the Site, its surroundings, and its context.
  2. Meet with stakeholders to inform them about the CMP and understand their knowledge and perceptions of the site.
  3. Collect data concerning executed activities, current activities, and intended future ones.
  4. Conduct in-person meetings with the CMP team and set a mechanism for conducting further activities.

The team set a mechanism for this mission, and the following was achieved:

1. Revisiting the Site to see what progress had been made in terms of conservation and interventions since their last individual visits.
2. Constant dialogue with PUI and EBAF officials, both officially in their offices and with Arch. Issam and Dr. Raymond during evening meetings at the PUI Hostel where they were staying. This collaboration with PUI is extremely important to build up the CMP.
3. The team had important long meetings with NM and two main ministries involved: the De Facto MoLG and the De Facto MoTA in Gaza.
4. The team members separated to hold simultaneous meetings with various stakeholders. Dr. Raymond Bondin, the team leader, and Arch. Issam Juha, the project coordinator, visited another site where PUI and EBAF are working. They also met a UNESCO–Ramallah delegation that was visiting Saint Hilarion and Wadi Gaza. The rest of the team, such as Arch. Mahmoud Balawi and Dr. Akram Iilja, held meetings with contractors and experts on solar panels.
5. Some of the discussions with the ministries are still not concluded, but the mission achieved the goals determined for it. The on-site visit was very useful to establish personal contact with all the stakeholders in Gaza and to plan ahead for future missions, which are crucial to the success of the CMP. The discussion, especially with regard to the control of development in the surrounding area, will be continued during the Second and Third Missions, when the emphasis will be on social outreach and a more detailed report by the two archaeologists on the conservation of the site and planned future activity.



**Fig 20:** Meeting with Dr. René Elter in the Site

1. *Mission Program*

A) Original Program:

***Sunday, 18 June 2023***

Activity	Time	Place
Arrival at Erez checkpoint	11:00	
Arrival at hotel	12:00	PUI Hostel
Meeting with the local Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities	13:30	MoTA HQ
Lunch (Main stakeholders and the Team)	14:30-15:30	Abu Hasira Restaurant
Site visit (Introduction of the site by Ahmed Bursh, Gehad Hassan and Ayman Hassouna)	16:00-19:00	The Site
Hotel	19:30	PUI Hostel

***Monday, 19 June 2023***

Activity	Time	Place
Breakfast	7:30-8:30	PUI Hostel
Introductory workshop	9:00- 11:00	Hotel Venue
Meeting: Ministry of Local Government: Dr. Hatem Al Taeif <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current planning and building regulations in the Site's zone</li> <li>• Prospectus planning and regulations</li> </ul>	12:00-13:00	MoLG HQ
Meeting: Municipality of Nuseirat <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cooperation on how to protect the site</li> <li>• What role can the municipality play to protect the site?</li> <li>• What management role can the municipality play?</li> <li>• Infrastructure, services, amenities</li> <li>• Solar energy</li> <li>• Re-planning the zone</li> </ul>	12:00-13:30	Municipality HQ
Take-away on-site lunch	14:00	The Site
Site Analysis and data collection	15:00-17:30	The Site
Hostel	18:00	PUI Hostel

**Tuesday, 20 June 2023**

Activity	Time	Place
Meeting: Land Authority: Question on Buffer zone: problems and practical and applicable solutions	8:30-10:00	Land Authority HQ
Meeting: Engineering Consultants and Contractors (Brainstorming about the available capacity to implement a protective structure)	10:30-11:30	Contractors Union
Old Town Gaza	11:30-12:30	Two cases in Gaza Old Town
Meeting: Iwan center	13:00-14:00	Ghusain House "During the tour"
Meeting: Team meeting at the hotel: an appraisal of achieved tasks	14:30-17:00	PUI Hostel

**Wednesday, 21 June 2023**

Activity	Time	Place
Focus groups: students and Professors, IUG Dept. of Architecture and Dept. of Archaeology	8:30-10:30	IUG
Meeting: UNDP–Gaza	11:00-12:00	UNDP
Focus groups: University of Palestine students of Architecture	12:30-14:00	UP
Brainstorming on Site's development, further excavations, capacity building, site management model, protective covering. René Elter, Gehad Hassan, Ayman Hassouna, Ahmed Borsh	14:30-16:30	The Site
Dinner with the stakeholder	18:00	TBD

**Thursday, 22 June 2023**

Activity	Time	Place
Meeting: The Team at the Hostel - Next steps - Deliverables due - Visit report: Team leader	8:00- 9:30	PUI Hostel
Leaving to Erez checkpoint	9:30	



**Fig 21:** Meeting with Nuseirat Municipality

#### B) Justification for amending the program

During the team's visit to the NM, we received a warm welcome from the mayor and the municipal council. We asked for a technical meeting with the Department of Planning and Building Permits to look at the structural and zoning plan of the region where the archaeological site is located. In a meeting with the planning department, CCHP team discovered that crucial changes had been made to the Master Plan, especially in the zone surrounding the archaeological site. On October 31, 2018, a new structural plan was approved by the Central Committee of Planning and Building Regulations.

Two streets cut the archaeological Site, and land use surrounding the Site has been changed. The surrounding zone had been transformed from tourism to residential "B," which means eight-story buildings can be built on the surrounding parcels of land.

Thus, the team partially changed its agenda and schedule. We conducted intensive meetings on the decision-making level with the De Facto Ministry of Local Governance, the Central Committee of Planning and Building Regulations, NM, and the De Facto MoTA. The team highlighted the seriousness of the risk of the endorsed structural plan and asked them to take immediate action to change the plan, aiming to protect the archaeological Site.

Thus, the team partially changed its agenda and schedule. We conducted intensive meetings on the decision-making level with the De Facto Ministry of Local Governance, the Central Committee of Planning and Building Regulations, NM, and the De Facto MoTA. The team highlighted the seriousness of the risk of the endorsed structural plan and asked them to take immediate action to change the plan, aiming to protect the archaeological Site.

The meetings were complicated and bureaucratic, and there was a conflict of interest between the municipality and other stakeholders. However, the CCHP team achieved the following:

1. Instilling a belief among the parties about the negative impact of the endorsed structural plan on the archaeological site and the necessity of modifying it.
2. An agreement among the parties to initiate a task group aimed at modifying the plan in order to avoid severe damage to the Site.
3. PUI and the CCHP team offered technical support and optimum scenarios to achieve rational and practical adjustments that offer logical protection to the site.

The original program was further amended, adding a brief meeting with a delegation from UNESCO–Ramallah. The delegation visited Saint Hilarion and Wadi Gaza with Arch. Issam Juha, Dr. Raymond Bondin, where they discussed project progress. There was another unplanned meeting with around 34 local professionals at the Roman cemetery site who are working at Saint Hilarion but were working temporarily on this recently found site. A meeting was also held with UNDP to discuss the Wadi Gaza project and its relevance to the Saint Hilarion site. Both are on the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List.

C) Amended Program

*Sunday, 18 June 2023*

Activity	Time	Place
Arrival at Erez checkpoint, Dr. Raymond and Arch. Issam	11:00	
Arrival at Rafah checkpoint for Akram	12:00	
Arrival to Place of accommodation	12:00-13:30	PUI GH
Lunch and team meeting	14:00-15:00	Palmera Restaurant
Visit the Site Meeting and dissection with PUI local team	16:30-18:30	The Site
Hotel	19:30	PUI GH

*Sunday, 18 June 2023*

Activity	Time	Place
Minutes of Meeting #1: Ministry of Local Government	09:00-11:00	MoLG HQ
Minutes of Meeting #2: Municipality of Nuseirat	12:00-13:30	Municipality HQ
Lunch and team meeting	14:00-16:00	Abu-Haseera Restaurant
Minutes of Meeting #3: Site Analysis and data collection with Dr. René and Gehad	16:00-18:00	The site
Hotel	18:00	PUI GH

*Tuesday, 20 June 2023*

Activity	Time	Place
Minutes of Meeting #4: UNDP-Gaza	09:00-10:00	UNDP HQ
Visit to the Byzantine Mukhitim Church in Jabalia	10:30- 11:30	Site of Church
Minutes of Meeting #5: Meeting the local Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities	11:30-12:30	MoTA HQ
Minutes of Meeting #6: Meeting with the general director of Electricity Company, Dr. Akram, Dr. Mahmoud and Ms. Amal	13:00-14:00	Electricity Company HQ
In parallel: meeting with UNESCO at the site, Raymond and Issam		The Site
Lunch and team meeting	13:00-17:00	Palmera Restaurant



**Wednesday, 21 June 2023**

Activity	Time	Place
By Dr. Akram: Minutes of Meeting #7: Engineering Consultants (Brainstorming about the available capacity to implement a protective structure)	09:00-10:30	Al-Madina Consultation office HQ
In Parallel, by Raymond and Issam: Visiting the Roman Cemetery archaeological site, which was discovered recently	09:00-10:30	Site of Cemetery
Minutes of Meeting #8: Feedback Meeting with Ministry of Local Government	10:30-12:00	MoLG HQ
Minutes of Meeting #9: Contractors Union (Brainstorming about the available capacity to implement a protective structure)	12:00-13:00	Contractors Union HQ
Lunch and team meeting	13:20-16:20	Abu Hasira Restaurant
Minutes of Meeting #10: Brainstorming on Site's development, further excavations, capacity building, Site management model, protective covering Dr. René, Jehad, Anthony (PUI director)	16:30-18:30	PUI GH
Hotel		

**Thursday, 22 June 2023**

Activity	Time	Place
Leaving to Erez checkpoint	9:30	



**Fig 22:** Meeting with the De Facto Deputy Minister of Local Government

#### *4. Mission's Findings*

1. The Site is well preserved, but future maintenance is fundamental to preserving the Site.
2. The Site has many new structures made of wood and steel such as canopies, walkways, and interpretation panels that have already deteriorated and need maintenance or replacement.
3. The Site borders are not clearly set, and there may be a need to enlarge the area of the Site based on future excavation and analysis of required development.
4. Proposed physical interventions at the Site include the construction of a new shelter. An assessment shall be made to define the needs, area, and impact of the shelter.
5. The PUI's interest in installing solar panels to generate income for the Site and ensure its sustainability and maintenance shall be further studied. The study may tackle the feasibility of installing these panels while maintaining the OUV of the Site, the business model, the management model, and the facilities needed to accommodate the system. This is the main issue that needs to be discussed further, based on possible technical options.
6. There is a lack of awareness of the stakeholders on the value of the Site, resulting in an absence of interest to support the protection of the Site.
7. The municipality has endorsed a detailed Master Plan by the Central Committee for the block in which the archaeological Site is located. The Plan did not consider protection of the Site, the view toward the surroundings, and the need for a buffer zone. This may be an obstacle to the future inscription of the Site on the WHL if Palestine decides to go ahead with the nomination. The Area land use has been changed from Agricultural use to Residential use (Class B, 6 floors, 60% building ratio).
8. The Municipality of Nuseirat has expressed its goal of including the rehabilitation of surrounding streets in the project so that the local community more directly perceives the benefit of the project.
9. The De Facto MoTA supports efforts to preserve the Site. However, they did not take the necessary measures to protect the Site, and they approved a Master Plan as a member of the Central Committee that includes planned roads that will pass through the archaeological Site.
10. The preservation of the archaeological Site provides work opportunities for the local community and possibly future opportunities for economic prosperity and jobs for local professionals.
11. The site is a potential World Heritage Site, and any new intervention must consider supporting the Site's inscription.
12. More efforts shall be devoted to reaching a consensus among the stakeholders, MoTA, MoLG, and NM to adopt the necessary measures and policies to protect the Site.

13. The Site is managed by MoTA in cooperation with PUI, but no clear roles are set, and there is a need to set future Site management policies. This is fundamental to ensuring the sustainability of its preservation.
14. The Site is considered expensive for the local community and accessibility is limited.
15. An existing building is used to serve Site visitors. The proposal to construct an information centre should be studied in terms of benefits, use of spaces, and impact on the Site.
16. The capacity building program is set within a project funded by AFD and implemented by PUI. The team shall assess the benefit of this program and the need for other capacity building programs.
17. A well-designed interpretation centre is necessary for the modern visitor to understand the complexity and use of all elements of the site. This must be a minimal building that does not detract from the importance of the archaeological area.
18. Some surrounding areas still need to be excavated if the local authorities manage to control development around the site.
19. The team has defined the OUV of the site as follows:
  - The site in question was created in the 4<sup>th</sup> century and used up to the 8<sup>th</sup> century. It was enlarged considerably during this period, especially after the original hermit, Hilarion, abandoned the site as he wanted to live the life of a monastic hermit away from the crowds.
  - The very complex monastery was abandoned around the mid-8<sup>th</sup> century for various reasons. Its position was known, but excavations only started in the early 1990s. This is without doubt one of the best preserved and largest Christian monastery sites from the 4<sup>th</sup> century. It is a testimony to the importance of Gaza as a port city and also as a transit point for Christian pilgrims from Egypt and beyond towards the Terra Santa.
  - Its outstanding universal value lies not only on the fact that it is one of the oldest Christian testimonies in the area but also because of its size and complexity. There are enough existing elements to understand the monastic life including architectural elements such as roads, baths, water systems, heating systems, and residences. As a Christian site, it has a complex presence of five superimposed Churches, a crypt, and other elements that are outstanding in their own way.
  - The site also has beautiful mosaics still in a good state of preservation. Excavation has revealed a large number of artifacts, mainly amphorae, that are still being researched and documented.
  - Its outstanding universal value is found not only in what we can witness today but its importance to the history of mankind and our understanding of the history of the region.

- The general state of conservation is good, but it is, of course, subject to the elements unless protected. Part of the site already has an archaeological cover, but there is great urgency to extend this over a much larger area. The rebuilding that was done to consolidate some of the structures is acceptable and necessary to preserve the structure and to understand the complexity of the five churches. The intervention is clearly readable from the original.



**Fig 23:** Meeting with De Facto MoLG in the presence of Dr. Jamal Abu Rydeh



**Fig 24:** Visiting the Site of Tell Umm Amer “Saint Hilarion Monastery”

##### *5. Recommendation for the Second Mission*

CCHP conducted its First Mission to the Site of Tell Umm Amer “Saint Hilarion Monastery” in June. The Centre was better able to understand the Site, its value, its context, its condition, and the challenges facing its preservation. The Centre was able to meet with the stakeholders of the Site in Gaza, including the De Facto MoTA, De Facto MoLG, and NM. CCHP recommends the following for the Second Mission:

- 1) The mission shall include workshops with the goal of sharing its vision for the protection of the Site.
- 2) The stakeholders shall be more aware of activities taking place at the Site.
- 3) CCHP shall have draft scenarios for the Site’s buffer zone.
- 4) CCHP, with the support of the PUI, shall define a clear border for the archeological Site.
- 5) Initial Assessment for the proposed intervention shall be discussed with the PUI.

A presentation about the world heritage convention and the benefits of inscribing the Site on the WHL shall be set. A presentation about the CMP and its role and benefits shall be shared with the stakeholders to lobby for the Plan.

# *ANNEX 11 Second Mission Report*

30 September 2023

1. *Introduction:* On 28 August 2023, as per the contract, a Second Mission visited the Gaza site. Some members of the First Mission planned to attend, including Project Manager Arch. Issam Juha and Team Leader Dr. Raymond Bondin. Unfortunately, Arch. Juha was denied entry by Israeli forces even though he had a permit to enter. Four members that had not joined First Mission were also supposed to attend, namely international and local archaeologists Dr. Jean-Sylvian Caillou and Dr. Hamdan Taha, and two members from the CCHP office, Arch. Luma Qumsieh and Mrs. Faten Fararjeh. But all were denied entry, even though they had also obtained permits, other than Dr. Jean-Sylvian Caillou. From the Gaza Strip, Dr. Mahmoud Balawi and Ms. Amal Abu Eisheh were able to attend.
2. *Mission Objectives:* The main objectives of the Second Mission were to continue the discussions held in the First Mission with PUI and its archaeologists, to introduce the two new archaeologists, and to conduct workshops and introductory seminars with local stakeholders.
3. *Mission Program:* On the way to Gaza, we were stopped at a highway checkpoint. After waiting for hours, we were told that the four Palestinians did not have a permit to enter Gaza and had to return to Bethlehem. Thus, after much delay, only Dr. Raymond Bondin and Dr. Jean-Sylvian Caillou could proceed to Gaza, and they arrived much later than schedules. Because of this unexpected situation, we could not proceed with the original programme. The outreach seminars had to be canceled. The new adjusted programme had three primary objectives:
  - Familiarization visit for the international architect to the Site, other sites in Gaza and the magazines
  - Long discussions with PUI
  - A meeting of the main ministries and municipalities

The first part of the programme for 27th August was therefore abandoned, and we proceeded on a long visit to Tell Umm Amer “Saint Hilarion monastery”. There PUI archaeologist Dr. René Elter explained at length to Dr. Jean-Sylvian Caillou about the progress that had been made up to that point. Afterwards we had a long discussion about future excavations, the proposed archaeological cover (which is planned to cover the whole site), proposed solar panels, the new visitor centre, and other related matters.

On 28th August, we had three official meetings with the local authorities. Dr. Raymond, Dr. Mahmoud, Ms. Amal and Dr. Wesam attended the three meetings. Dr. Jean-Sylvian Caillou attended the first one then was shown other archaeological sites in Gaza. My emphasis was on the preservation of the site and making sure the CMP would allow for the continuation of the project [at the moment at a complete standstill]. I avoided discussing the buffer zone as we had agreed this would be the main issue of the Third Mission.

Dr. René Elter took the international archaeologist to Jabaliyah to visit the ongoing salvage excavations of the Roman cemetery of the ancient city of Anthedon, which is also a training for young Palestinian archaeologists and students. The visit continued to the Byzantine monastery of the Mukhaytim site in Jabaliyah and its magnificent mosaics recently restored and sheltered. This is a good point of comparison for what can be done at Tell Umm Amer.

The meeting with the Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities was very cordial. The Minister was very supportive of our work and hoped to see the major project start soon. However, he would not commit to reducing the width of the proposed road or altering the regulation of development around the site. On the contrary, he was in favor of an uplifted street above the archaeological remains. He made it clear that this was not part of his remit.

The meeting with the MoLG was much more difficult. They reconfirmed the new street at 25 meters, overriding part of the Site, and the street at the other side at 8 meters, overriding more of the Site. They wish to allow development of seven-story buildings in the parcels all around the Site including those touching the Site. Dr. Raymond's request to have at least a stepping up approach, starting from two levels, was rejected outright. The only way for the roads not to be built is if the private owners are financially compensated (not from them). These policies are from an agreement signed in March 2018 by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, the Ministry of Transport, the Ministry of Local Government and the Municipality of Nuseirat. Attached to this agreement is a MoTA plan that shows in yellow the archaeological sites that will be part of the two streets and a later plan in which these yellow parts are not



**Fig 25** visit to Al Basha Palace to meet MoTa management staff



**Fig 26** visit to Al Basha Palace

shown. It is the definitive plan for the area.

The meeting with the Municipality of Nuseirat reconfirmed what we had already heard. The argument, said much more forcibly, is that the people who bought property in these last years did so knowing the plan for the road in front of their property (which is also their property), and maybe, but only maybe, they will accept financial compensation. No other alternatives were proposed. Dr. Raymond's request to at least reduce the major road to 8 or 10 meters on the other side was rejected. The officers would not discuss other possible scenarios. Ms. Amal conducted interviews in all the three meetings.

Further meetings were held at the magazines and a long meeting at the Tell Umm Amer site.

Dr. Raymond, Dr. Jean, and Dr. Mahmoud visited the storage area, where we saw great organizational improvements. Dr. Jean had a discussion about the inventory system. Dr. René Elter showed us the part of the storage room dedicated to the finds from Tell Umm Amer and the parts devoted to other excavations carried out by the EBAF. It gave an overall idea of the volume needed for presentation and storage spaces in a future visitor center or Site museum. All finds are in a good state of conservation and well recorded, according to European standards.

Another Site meeting in Tell Umm Amer was held to discuss various issues. Dr. Raymond insisted on being given information on the two parts that will be covered by streets. He was only told that the part under the wide street was the hostel area and that all their information has been sent to the CCHP. Dr. Raymond emphasized that we could not insist on this matter if we did not have more detailed information in hand, but he did not get anything. On the question of the proposed solar panels, Dr. Raymond restated that in principle he was against it, but he suggested a solution in which they were flat during opening hours (10:00 to 16:00) and vertical at other hours. Dr. Jean agreed to this proposal. The solution to utilize the secondary site was not feasible as the area was small.

Aware of the problems that would be caused by building a huge street on the remains of the hostel, Dr. Jean visited that part of the site until the arrival of Dr. René Elter. He led Dr. Mahmoud and me out of the Site itself to see where he had recently carried out a salvage excavation, about 100m north of the monastery. He then showed us Site 2 of Tell Umm Amer, which is outside the protected area. Dr. René Elter highlighted the fact that the ancient occupation potentially left archaeological remains everywhere throughout the area and that it was very difficult to study and preserve them all due to the specific situation of Gaza. Back at Tell Umm Amer, we discussed at length the threats caused by the street project, the need for future excavations and publications, the sustainability of the site, and the importance of solar panels in this goal.

On the last day we visited sites in Old Gaza, all very interesting and with some good restoration works. We also visited a private museum.

We held a last meeting with PUI, mainly with Mr. Gehad and Dr. René. All the issues that had been raised were discussed in detail as Dr. Raymond explained the situation. Dr. Raymond made it very clear that UNESCO should have been advised of the 2018 plans as per the Operational Guidelines, which apply even for sites on the Tentative List. He said there is no way multiple seven-level developments around the site would be accepted in a UNESCO nomination.

The usual PUI logistical support was very helpful whilst Dr. Mahmoud and Ms. Amal organized all the local coordination.



**Fig 27** Meeting with Nuseirat municipality planning department

The Second Mission proved crucial on two fronts. First, it revealed the details of the 2018 Agreement between the Ministries and the Municipality regarding proposed development around the site, including two streets that will encroach upon the archaeological area. Secondly, the visit, especially for the archaeologist, was vital for assessing the Site's condition and conservation challenges. Discussions with PUI were constructive and informative.



**Map 1.** 2018 Agreement map

For the Third Mission, conducting outreach seminars with local stakeholders and communities is essential. Additionally, the Mission should insist on amending the 2018 Agreement to guarantee a proper buffer zone and ensure the comprehensive protection of the Tell Umm Amer archaeological site.



# *Conclusion and Recommendations*

The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities of Palestine requested that a Conservation and Management Plan be prepared before further interventions were done at the Site of Tell Umm Amer, which is one of the most important heritage sites in Gaza. The aim is that the substantial funding offered by donors, most notably the French Agency for Development (AFD), ensures a correct intervention strategy on the site according to international standards of conservation and to ensure effective management for the future of the Site.

The CMP is also needed in view of the fact that the Site is on the Tentative List of Palestine for cultural and natural sites of potential OUV, which already gives the site an internationally recognized status, especially if the State of Palestine decides to continue with the process to nominate it to the World Heritage List.

The CMP looks at what was achieved at the Site and what was proposed by the Première Urgence Internationale (PUI). MoTA and the AFD contracted the Centre for Cultural Heritage Preservation (CCHP) as a consultant to create this comprehensive technical CMP.

The Site has already had various interventions such as substantial archaeological excavations. Part of the funding has also been allocated for permanent or temporary shelters. Funding was achieved through UNESCO, French and British Government agencies, and other NGOs. The French NGO PUI has been involved in protection and preservation activities in the Site for several years. The project also aims at constructing other ancillary buildings, including a visitor center and a Site museum.

The CMP was prepared through a dialogue process of constant interaction and sound cooperation among the Team Members. This was based on on-site missions and on regular weekly Internet meetings. The Team presented an Inception report, an Interim report, and a report of the Missions that went to Gaza.

The Team gave a lot of importance to interaction with the local authorities as is normally the case, but even more since Gaza is a special case governed by local authorities who have to face very difficult administrative problems in a territory completely surrounded by a hostile state. Thus, great importance was given to interaction with local Ministries, the Municipality that administers the area where the Site lies, the local community, and other stakeholders.

***Expected outcomes of the plan:*** The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities set very clear outcomes for the plan through four main components to be studied and acted upon. These are:

1. The Construction of an interpretation center to ensure permanent cultural and touristic activities and the protection of fragile remains by a sheltering roof to protect them
2. An ambitious training program regarding youth and MoTA staff in heritage preservation, restoration and valorization, cultural mediation, site management and technical maintenance, and scientific and cultural programming
3. The setup of a communication plan and outreach activities aimed at promoting the Site of Tell Umm Amer outside the Gaza Strip through the establishment of exhibitions and innovative tools
4. Identification of different scenarios for the Site boundaries and buffer zone through a proposed master plan for the Site zone and to establish a coordination mechanism with MoTA based on the Conservation and Management Plan. Governance model recommends establishing a Citizen Advisory Committee, Scientific Council, and Site Management Committee. This is in pursuit of a sustainable and stable governance framework for the management of the Site and its long-term development.

The Terms of Reference specifically requested that the CMP aim at establishing a comprehensive framework to ensure the effective management, protection, and conservation of the Site based on a participatory process and a shared vision for the future.

- ***Studies prepared by the team:*** The CMP has shown the need to better understand the history and importance of the Site. Therefore, substantial importance has been given to the history and development of the Site over the years. Studies were also conducted on the state of conservation of the archaeological remains of the Site, the architectural interventions made, the archaeological covers, and the program of site conservation. Particular importance was given to the training program offered by PUI and EbaF to local professionals and craftsmen.
- ***State of conservation:*** Both the archaeologists and the architects in the team studied the specific state of conservation of the Site and has found the Site is good state of conservation.

The archaeologists have given a detailed report regarding the interventions that have been done. These comments are found in the respective Chapters of the Plan. They have also given ample ideas about future interventions.

The architects have provided all the necessary information regarding the physical elements of the Site, including scenarios on Site boundaries, buffer zones, and future interventions in the Site. They developed professional criteria regarding the construction of the protective shelter, visitor center, current structures, landscape, and facilities.

However, elements of the Site are vulnerable to climatic conditions and need to be sheltered. Walkways, and signage need constant maintenance. Substantial resources must be aimed at training local staff to maintain the Site to acceptable international standards.

Most of the artifacts that have been found have been moved to Ebaif magazines where they are being studied and documented. These will be important elements of the proposed museum at the Site.

- ***Authenticity and integrity:*** The Site has a high level of authenticity and integrity. The interventions have not altered these very important elements. The minimal reconstruction that was undertaken was mainly to consolidate existing structures, such as the chapels.
- ***Attributes of the Site:*** The Team has studied the attributes of the Site for a possible nomination. The Site contains many important attributes that make it a good candidate to be inscribed on the World Heritage List. The Site has clear outstanding universal value as one of the earliest known Christian monasteries and due to the complexity of the Site. It teaches a great deal about the monastic movement in the first centuries of the Christian faith and about adapting to other ways of life in the region, as the baths and other structures continued to be used for centuries. Whilst the conservation project is not finalized, the Site already has substantial attributes. It is hoped that the rest of the Site will be excavated in the near future. The protection of the Site and a good management system are very important elements for an eventual World Heritage nomination.
- ***Protective shelter and use of solar panels:*** PUI proposes that vulnerable archaeological parts of the Site be covered by a shelter and that invisible solar panels be placed above these shelters. There is no doubt that a protective shelter needs to cover vulnerable parts of the ruins, and both the team archaeologists and heritage experts prefer to follow the ICCROM and international standards in terms of a protective shelter covering only fragile and vulnerable parts of the Site, and not the whole Site. The solar panel proposal offers a sustainable future financial resource. It has been subject to substantial study and discussion in view of the visual impact of such panels in such a sensitive site. There are options on whether the panels could be flat or vertical, rendering a more substantial visual impact. This matter needs to be studied further from a technical point of view and regarding how to minimize the visual and the environmental impact.
- ***Site Museum and Visitor Centre:*** There is general agreement of the importance of these elements, but again, not enough information is available as to the eventual plans or design of these structures which must have minimal visual impact on the Site. Further architectural studies are recommended before any final decision is taken.

- **Training program for local staff:** This important matter will be a continuation of training already being provided by PUI and Ebaf but must be now channeled into permanent jobs for local professionals and craftsmen. As requested by MoTA, a program of training for future management of the Site must also be given priority.
- **Outreach program:** MoTA had emphasized an outreach program. Initial outreach has shown that the Site is not as well known locally as it should be. It was concluded that much more needs to be done so that the local community understands they are the owners of this important heritage site. Under present political circumstances, it would be almost impossible to hope for international tourism to the Site, so the CMP emphasizes the need for widespread local involvement and interest in the Site. A detailed local “touristic” program is therefore being emphasized.
- **Promoting the Site:** The Action Plan includes proposals about promoting the Site, mainly through the social media, a website, and other means. However, the CMP has not gone into the possibility of exhibitions in Jerusalem and the West Bank or outside Palestine as the artifacts are still being studied and documented. The CMP suggested ways to promote the Site on the local level: school visits and collaboration with local universities, on-site cultural activities, social media engagement, educational programs, a visitor center, publications and awareness materials, an online presence, community involvement, and media relations are some of recommended activities aimed at promoting the Site.
- **Governance system:** The future management system for the Site is of the utmost importance, and this element has been studied and substantially discussed. A governance system has been set up in cooperation with the stakeholders. According to MoTA (the Site’s owner and the governmental agency that has the mandate over site management in Palestine), there will be two phases of management. In the first phase, the conservation and rehabilitation project funded by the AFD will have its own organizational structure to manage the project for a five-year span. After completion of this project, the second phase will begin as PUI will permanently transfer management of the site to MoTA and its administrative structure.
- **Master Plan:** The existing land use plan for the area of the Site needs to be adjusted. A new master plan shall be prepared and endorsed by the responsible bodies. The plan shall ensure minimal construction in terms of building height and the ratio of built-up area surrounding the Site. The plan shall also define the Site boundaries and a buffer zone to protect the Site. The CMP has proposed two scenarios addressing these issues.