

**PUSH Site Visit, Jordan  
 August 20-22, 2008**

**Executive Summary**



**Table of Contents**

1. Site Visit Itinerary.....	2
2. Site Visit Executive Summary.....	3
3. Site Visit Supplementary Guide.....	6
4. Site Visit Participants List.....	11

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**Wednesday, August 20, 2008**

**13:00** Participants Arrive in Jordan

**13:30** Pella Site Visit

**17:00** Baptism Site Visit

**19:30** Dinner in Madaba



**Thursday, August 21, 2008**

**09:00** Um er-Rasas Site Visit

**12:30** Mount Nebo Site Visit

**15:00** Tel Hesban Site Visit

**16:00** Madaba Mosaic Site Visit

**19:00** Group Discussion

**20:30** Dinner in Madaba



**Friday, August 22, 2008**

**9:00** Palestinians depart for Allenby Border Crossing

**10:00** Jerash Site Visit

**11:30** Ajloun Site Visit



## **Executive Summary: PUSH Jordanian Site Visit August 20-22, 2008**

### **Overview:**

During the course of the PUSH Jordanian Site tour a group of 55 Israeli, Palestinian and Jordanian tour guides, site managers, and heritage specialists traveled together throughout Jordan visiting sites representing various aspects of the region's shared heritage. The site visits inspired discussion both at the sites, on the bus and throughout the shared meals during the three days.




While the guests were constantly engaged in small group discussion one large group discussion took place on the evening of second day. The discussion was held in English with Arabic and Hebrew translation as needed. Select comments from the meeting using Chatham House Rules are as follows:

- I have participated in several PUSH events in the past including workshops and site tours in Artas. Having now experienced the shared heritage in Jordan, I would sincerely like to visit Beit Shean and Gesher to better understand the way the Israeli sites link to the Jordanian and Palestinian sites. If there are any further opportunities for this I would like very much to participate. The Palestinian sites are underdeveloped and visits to the more developed sites will give us an opportunity to see what we can develop in the future. Artas is an example of an underdeveloped site. We hope that PUSH can support development activities in Artas and other Palestinian sites. I would really like to thank PUSH and the Project Managers and Project Coordinator for the opportunity to participate in PUSH events thus far. (Arabic translated to English)
- Participating in the PUSH project has been a very unique and important opportunity for me. I am an environmental expert – working with the project and traveling to sites as a group has been a great experience for me to hear and learn about other points of view. This type of project is not only about promoting dialogue for me it is about learning. This is the most distinguished project that I have been involved with. I hope in the future we can expand to more sites with more community involvement. I realize that all good things start small and get bigger – PUSH is definitely on its way. What we have now is of great value – I hope it continues in the future. (Arabic translated to English)
- This project is my baby shared with a few other of the project's managers and coordinator. I will thus share a very personal story. As I child growing up in Jerusalem I understood the Palestinian narrative well, the Old City is a Palestinian city, the holy sites are our sites. Only later was I exposed to another narrative as I became an Israeli tour guide. This was a conflicting





narrative, one that shocked me. Here, particularly in this region, we must make attempts to balance. All of you are one team with us now for nearly two years. We have only just scratched the surface of what we can do together. We have indeed worked very hard and from what I see here – it is worth it. All of our peoples must be exposed to the multitude of narratives this region shares. Moreover, we must work on the ground to affect people and their understanding of heritage and our shared history. (Arabic translated to English)

- When I hear this story I am very moved. I share this story and the growth experienced within it – but from the other side. I too was born in Jerusalem and experienced a similar transition of knowledge and discovery. I believe that the PUSH project is one of the projects that has the greatest potential to change the situation and change people's understanding of our region. Ten years ago I could never imagine or dream of traveling in a bus together with Israelis, Palestinians and Jordanians. This experience is truly moving and touching – amazing really. I feel very excited to be a part of such a group and such a project. I think we should focus more on telling our story in our publications – like the brochures – this should be the focus. Thank you to the Jordanians for hosting us. When we all stood together at Mount Nebo/Nevo and we spoke about Moshe/ Moses it was at last the same Moshe/ Moses, the same mountain. We have really come together in ways I couldn't have dreamed. We should all feel privilege to be a part of PUSH. Thank you. (English with Arabic translation)
- 
- I will speak a bit of Hebrew in order to introduce a third language into the discussion. I think the main objective is to meet people and create cross-border linkages. We look for this opportunity – and there are very few. The real story here is between people and I ask you to speak – even if you don't understand because we don't want to miss a moment of this opportunity we have to be together. In response to earlier comments, I look forward to inviting you to my house, to visit my community. I want you, my friend, to likewise invite me to your house. We must work to open our doors to each other. For some of our Jordanian guests, I visited Jordan many times in the past. In fact I have been to all of the sites that we visited thus far. But I find myself more and more excited and each time I come I see more and more development. I really praise you for the love and care you are putting into your sites. For me when I come as a tour guide I see the site differently from when I come now with the PUSH project. In this way we have succeeded greatly. *Follow up question: Did you mean that when you come as a tour guide your experience is different than as a visitor?* I can say now that I have experienced what PUSH is trying to do. (Hebrew and English with Arabic translation)
  - In addition to what was previously said about opening doors we point out the great difficulties we face in visiting each other; permits, visas, areas A, B, C etc. Additionally we know that Israelis can not visit us in Areas A. Furthermore Al Quds University is well known as the most open Palestinian

university, we have over 60 cooperation projects yet we are the only Palestinian that is not accredited by Israel and our degrees are not recognized. It is no secret that the university leaders including our President Sari Nusseibeh are considering a different approach. (English with Arabic translation)

- Speaking of one of the other participants, this man is a great leader to us. He has an open mind and has been engaged in exactly what we mean to achieve for many years. Indeed it was he that first taught me about the multitude of narratives in Jerusalem and the region – I was once his student, as were several others in this room. We are greatly honored that he is participating with us here today. He is a great supporter of the PUSH project and our objectives. (Arabic with English translation)
  
- I would sincerely like to respond to all who have spoken today but I feel that our time is limited therefore I will just response to the last speakers. I personally don't feel that we will find a political solution today; we are working for our children. We should struggle more and more. We have a peace agreement with Egypt – but it is a cold peace created by politicians, not people because there is no sharing, no people-to-people cooperation as PUSH is striving to create. PUSH is the road to a real peace. Our cooperation can aid the politicians. One thing can be emphasized it is that we must keep our unique stories – our personal stories, as discussed before. What one speaker said about the exposure to multiple narratives through the tour guide training course was very moving for me. This is our role. We need to understand our own stories yes but also learn and listen. This should be the primary focus in the future of PUSH. (English with Arabic translation)



## Jordanian Site Visit: Supplementary Guide

The visit to Jordan was an opportunity to look at the shared regional heritage and discuss the commonalities identified in the PUSH project.

### Wednesday, August 20<sup>th</sup> – Day 1:

#### GREAT CITIES

##### **Pella and Jerash:**

In the first half of the third century CE, the urbanization of the Roman East reached its zenith. During this period of Roman rule, dozens of cities were founded and expanded, among them **Pella**, **Jerash**, **Scythopolis** (Beit She'an/ Bisan) and **Sabastia**. Located on the sites of earlier urban centres, the cities embodied the collective memories of the region's peoples. These great cities share similar urban plans, centring their economic and social lives along the colonnaded north-south oriented *cardo* or *cardus maximus* and east-west *decumanus maximus* streets. These cities reached their pinnacle during the Roman and Byzantine periods, but remained important to the lives of the surrounding communities throughout later periods. Accordingly, their remains are an important part of our region's shared heritage.



The great city of **Pella** developed during the Roman period atop Hellenistic foundations. As one of the Decapolis cities located along the eastern frontier of the Roman Empire, Pella has numerous features typical of a great Roman city including an Odeon (theater) built into the curve of a natural hillside. Pella was also the site of one of Christianity's earliest communities, and became an important place of refuge for Christians after the siege and destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE. Both Pella and the nearby Decapolis city of Scythopolis (Beit She'an/ Bisan), were brought to an abrupt end in the massive Jordan Rift earthquake of 749 CE.



**Jerash** is known for the ruins of the Greco-Roman city of Gerasa, also referred to as Antioch on the Golden River. Jerash is considered one of the most important and best preserved Roman cities in the Near East. There are a large number of striking monuments located in Jerash: the Corinthium column, Hadrian's Arch, a circus/hippodrome, two immense temples (to Zeus and Artemis), the nearly unique oval Forum, which is surrounded by a fine colonnade, a long colonnaded street or *cardo*, two theatres (the Large South Theatre and smaller North Theatre), two baths, a scattering of small temples and an almost complete circuit of city walls. Most of these monuments were built by donations of the city's wealthy citizens. From AD 350, a large Christian community lived in Jerash, and between AD 400-600, more than thirteen churches were built, many with superb mosaic floors. A cathedral was built in the fourth century. An ancient synagogue with detailed mosaics, including the story of Noah, was found beneath a church.



## PROPHETS JUDGES, DISCIPLES AND COMPANIONS

### **Tel Deir Allah:**

Excavations at Tell Deir Alla, indicate that the area was first settled at the end of the Middle Bronze Age, around 1600 BCE. Several architectural sites such as a sanctuary complex, treasury, late Bronze Age houses, and the remains of an Iron Age village were uncovered. One of the most important discoveries from Deir Alla are clay tablets inscribed with what are believed to be the first written records in Jordan. Additionally, cultural artifacts such as pottery from different periods, vessels, beads and bronze armor were found. A temple dating back to 1500 BCE was built at Tell Deir Alla, which is likely the ancient cultic and market center of the biblical Succoth.



### **Mosque of the Companion of the Prophet Mohammed:**

A large number of shrines of the Prophet Mohammad's venerable companions exist in and around the Jordan River Valley. Deir Allah is home to the tomb of Derar Bin Al-Azwar, a revered companion of Mohammad.



### **Bethany Beyond the Jordan Baptism Site:**

To Christians, the Jordan River is considered one of the most holy sites in the region, as it was here that John the Baptist baptized Jesus. In this tradition, Christian pilgrims come from all over the world to be baptized in the Jordan River. On the eastern bank of the Jordan River the baptism site is known as Bethany Beyond the Jordan, on the western bank it is known as Kaser el Yehud.



During the 6th-7th centuries CE four churches were built on the hill at Bethany Beyond the Jordan. The largest of these Byzantine churches contained a partly preserved mosaic floor. The second church also contains remains of a mosaic with small cross motifs, although much more fragmentary than the first. Finally, the third church seems to have been built around a natural cave on the western side of the hill that was used in the days of John the Baptist. Very little remains from the fourth church other than some floor patches with cross-decorated colored mosaics. Byzantine period remains at Bethany Beyond the Jordan demonstrate great efforts during the period to enhance the productivity of water by building cisterns, pools, aqueducts, and pipes. The most significant finding from this area is a Byzantine monastery that is comprised of churches, baptism and water storage pools, water systems and chapels. Another Byzantine Church was built around the cave where John the Baptist is believed to have lived and performed baptisms. Closer to the Jordan River are four other Byzantine churches and large pools with an extensive water system dating back



to the 5th and 6th centuries CE (Jordan Ministry of Tourism & Antiquities [JMTA], 2003; JTB, n.d.).

Opposite Bethany Beyond the Jordan, the western bank baptism site, Kaser el Yehud, has been under Israeli military jurisdiction since 1967 and is largely inaccessible to the public. Consequently, for the most part pilgrims in Israel undergo baptism at an alternate location near the Sea of Galilee.

Both baptism sites and their related tourism efforts suffer from problems resulting from the quantity and quality of the water in the Jordan River. Prior to the large-scale upstream diversions of the water flow since the 1960s, water flow in the Jordan River measured 1.3 billion cubic meters of water per annum. Today the water flow is as little as 100 million cubic meters per annum, a large percentage of which is sewage and agricultural run off – the water therefore is a potential health hazard to pilgrims.

## **Thursday, August 21st – Day 2:**

### **FRONTIERS**

#### **Um er-Rasas:**

Most of this archaeological site, which started as a Roman military camp and grew to become a town from the 5th century, has not been excavated. It contains remains from the Roman, Byzantine and Early Muslim periods (end of 3rd to 9th centuries AD) and a fortified Roman military camp. The site also has 16 churches, some with well-preserved mosaic floors. Particularly noteworthy is the mosaic floor of the Church of Saint Stephen with its representation of towns in the region. Two square towers are probably the only remains of the practice, well known in this part of the world, of the stylites



(ascetic monks who spent time in isolation atop a column or tower). Um er-Rasas is surrounded by, and dotted with, remains of ancient agricultural cultivation in an arid area. It is here that the Prophet Muhammad, travelling as a tradesman, met a monk who convinced him of the virtue of monotheism (<http://whc.unesco.org/>).

### **MOUNTAINS**

#### **Mount Nebo/Nevo:**

Since the beginning of human history, mountains and hills have attracted the attention of individuals and communities the world over. Numerous peaks became renowned as sacred places both in their own right or as the backdrop for famous events. In our region the remains of many ancient mountaintop altars and temples have been revealed in archaeological excavations and the mountains and peaks of the Holy Land remain important sites of pilgrimage for the adherents of the three monotheistic faiths.





The relative closeness of mountain summits to the heavens, coupled with the widely held belief that God exists in the celestial world made these high points ideal for religious evocation. A selection of mountains in the region, such as Mount Carmel, Mount Tabor, Mount of Olives, Mount Gerizim and Mount Nebo, clearly illustrates the extent to which these mountains have affected the minds and faith of believers. The Abrahamic traditions describe the mountains as places where prophets heard God's instructions and received his Holy Scripture. Moses received the Law on Mount Sinai; Jesus ascended to heaven from the Mount of Olives, as did Mohammad from Mount Moriah, also known as al-Haram al-Sharif. Mountains also provided a focal point for commemorating events related to more than one of the Abrahamic traditions. For example, Mount Carmel is revered by Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike for its association with the prophet Elijah. In addition to their holiness, the region's mountains were also strategic vantage points, valued for their military significance in overlooking major trade routes and settled territories.



According to the Bible, Moses stood upon Mount Nebo, looked out over the Jordan River Valley and saw the land of Israel. Ruins from a 4th century church and monastery built to commemorate these events feature beautiful mosaic floors.

## MOSAICS

### **Tel Hesban:**

Archelological excavations in the area of Tel Hesban sought to examine whether the tel marks the area of Heshbon referred to in the Bible (Numbers 32:37). Bronze Age remains were not yet uncovered at the site shedding doubt on this theory. From the Byzantine era two churches were discovered, both with impressive mosaic floors.



### **Madaba Mosaic:**

The Madaba Mosaic is the earliest original map of the Holy Land in any form to have survived from antiquity. The 6th century mosaic, found in the remains of a Byzantine church, contains the earliest exact representation of the holy city Jerusalem. Moreover, unlike other mosaics of the time, it is a geographical map rather than a landscape mosaic.



## **MEDIAEVAL FORTRESSES:**

### **Ajloun (Qala'at al-Rabadh):**

From the eleventh to fifteenth century CE, the ongoing conflict between European Crusaders and various Muslim dynasties and military leaders led to an unprecedented intensity of fortress construction throughout the entire Levant. In their mixture of building styles and engineering achievements, these extraordinary and impressive strongholds symbolize the military clashes and interaction of cultures that took place during this period. During the Muslim military campaigns against the Crusaders, many European architectural elements were adopted and adapted, merging styles, as can be seen in Ajloun or Kalat Nimrod/ al-Subeiba.



Qala'at al-Rabadh, located in Ajloun, was built between 1184-85 CE by the nephew of Saladin in the campaign against the Crusaders. The Castle is an excellent example of 12th century Arab-Islamic military architecture. It also exhibits an important interchange of human values during the Mamluk times, in which it was one station in a network of beacons and pigeon posts transmitting messages from Baghdad to Cairo.

## Jordanian Site Tour: Participants in Alphabetical Order

**Khaled Abu Alia**, Tour Guide



**Jamal As'ad**, Member of Artas Municipal Council



**Hamdi Ayish**, Head of Artas Municipal Council



**Abdel Aziz Abed Aziz**, PUSH Peer Reviewer, Al-Albeit University



**Nisim Bados**, National Parks Authority, Beit Shean



**Nirit Bagron**, Site Manager, Gesher



**Doron Bar**, PUSH Team, Bezalel Academy



**Bakar Barakat**, Good Water Neighbors Field Staff – Deir Allah, Friends of the Earth Middle East



**Lari David**, Financial Officer, Bezalel Academy

**Anat Dror-Sharp**, PUSH Team, Bezalel Academy Student Assistant



**Hasan Dweik**, Executive Vice President, Al Quds University



**Mira Edelstein**, Friends of the Earth Middle East



**Kinneret Ben-Amram Fligelman**, Vice President of Finances and Administration, Bezalel Academy



**Qadri Ghazal**, Deputy Mayor of Sabastia Municipality



**Avner Goren**, Archeologist and Tour Guide



**David Guggenheim**, Architect, PUSH Team, Bezalel Academy



**Rawan Haddad**, PUSH Team, Jordan Society for Sustainable Development



**Sameh Halleq**, Financial Manager, Al Quds University





**Ala' Hamad**, Member of Sabastia Municipality



**Osama Hamdan**, Architect, PUSH Team, Al Quds University



**Rami Haruvi**, Tour Guide



**Sigal Har-Zion**, Tour Guide, Gesher



**Maha Hawari**, Sabastia Community Center



**Muna Hindiyyeh**, PUSH Peer Reviewer, Director of the Socio-Economic Programs Unit, National Council for Family Affairs



**Ibrahim Iqtit**, Institute of Archeology, Al Quds University



**Yosef Israelashvili**, PUSH Team, Bezalel Academy Student Assistant



**Mohammad Jaradat**, PUSH Team, Al Quds University



**Marwan Abu Khalaf**, Archeologist, PUSH Team, Al Quds University



**Ran Kleinman**, Site Manager, Gesher



**Elizabeth Koch**, PUSH Project Coordinator



**Salam El Labadi**, PUSH Team, Jordan Society for Sustainable Development



**Khaled Nasser**, PUSH Project Manager, Jordan Society for Sustainable Development



**Yusuf Natsheh**, PUSH Project Manager, Al Quds University



**Mohammed Nouasra**, Good Water Neighbors Field Staff - Tabkat Fahel, Friends of the Earth Middle East



**Itzhak Rachamim**, Tour Guide, Beit Shean



**Mohammad Sa'd**, Member of Artas Municipal Council

**Yehuda Shamesh**, Tour Guide, Beit Shean



**Kamilia Sukkar**, Cultural Community Center, Sabastia



**Mai Kamel Sultan**, Masters Student Jordan University for Science and Technology



**Suhaib Al Talafha**, Jordan University for Science and Technology



**Noga Tavor**, Tour Guide, Beit Shean



**Michael Turner**, PUSH Project Manager, Bezalel Academy



**Mohammed Waheeb**, Archeologist, PUSH Team, Jordan Society for Sustainable Development



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