ACOR Newsletter

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The High Place at Beidha

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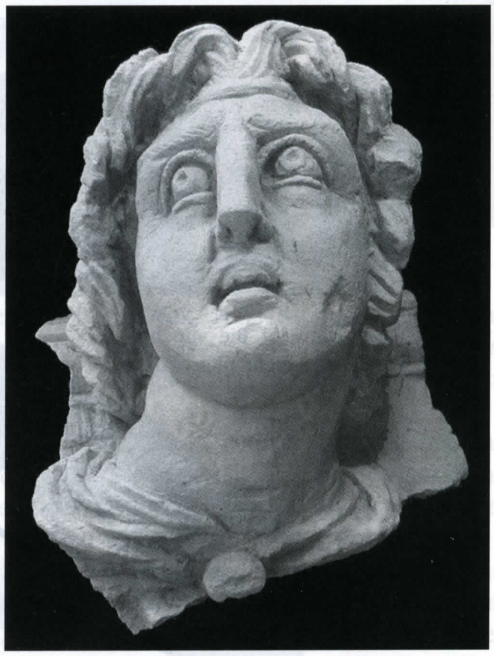
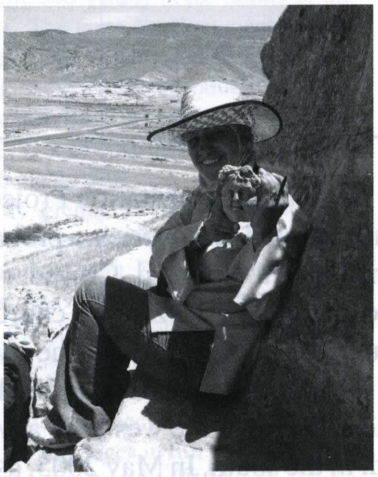
The Beidha Documentation Project has yielded a number of unexpected discoveries: a probable Nabataean shrine in the midst of a vineyard, Crusader-era housing, a medieval mosque, and a Byzantine church, but there was one more surprise in store for us. The overall objective of the project is to document an area defined by the highway in the east, Siq al-Barid in the west, Siq al-Amti in the north, and the wadi in the south. In May 2005, as the project neared its end, only one area remained to be documented, a high bedrock formation in the east of the study area. The strategy for documenting this was the same as it had been elsewhere: minimal clearance, mainly of windblown sand and other late debris, in order to define major installations.

On May 5, parts of two capitals with heads of Medusa carved on them in low relief were found during clearance. On May 7, at the eastern end of the formation, a sandstone head in the round measuring about 14 cm in height was recovered. The next day a second head, that of the child Dionysos, was

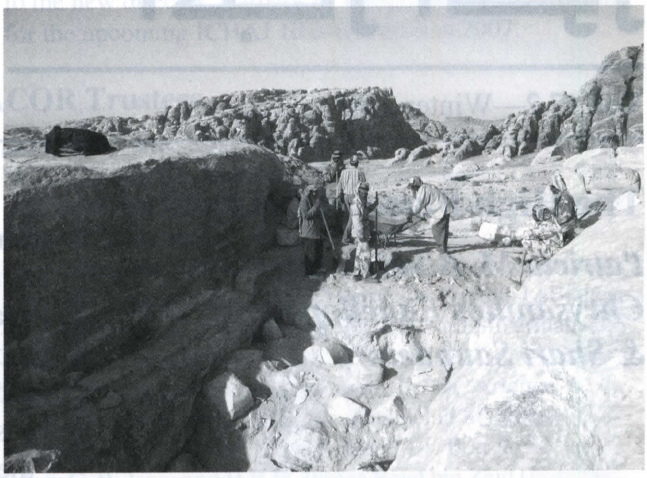


Left: recreation by C. Kanellopoulos of the interior of the main hall; right: head of Ampelos, a companion of Dionysos; photo by P. M. Bikai

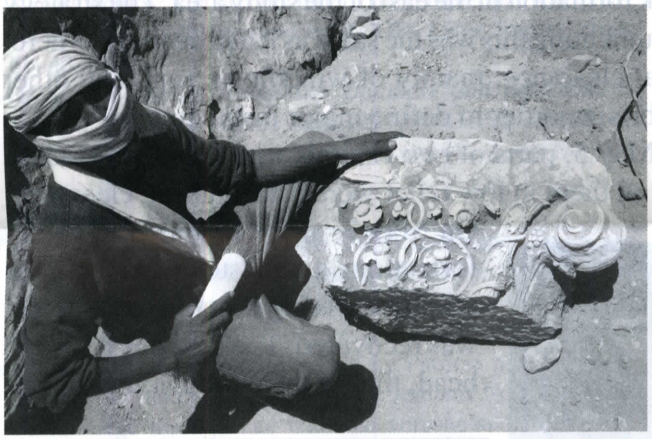
found. On May 9, another six heads were recovered, and seven capital parts also appeared. Two of the capitals had heads still attached to them. By now there was a realization that the heads had all been parts of capitals and were portraying Graeco-Roman gods. In the end there would be a total of 30 heads and 18 capitals. While there were some column drums and cornices recovered, there was a notable paucity of building materials to accompany the capitals; there were no bases and, most importantly, there were very few ashlar blocks. The architectural elements were coming from a long, relatively narrow (ca. 3.75 m wide) cut into bedrock. It was very difficult to see how the capitals would have been used in such a space, and it quickly became clear that the bedrock cut was the basement or cryptoporticus of a building that had been located above it; nothing remained of that building. It had literally been taken away at some point but, for whatever reason, those who removed the materials had no use for the capitals with their heads, and they fell or were pushed into the cryptoporticus.



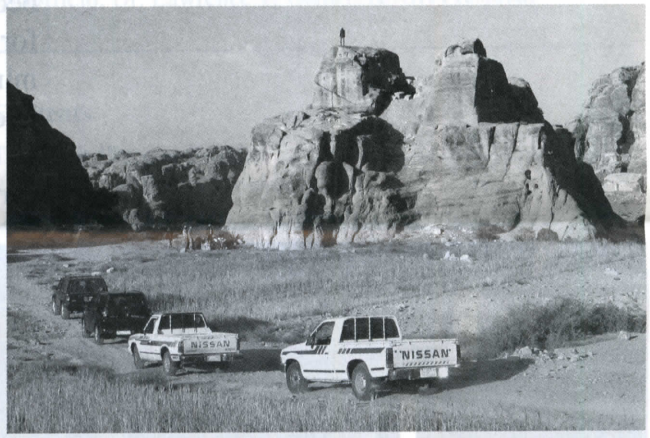
Tahani al-Salhi holds the head of the child Dionysos; photo by S. Saunders.



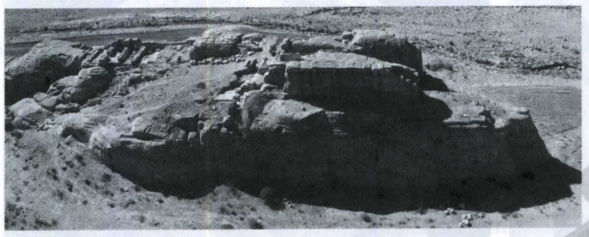
Architecural elements appearing in the western part of the cryptopoticus excavation; photo by F. Parsons

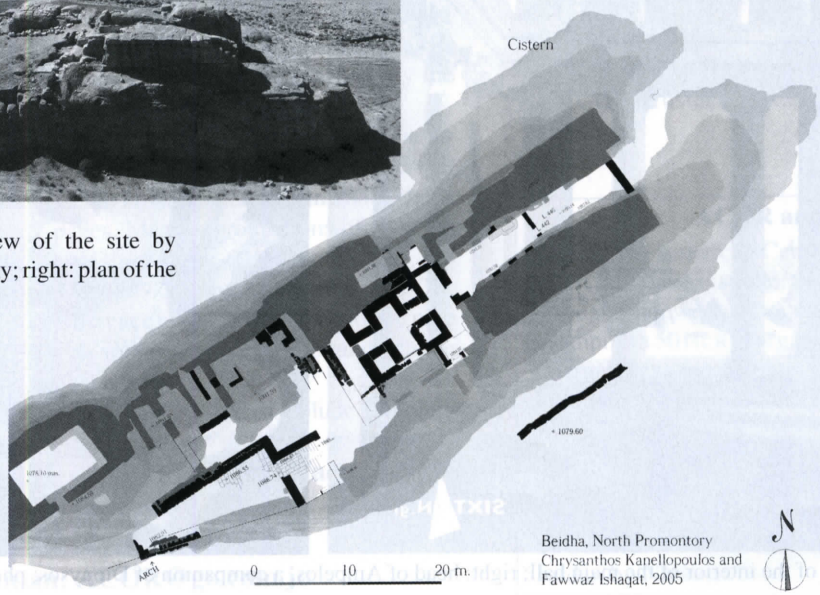


Corinthian capital as discovered; photo by S. Saunders



View to the west of the promontory; photo by F. Parsons





Above: aerial view of the site by A.A.W. Joukowsky; right: plan of the site

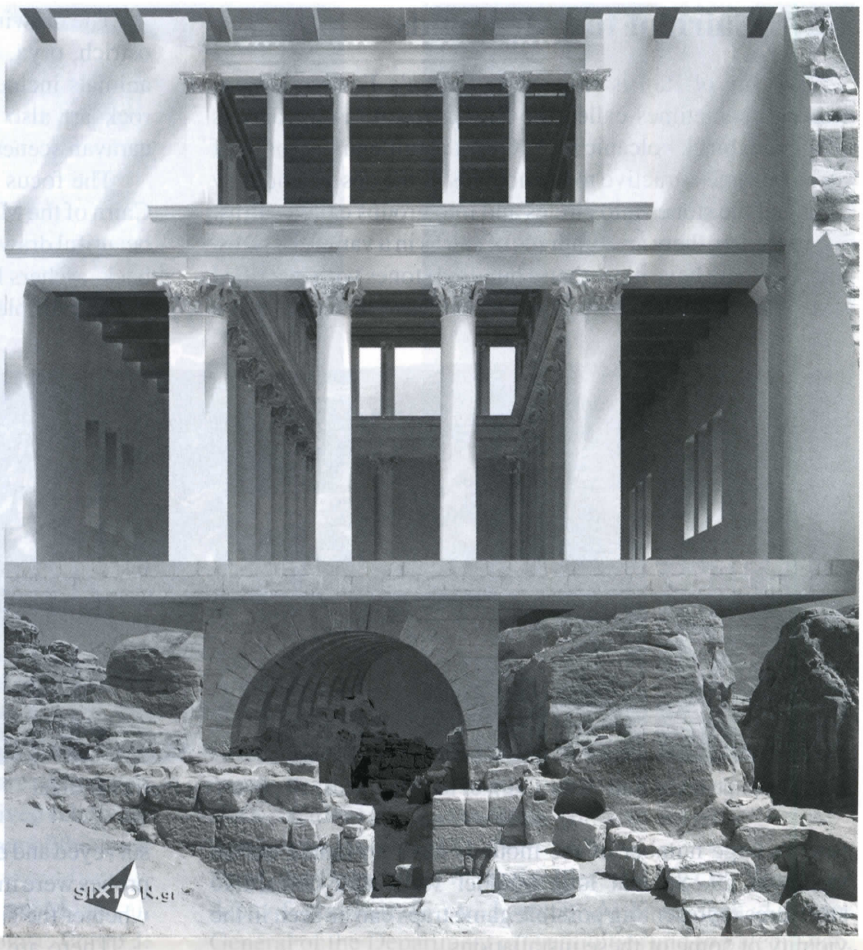
Beidha, North Promontory
Chrysanthos Kanellopoulos and Fawwaz Ishaqat, 2005

Work continued in September of 2005 and a great deal is now understood about the architecture of the complex—a complex that covers all of the bedrock formation. It was entered from the west and much of the approach leading to the top is in relatively good condition; it begins with a paved walkway leading to a gate. The walkway was ca. 4 m wide N/S and 6 m of its length is still extant, but it may have been well over 12 m in length E/W. Beyond the gate, which is in a wall that is 1 m in thickness, is an area that may

Head of Isis; photo by P.M. Bikai

have been roofed; it has a bench to the south. From the north part of that area a broad flight of steps leads to the building at the top of the formation. From the south part of the area, there was apparently another access that led to service rooms under the main building.

At the top of the steps, there may have been a courtyard. East of this area and west of the cryptoporticus, which was under the main hall, is a series of vaulted rooms the total length of which is 14.8 m and the width of which is 15.4 m. These rooms appear to have supported the atrium of the main hall. This area, west of the main hall, may have featured Ionic capitals and, perhaps as parts of window frames, had Ionic capitals with elephant heads as volutes.



Composite view to the east of the extant remains of the cryptoporticus with a restoration of the main hall by C. Kanellopoulos

Finally, to the east, is the long cryptoporticus or basement (ca. 28 m) cut into bedrock. Above the cryptoporticus was a hall featuring the capitals with heads. In the upper level of the hall, there was another, smaller colonnade that featured small capitals with the heads of lions as volutes and heads of deities as bosses. The entry to the hall may have included Corinthian-style capitals decorated with the heads of Medusa at the end of the abacus, and with pinecones as bosses. When the building was dismantled, the capitals with their heads and a few other pieces of the building were pushed or fell into the cryptoporticus where, over the centuries, they were covered with windblown sand.

Capital with a head of Pan; photo by Patricia M. Bikai

North and west of the main building is a series of rooms that may have served as baths or kitchens. Preliminary dating of the materials recovered indicates that the structure may have been built in the second half of the 1st century B.C., and it appears that the building went out of use and was dismantled in the middle of the 1st century A.D. The purpose of the building is not yet certain. The finds and the richness of the decoration suggest that it may be an elite residence that included a banqueting hall.

Staff in 2005 consisted of Patricia M. Bikai, director; Chrysanthos Kanellopoulos, architect; Shari Saunders, archaeologist; Julia Costello, archaeologist; Fraser Parsons, site engineer; Fawwaz Isaqat, surveyor (Hashemite U.); and Tahani al-Salhi, representative of the Department of Antiquities. Students were Ala'a al-Deek, Najd Sweidan, and Aysha Shoman. Volunteers were: Riet Versteeg, Sally de Vries, Karen Asfour, Peggie Abujaber, Joyce Kasim, and Christopher Tuttle.

ACOR thanks Dr. Fawwaz Al-Khraysheh, Director of the Department of Antiquities, Suleiman Farajat, Director of the Petra Archaeological Park, Dr. Talal Akasheh (Hashemite University), and the Petra Region Authority for their help.

Support for the Beidha Project came from the Khalid Shoman Foundation, Dick and Betsy DeVos Foundation, ACOR's USAID Endowment (a grant from the United States Agency for International Development), and the Council of American Overseas Research Centers (CAORC).

Rajl: Cairn of the Mermaids

The site of Rajl is situated in Jordan's Eastern Desert, which is sometimes called the Black Desert, as the area is filled with black volcanic rock. Over the millennia, groups of rocks became attractive to the nomads of the desert, and they arranged the stones into circles and into groups called cairns.

In Jordan, there are hundreds of cairns in a variety of sizes. Some of them have more than a hundred stones with inscribed texts and figures on them while others have no more than a few. A large number of the mounds have no marks on the stones at all. Several long boulder walls and corral-like structures representing possible game traps can be seen in the vicinity of some of these installations.

The cairns themselves are cone-shaped piles of stones. They can be of different sizes but average around 5 m in diameter and 1.5 m in height. The function of these cairns is not yet established. Some investigators believe they are a sort of desert lighthouse, others think they may be rallying points, camping sites, or burial places.

The drawings on the stones include wild animals such as ostrich, oryx, deer, onager, felines, and ibex. Domesticated animals include camel, horse, dog, donkey, and sheep. The rock art also includes men, women, hunting scenes, and caravan scenes.

The focus of this project is Wadi Rajl-3, nicknamed the Cairn of the Mermaids. This is a spectacular rock art site, with beautiful drawings of animals, men, women, figures on horseback, archers hunting, oryxes, lions, ibexes, etc.

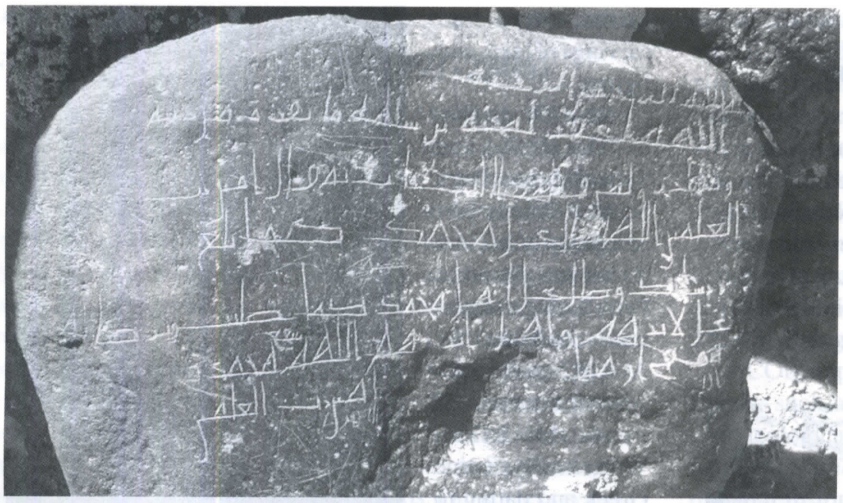
In multiple trips to the site beginning in 2002, it has been surveyed and documented. In August of 2005, a number of test probes were made by Jerome C. Rose in an effort to determine whether the site was used for burials, but none were found.

There are 79 different documented inscribed texts. The largest one has 84 letters. Most of the texts are associated with drawings but some have only text. Tribal marks and the Pleiades (seven dots) are also included in some drawings. So far the main name list includes no less then 120 different persons, 74 of them belonging to one family consisting of 13 generations. A second list can be made from three texts with

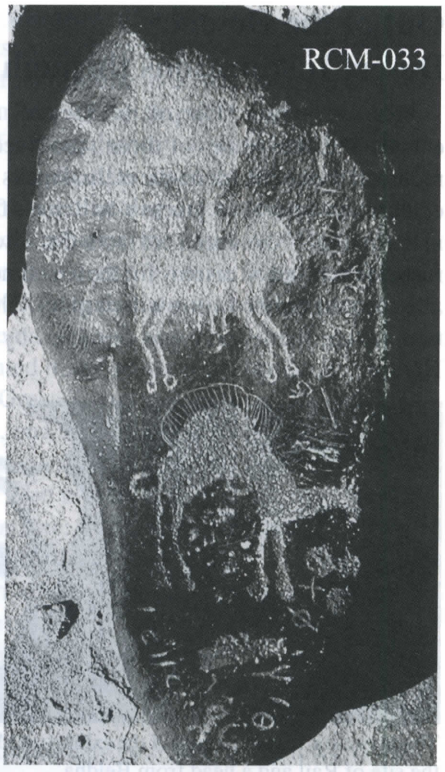
Composite photo of Rajl-3, the Cairn of the Mermaids; all photos by Pierre M. Bikai

Herding scene and five separate texts

Caravan scene



Kufic text from a site near the Cairn of the Mermaids



The text on this stone explains that the horse and the camel portrayed are gifts.

nine different names from the tribe of *'mn* and a third list from one text that gives 14 generations. The texts of the Cairn of the Mermaids are in Safaitic. However, at other cairns nearby, there are texts from different eras including some in early Arabic in Kufic script, indicating a late period, perhaps the eighth century, and there are other Arabic texts that are probably even later, perhaps extending into modern times.

The peoples who created this rock art are the desert nomads of late antiquity, a group that has received relatively little attention in Jordan. Certainly, the existence of this rock art is known to only a few.

The participants in the project were: Pierre M. Bikai, director; Jerome C. Rose, physical anthropologist; Philip J. Wilke, prehistorian; Ahmad Al-Momani and Jihad Kafafi, documentation; Fawwaz Isaqat, surveyor; and Nancy Coinman, Mansour Hamati, Adam Messer, Maria Hajnalova, and Christopher Tuttle, photographers. Support for the project came from the IRG Cultural Preservation Fund, the Department of Antiquities, and ACOR. We owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Fawwaz Al-Khraysheh, Director General of the Department of Antiquities and to Salem Diab, representative of the Department of Antiquities at the site.
Pierre M. Bikai, ACOR

Camel and a woman

A woman and seven stars, the Pleiades

Out of the Desert: Desert Inspirations through Time

The exhibition "Out of the Desert" at Darat al Funun echoes with the voices of those who lived in the desert and recorded their heritage on the eternal rocks of Jordan. A visual celebration of man's journey in time—from Nabataean to modern day—Nabataean artifacts, Safaitic stones, and papyrus scrolls are all on display for the first time at Darat al Funun, allowing the public to relive their glory. The inspired installation setting them apart was designed by architect Sahel al Hiyari.

The invitation to the opening of the exhibit on May 10, 2006, featured the site of Rajl and a head from Beidha.

These archaeological installations highlight the latest antiquities discovered at the sites of Beidha and Rajl. In Beidha, a nomadic group appeared who, by the 1st century B.C., had established themselves as the masters of one of antiquity's major trade routes. The site of Beidha, about 10 km north of Petra, was a place where wine was produced; it also seems to have served as a retreat for the citizens of Petra. In May 2005, after three years of excavations in Beidha, directed by Dr. Patricia Bikai (ACOR), 30 stone heads and a number of capitals were unearthed. These pieces are believed to have decorated a banquet hall dating to the 1st century B.C., and are now on display for the first time.

H.R.H. Princess Sumaya and Suha Shoman greet members of the Amareen tribe from Beidha at the opening of the exhibit; photo by C.A. Tuttle.

Jordan's Eastern Desert inspired nomads over millennia, and the rocks of Rajl are outstanding examples of rock art. The stones, arranged into circles and mounded groups called cairns, often had carvings of texts and figures.

Also on display is "The Khalid and Suha Shoman Petra Scroll." This is part of a group of ancient documents found at Petra during excavations conducted by ACOR under the general direction of Pierre M. Bikai. Written in Byzantine Greek and dating to the 6th century A.D., the scrolls contain unique evidence of the history and development of the Arabic language; many of the personal names on the scrolls, although written in Greek, are in fact Semitic or, more specifically, Arabic. The scrolls were stored in a room adjacent to the Petra Church and were carbonized—and thus preserved—when the church burned.

A capital from Beidha in the exhibit

Nisreen Abu Al-Sheikh, Pat Masri, and Humi Ayoubi in the Rajl room of the exhibit; photos above by S. Saunders

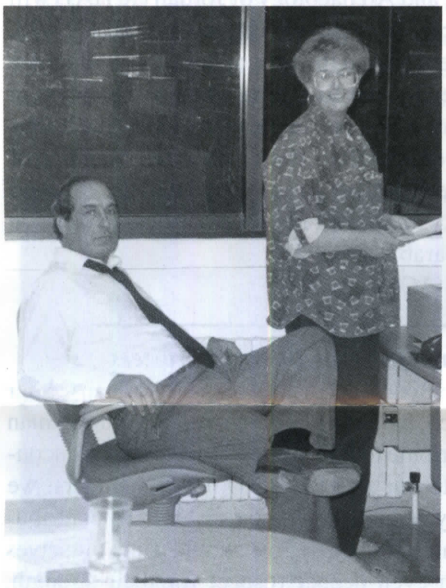
Patricia and Pierre Bikai with some of the Beidha heads; photo by C.A. Tuttle

Alongside these exhibits are contemporary inspirations by the desert, including art by Hakim Jamain and Suha Shoman's video art "*I am everywhere*," which is "a reflection on the opposite forces of existence, presence and absence, visible and invisible, fear and faith." The film resonates with the spirit of Beidha where the silent rocks echo with life.
[Edited extract from the exhibit brochure]

Pierre and Patricia Bikai thank Suha Shoman for creating this wonderful opportunity for the people of Jordan to see these new discoveries.

Pierre and Patricia Bikai: Fifteen Years at ACOR (1991-2006)

When Pierre and Patricia arrived at ACOR in 1991, they were almost unknown to the ACOR community. Their scholarly work had concentrated on Lebanon: Pierre on dendrochronology of the Cedars of Lebanon and Patricia on the Phoenicians. When the Board announced its decision to select Pierre as the new director, his extensive archaeological field experience was cited. He had been the manager of the Tyre excavations in Lebanon from 1967 to 1976 and had also participated in excavations in Turkey, the Azores, Iraq, Egypt, Syria, and at Pella in Jordan. Pierre received his doctorate from the University of California at Berkeley. The Bikais met when they were both working on the excavations at Sarafand (ancient Sarepta) in Lebanon in the late 1960s. Patricia excavated at Tyre from 1971 to 1975 and wrote her dissertation for the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley on the ceramic evidence of Tyre, for which she developed an important classification system. In 1978, her thesis was published as *The Pottery of Tyre* (Warminster, 1978).



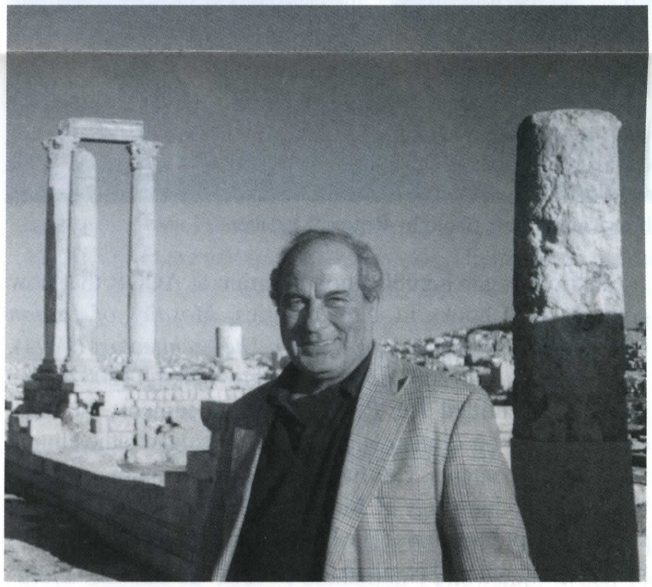
Pierre and Patricia in the office in 1992

The Bikais came to ACOR after it was shut down during the First Gulf War. They thought that they would stay for two years but in the end they were here for fifteen full years. During their time as director and associate director of ACOR, they raised nearly a million dollars a year for endowments, the building, fellowships, and numerous archaeological projects. During this long tenure and because of those funds, ACOR was able to host around 400 fellows involved in diverse disciplines including Jordanians who have studied in Jordan and abroad. Many of the graduate students who had the chance to be at ACOR have gone on to positions at major institutions. Indeed there is a strong "ACOR" presence at such academic conferences as MESA (Middle East Studies Association) and ASOR (American Schools of Oriental Research). Also, during this period, ACOR supported over 160 archaeological field projects. The impact of those projects continues to be felt, and some 5000 people are estimated to have been involved one way or another.

Pierre has enriched ACOR in many ways. The current building was opened officially in July 1986 during the directorship of David W. McCreery. With much hard work and effort, the mortgage was paid off a few years after Pierre's arrival. He had the vision to enlarge the building in 2005 with nine new rooms and four apartments so that there are now 20 rooms and six apartments for visiting fellows and scholars. Pierre was a master of making the most of all we have and often managed to host 70 people all at once. In his last year, he organized a more formal archaeological museum and ethnographic section which enhance the building. The ACOR library has grown steadily over the years. When the Bikais arrived there were 5000 volumes and now there are more than 35,000 catalogued items.

ACOR implemented many projects for Jordan under the Bikais; such as the Great Temple of Amman, the Madaba Archaeological Park, and JADIS (*Jordan Antiquities Database Information System*), a tool that has proven invaluable for research in Jordan. These projects were initiated by Bert de Vries, ACOR director from 1988 to 1991.

Other ACOR assisted projects undertaken by Pierre were the Ayyubid Tower in Amman and the presentation of Aqaba/Ayla. Pierre's own projects included excavation and restoration of the Byzantine church at Darat al Funun on Jabal Al-Weibdeh in Amman and the excavation of Khirbet Salameh, located immediately in front of ACOR. The latter served as the site for a field school directed by Pierre and co-sponsored with the University of Jordan. Over the years there have been many formal as well as informal training sessions for Jordanian students conducted by the Bikais.



Pierre on the Amman Citadel in 1996

In terms of Petra, during their tenure ACOR has also played a significant role unearthing and documenting major buildings and structures—the Petra Church, Roman Street, Petra Map Project, the Ridge Church, and Blue Chapel. A whole new area for tourism in Petra has been opened up by virtue of this work.

The Bikais' commitment to conservation and preservation has been manifest in all of their activities in Jordan. The Madaba Archaeological Park has enhanced the tourism potential for that city and provided the necessary protection of the