

Gaza at the crossroads of civilisations

Gaza à la croisée des civilisations

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GAZA'S FUTURE ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM: A MAJOR PALESTINIAN PROJECT

Although the Gaza Strip has been the site of many archaeological digs since the 19th century, there has been no museum to this day allowing the general public to view the findings. As a consequence, tens of thousands of unearthed objects remain unknown.

Accordingly, the exhibition *Gaza at the crossroads of civilisations* was conceived as part of a major UNESCO-sponsored project: the creation of an archaeological museum on the actual excavation site of the antique port of Anthedon, now known as Blakhiah, to the north of Gaza City. To a certain extent, the Geneva display can be considered a precursor to the museum.

The Palestinian National Museum of Archaeology will be funded by the citizens of Palestine with scientific and technical support, through the provision of training internships, from the City of Geneva's Cultural Affairs Department and Musées d'Art et d'Histoire. Other museums, such as the Benaki Museum in Athens, are also potential partners in this training programme, notably with regard to art restoration work.

A letter of intent that clearly established the framework and conditions for this collaboration was signed on 10 December 2005 in Bethlehem by Ziad al-Bandak, the Palestinian Minister of Tourism and Antiquities at the time, and Patrice Mugny, Executive Councillor in charge of the Cultural Affairs Department of the City of Geneva.

The project of creating the Palestinian National Museum of Archaeology was ratified by a decree signed by President Mahmoud Abbas on 28 May 2006. It is overseen by a Foundation Board comprised of 11 members under the presidency of Ziad Abu Amer, Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Palestinian National Authority cabinet. The Museum will be funded by the foundation and by UNESCO. The initial launch of the museum project is financed by UNDP (United Nations Development Programme).

The Palestinian National Museum of Archaeology will be built on a plot of 18 hectares at Blakhiah, near the Shatti refugee camp. Situated on an archaeological site, the historical vestiges will naturally be taken into consideration and be presented in the best possible manner.

The archaeological specimens to be shown originate mainly from excavations undertaken in the Gaza Strip by the Palestinian Department of Antiquities and the French Biblical and Archaeological School of Jerusalem. Also on display will be items from private Gaza collections, in particular that belonging to Jawdat Khoudary from which a selection of pieces will also be presented in the Geneva exhibit.

The museum building should include, in addition to the exhibition rooms, a library, a multimedia room, restoration work spaces, storage rooms, workshop areas (for interior designers and decorators, locksmiths, cabinet-makers, etc.), as well as office spaces for conservation or public reception purposes. The edifice should have a surface area of some 20,000 square metres and is scheduled to be completed in 2016. Its cost is estimated at US \$30,000,000.