



Crossroads and Contexts: Interviews on Archaeology in Gaza
by *Fareed Armaly with Marc-André Haldimann, Jawdat Khoudary,
Jean-Baptiste Humbert, and Moain Sadeq*

When the average newspaper reader thinks of Gaza, the images that come to mind are often of turmoil, violence, closure, poverty, and despair. There is another face of Gaza, however, that is seldom evoked—one that bespeaks an ancient heritage, archaeological wealth, openness to the world, and a determination to preserve the past. This is the face of Gaza put forward in a major archaeological exhibition entitled “Gaza—at the Crossroads of Civilizations,” recently held at the Musée d’Art et d’Histoire in the City of Geneva. Though largely uncovered by the international press (except by the Francophone media), the exhibition nonetheless has an importance well beyond its five-month run, because it represents only the first part of a unique, long-term project that could make a real difference for Gaza’s future.

On display in Geneva were more than five hundred Pharaonic, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Phoenician, Assyrian, Persian, Hellenic, Roman, Byzantine, and Islamic objects. The artifacts are remarkable in themselves; more remarkable, however, is the fact that they were all unearthed in the last two decades in the tiny, beleaguered territory of the Gaza Strip. Unlike Iraq—that other contemporary metaphor for violence and strife—Gaza has never been associated in the public mind with either archaeology or an ancient past. As a result, the dissonance between the wonderful vestiges of the successive cultures that left their mark and the territory’s current status in world consciousness as a symbol of hopelessness gave the exhibition particular poignancy. Gaza—again in contrast to Iraq—was not a seat of empires but a crossroads; the character of this once-open land was formed by civilizations passing through this pivotal link on the major sea and land routes between Asia, Africa, and Europe. These transitions and cultural linkages were the emphasis of the exhibition, lending both historical depth and perspectives on contemporary Gaza.

Unlike most exhibitions, the Gaza archaeological exhibition in Geneva—which ran from 23 April to 7 October 2007—was not a “one-shot deal.” Rather than representing an endpoint, the exhibition marked a beginning, the first stage of a multilayered cultural project “designed to safeguard world heritage in the Gaza Strip and ensure its sustainable development,” as the exhibition’s press release states, through the establishment in the territory of an archaeological museum. Under the patronage of UNESCO, the project represents a partnership between the Palestinians and a Swiss coalition made up of the City of Geneva’s Museum Division, the Canton of Geneva, and the Swiss Confederation, with the Musée d’Art et d’Histoire taking the lead on the Swiss side. The Swiss will provide the scientific and

technical support necessary for the museum's establishment and will begin long-term training of Palestinian museum personnel in Geneva's various museums as soon as the situation in Gaza permits. The target date for startup of the Gaza museum is 2017. Already the institution has a legal existence, its mandate and charter having been finalized by the Palestinian Authority (PA). Its board of directors is also in place.

The future museum will be situated at one of Gaza's most important archaeological excavations—the ancient port discovered at Gaza-Blakhiya just over a decade ago. This location will facilitate ongoing archaeological fieldwork, secure storage for the archaeological finds, and enhance the museum's educational and training role. It will also result in the enlargement of the protected archaeological zone in Gaza, for the choice of site also relates to contemporary realities: Directly adjacent is the Shati' refugee camp, heightening the pressures of construction, while the excavation's proximity to the Mediterranean shore makes it vulnerable to erosion from the sea and looting by divers.

The Geneva exhibition can be seen as the first concrete expression of the newly chartered Gaza archaeological museum. Indeed, the planned museum was symbolically embedded in the exhibition's very core: A large model reconstruction of the antique harbor layout in its Blakhiya setting formed the centerpiece of the small central gallery connecting the Geneva museum's two large exhibition halls where the Gaza artifacts were laid out in more or less chronological sequence. The model's placement at the center of the exhibition helped underline the understanding that what was on display in Geneva was the core collection of the future Gaza museum. Thus, although the physical museum in Gaza is yet to be built, the Geneva exhibition represented a process already underway—as if the visitor were walking through two institutions at once, the Geneva museum and the Gaza museum.

The objects displayed in Geneva come in almost equal measure from two different collections brought together for the first time: the "public" collection of the PA Department of Antiquities and the private collection of Gaza businessman Jawdat Khoudary. Aptly enough, the two collections represent the two distinct kinds of "collecting" that have always characterized archaeological research: formal, professionally supervised excavations generally under the auspices of an institution, and the unsupervised extraction of archaeological material within the context of private initiatives (whether undertaken for preservation or profit).

The tension between the two types of collection forms a backdrop to the exhibition and sets in motion the dynamic not only for the exhibition itself but for the future museum. Here again, the partnership with Geneva, particularly the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, has played a key role. In addition to mediating an international dialogue aimed at creating a strong long-term institutional relationship with Gaza, the museum took charge of cataloguing the Khoudary collection and initiating the process to secure official international recognition, through UNESCO, of both the antique harbor museum site and of the Khoudary collection, making the latter accessible to researchers. The museum exhibition, with its handsome academic

catalogue[+] containing photographs of the hundreds of artifacts on display, can thus be understood as part of the sequence of steps in a process of legitimization and accountability.

The vulnerability of archaeology in Gaza—which the future museum is meant to reduce—is well illustrated by the spiraling events that have taken place since the exhibition's opening and, indeed, since its planning began in spring 2005. As a result of the deteriorating political conditions, it was decided that the objects displayed in Geneva could not for the time being be repatriated. Instead, until such time as circumstances permit, the labeled objects will remain in storage, ready to go on tour if agreement is reached with one or more appropriate venues. Discussions to this end are currently underway.

As a contributor to the Geneva exhibition, I had the opportunity during the course of its two-year development to reflect on the various vantage points that the project brought together. I wanted to fix these in dialogue, in the form of interviews with the persons representing these vantage points, who, taken together, reflect a compass for archaeology itself: museum curator, private collector, field archaeologist, and governmental antiquities department administrator. More specifically, my four interviews were with the Swiss curator Marc-André Haldimann, head of the Geneva museum's archaeology department and initiator of the Gaza project; the Palestinian private collector Jawdat Khoudary, a businessman with a passion for archaeology whose works comprised half the exhibition; the French field archaeologist Jean-Baptiste Humbert, a professor at the *École Biblique et Archéologique Française de Jérusalem* who has led excavations in Gaza on behalf of the PA since 1994; and the Palestinian administrator-archaeologist Moain Sadeq, head of the Gaza branch of the PA Department of Antiquities since its establishment.

The interviews also offer what amounts to the only in-depth English-language account of the exhibition/museum project that exists to date. They were conducted over more than a year, on three continents, reflecting the difficulties of mounting an exhibition in a situation of turmoil, war, and volatility. The four interlocking interviews, sometimes evoking the connections among the four interviewees, inevitably contain some overlap, though from differing perspectives and with different emphases. Together the interviews raise—again from differing perspectives—a number of the issues facing archaeology today, not only in Gaza, but in all places where the struggle for survival is a prominent feature of the landscape. Such issues include the pressures of urbanization, the tension between the needs of development and the mandate to preserve the past, the clash of private interests with public patrimony, the repercussions of poverty and the difficulties of raising public awareness in situations of economic deprivation, the competition of priorities in the face of scarce resources, and the need to settle for the feasible at the expense of the desirable (as manifested, for instance, in the need to forgo established methods of archaeology in favor of necessity-driven salvage methods).

Traditionally, the establishment of national archaeological museums, particularly in the West, belongs to earlier epochs, reflecting part

educational Zeitgeist and part promotion of a perceived nation-identity and a certain view of the history of civilization, indeed of empire. The establishment of an archaeological museum in Gaza can be said to embody another perspective, one conceived in an atmosphere not of self-celebration but of occupation, of history suppressed, of harbors and borders closed, of movement curtailed. What attracted the record number of attendees of the Gaza exhibition at Geneva's Musée d'Art et d'Histoire was not just the opportunity to see interesting artifacts from an entirely unexpected place, but an entirely novel discourse. Although the exhibition (and its catalogue) presented a narrative of Gaza's past, the inescapable subtext was Gaza's present. In fact, the Gaza museum project can be viewed as being all about the present, reflecting a society's belief in history and education, the desire for membership in global institutional frameworks, and the chance for exchange. In the current circumstances of closure and despair, the fact that the project is going forward at all reflects perhaps more than anything the tenacity of the imagination, the endurance of qualities and aspirations that connect today's Gaza to the cultures and civilizations upon which it was built. It is these qualities and perspectives that are so sadly lacking in the representations of Gaza and its people found in the mainstream press.

Marc-André Haldimann, Museum Curator

Marc-André Haldimann, head of the archaeology department of the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire of Geneva, was the curator of the Gaza exhibition in collaboration with his colleague, Mariella Martiniani-Reber, head of the museum's department of applied arts. Haldimann played a leading role in the entire project, from conceptualization to exhibition design to negotiations with diverse parties in laying the ground for the eventual Gaza museum. Through him I had the opportunity to observe the processes "backstage," in development meetings, the arrangement of artifacts, catalogue production, and so forth. Mounting an international exhibition is always fraught with complicated logistics and uncertainties, but in this case, the habitual stresses were greatly magnified by sudden travel prohibitions, closures, bombings, and military incursions, to the point where the holding of the exhibition sometimes seemed in doubt. Through all the tensions, Haldimann made time for the background discussions that provided the deeper context for Gaza's archaeology, connecting the historical, civilizational, and societal levels. I was in touch with him frequently throughout the two-year planning and realization phase, but the formal interview, below, took place on 27 January 2007.

Armaly: This important exhibition of Gaza archaeology is entirely the initiative of the Museum of Art and History of the City of Geneva—in fact, largely your own personal initiative. How did the venture begin, and how did Geneva get involved?

Haldimann: In a sense, our involvement, or at least our particular interest in Gaza, goes back to 1980, when excavations under the Cathedral of Geneva turned up the remains of two wine amphoras from Gaza. Geneva was a thriving town between the fourth and the seventh centuries a.d., and the old city is very rich archaeologically, with late Celtic, early and late Roman,

and early Medieval layers. With the discovery of those wine amphoras, you have proof of a Gaza-Geneva commercial link dating at the very least to a.d. 457. As to why amphoras from Gaza would be found under the cathedral of Geneva, the explanation is to be found in a text by Grégoire de Tours, who wrote in the sixth century a.d. that the best wine for celebrating the Mass is the wine of Gaza, because it comes from the Holy Land, and that all bishops should endeavor to procure it. I had the luck to be present at that discovery as a young archaeological excavator at the age of 21. So for me, personally, the special connection to Gaza also began then. As you know, one of those two amphoras will be the opening object of the actual exhibition.

Armaly: What about the more immediate trigger of the exhibition? Gaza archaeology doesn't seem obvious as the subject of an exhibition.

Haldimann: It was through Jean-Baptiste Humbert, who has been leading excavations in Gaza with the PA Antiquities Department for over a decade. But that connection, too, goes back a ways, to 1988 in Jordan—again one of those coincidences that leads to unexpected outcomes. I was part of an excavation of an Umayyad palace that had collapsed during an earthquake, and at the same time, Jean-Baptiste was excavating a late Byzantine convent destroyed in a fire—in other words, two examples of archaeological material trapped by a sudden catastrophe. So with that connection, and both working on the period where late Byzantine blends into early Islamic, we developed an excellent professional relationship. In 1990 we went our separate ways, but when we met up again in 2004 and discussed his work in Gaza, I became very interested and wanted to see for myself. There was a lot of fighting that year in Gaza, so there were no excavations, but the following year my colleague Mariella Martiniani-Reber and I got authorization to go for an exploratory mission. We arrived in the evening of 24 April 2005, and in less than twenty-four hours we knew we simply had to do an exhibition.

Armaly: What made you decide so quickly?

Haldimann: Certainly the whole experience of coming into Gaza City at dusk, just as an almost-full moon was rising, was very exciting—the crowds of neatly dressed children coming home from school, the densely chaotic traffic, the calls to prayer, the sea breeze, the surf washing up on the beach. The only reminders of Gaza's very particular situation were the occasional explosions in the distance, and also perhaps a kind of vague sense of Israeli encirclement.

But what's relevant for us here is that from early the next morning we were plunged into particularly fascinating professional discoveries, as Jean-Baptiste guided us through the various layers of excavations of the ancient port of Blakhiya, wedged between the Shati' refugee camp and the sea. It's difficult to convey the absolutely stunning impression of the site itself, this ancient harbor being dug out of the sand, opening onto the vastness of the Mediterranean, conjuring up images of ancient ships and trade routes to Europe. Already that first morning confirmed the fantastic archaeological potential of the Gaza Strip.

All this was rich enough, but after lunch on that first full day, Jean-Baptiste casually suggested that we visit “a garden with a few antiquities” belonging to a local contractor in Gaza City. With such low-key remarks, and driving through the dusty, debris-encumbered streets of Gaza, we were totally unprepared for what we found. Suddenly, passing through a simple metal gate in a long wall, you’re in this marvelous garden with all these large architectural elements, from a Phoenician sarcophagus to a profusion of columns, capitals, statues or fragments of statues, all against the background of lush foliage. You’re just stunned—you forget where you are. And then there is this progression to greater intimacy as you move from the outside to the inner garden and then the house itself, where the collection is displayed—in all, some 3,000 objects from the second millennium b.c. to the Ottoman period. It was an adrenaline-laden few hours, like discovering uncharted sources, with the sense that every piece is awaiting your identification. As we were being led by our host, Jawdat Khoudary, through this archaeological Eden, the broad lines of the museum project very quickly took shape in our minds.

Armaly: What happened then?

Haldimann: When Mariella and I returned to Geneva, we reported that we had found pure gold. We put together a draft for a project for a major exhibition at the Geneva museum that would bring together under one roof the fascinating material excavated by our Palestinian and French colleagues and the incredible private collection of Jawdat Khoudary. Almost immediately the project became far more ambitious, and we began to see the two collections together as the basis of a wonderful archaeological museum in Gaza that could be right at the Blakhiya excavations. So we expanded the project to include technical and planning support for the establishment of such a museum, as well as a training component for Palestinian staff in our museums in Geneva.

We did a lot of heavy lobbying, but the project actually came together very quickly as these things go. The project was accepted by our director, and the mayor of Geneva liked it. Meanwhile the Swiss ambassador to UNESCO heard about it and asked to see the approved draft, and his response was: “Fantastic! I will get you patronage.” By early September of that same year—2005—we had the signature of the UNESCO secretary-general approving UNESCO’s patronage. In December we returned to Gaza with the director of our museum and the head of cultural affairs for the City of Geneva and met with Abu Mazen [PA President Mahmud Abbas] and closed the deal. Needless to say, during that first visit months earlier in April, already envisioning the possibilities of an exhibition and a larger museum project, we had tentatively sounded out the PA and Jawdat, and got a green light from both, and were in touch with both parties all along. . .

Armaly: From the standpoint of Geneva, was there a political dimension here—I mean, a connection between the turmoil in Gaza and plans to hold exhibition?

Haldimann: Absolutely. From the very beginning. If you do an exhibition, you are talking about communication, information, the image of a place. By

going this way, we hoped to offer another way of looking at the Gaza Strip, to show that it's not only a place of war, but also a place of civilizations on many layers. Another consideration, in terms of preserving Gaza's archaeological wealth, was that such an exhibition would be a first concrete step to ensuring a proper cultural heritage working sequence.

Armaly: From the way you tell the story, it would seem that the discovery of Jawdat's collection was a catalyst.

Haldimann: Yes, because the PA collection is about objects that have been excavated—they have a history, context, and scientifically run the full range of what can be extracted from the successive layers. The material speaks of daily life, of economics and trade routes, of flourishing and dire periods. But basically they are fragmentary objects. What Jawdat mostly has are relatively complete objects, because those are the ones that bring the high prices, and the people who extract objects to sell aren't going to be picking up shards. So in this respect, Jawdat's collection reflects the PA collection, but on a [museum-quality] level of completeness.

Armaly: Tell us something about the exhibition's concept of "Gaza at the Crossroads of Civilizations."

Haldimann: Gaza is situated on the only land route between Asia and Africa, so it's a theme that suggests itself. It's the last important water point before the Sinai desert separating Gaza from Egypt and the Nile Valley, so its strategic role is obvious, both for the Egyptians in the south and conquerors from the north. The first mention of Gaza in the official Pharaonic archives notes its conquest by Thutmose III on 25 April 1468 b.c., but it turns out that the Egyptians were there a lot earlier. This was proved by the excavations of the British Egyptologist Sir Flinders Petrie, who excavated during the British Mandate period at Tal al-Ajjul, a huge Pharaonic site 5 kilometers south of Gaza City with palatial installations, a main plaza, roads, a range of buildings and storehouses, and a huge necropolis. Petrie's excavations showed that the Egyptian presence went back to the third millennium b.c.—basically, that Egypt was at home in Gaza until the end of the second millennium b.c. In effect, Gaza was Egypt's northern border. More recently, Jean-Baptiste's excavations at Tal al-Sakan, about 1.5 kilometers from Tal al-Ajjul, uncovered the remains of an even older Egyptian stronghold dating to the middle of the fourth millennium b.c.

That's from Egypt's side. But the land route through Gaza was also one of the main axes for all the conquerors from Mesopotamia trying to invade Egypt. The Assyrians overran Gaza in 734 b.c. and made it the southern border of their empire. And a few centuries later, in 539 b.c., Cyrus the Great of Persia put the whole of Egypt as far as Libya under his rule—it's from his name that the antique name of Libya, Cyrenaica, derives.

So that's the north-south link. But where Gaza has a very special position is on the east-west link, because from the fourth millennium b.c. onwards it was the head of all the caravan routes linking the Arabian Peninsula and the Horn of Africa via the Red Sea to the Mediterranean. The Arab

populations of Gaza and the peninsula organized themselves on a major trade route—the incense road—for transporting precious perfumes and spices from Arabia to Gaza and from there to various points around the Mediterranean basin. All these civilizations interacted with the local population, bringing sometimes Egyptian influences, sometimes Persian or Assyrian influences. The melting effect was achieved through this caravan trade, and all this against a very strong Arab background. Because obviously as each conqueror's armies swept through, the population didn't change, just the administrations.

Armaly: You mention Sir Flinders Petrie's excavations. What happened since then, archaeologically speaking?

Haldimann: [Petrie's] explorations were the first to use modern techniques, and he made Gaza a front-runner for archaeological explorations in the whole area. He was the one who definitively established the Egyptian presence in Gaza—before him, it wasn't clear. His work was interrupted by the outbreak of World War II, and after that nothing happened until the Israeli occupation in 1967. The Israelis, as is well known, have always paid a lot of attention to archaeology and excavated in all the areas they occupied. But this was done on a very—let us say—political level, because the idea was to find traces of the Jewish people for purposes of legitimization. Of course this goal is by no means shared by all Israeli archaeologists, and since the 1980s there has been a lot of bold challenging and controversy within the Israeli archaeological establishment. But in the 1960s and 1970s, Moshe Dayan's crews just swept through the area.

Among other things, the Israelis excavated a synagogue in downtown Gaza, dated fifth century a.d., and a major harbor at Tal Raqaysh about 18 kilometers south of Gaza on the sea, apparently in search of biblical traces. Their most important excavation, at Dayr al-Balah close to Tal al-Ajjul, was accidental or unplanned. This was an area of new Israeli settlements. During the period when the Israelis were building the greenhouses and pumping buildings, suddenly these clay sarcophagi with human figures began turning up on the Israeli market. This of course triggered the interest of the authorities, and very soon a major excavation was launched that continued from 1972 to 1987. Among the discoveries were an Egyptian fort from about 1400 and 1200 b.c. and an astonishing necropolis where some fifty clay sarcophagi adorned with human figures were excavated. What is fascinating about these is that they showed Gaza to be at the midpoint between the traditional Egyptian sarcophagus and burial type on the one hand, and the Phoenician interpretation we know from Byblos and Tyre on the other. So once again, we have Gaza as a melting or transitional point between two civilizations. Unfortunately those fifty sarcophagi, unique to the area, were taken to Israel, where they are on display at the archaeological museum.

Armaly: Was there ever any attempt to recover them?

Haldimann: Not to my knowledge, not really. I understand that under the Oslo accords there was an agreement to try to settle the issue of the more

than 30,000 objects of Palestinian cultural heritage then known to be in Israel. Most of these would be in what was the only archaeological museum in Palestine before 1967, what is now the Rockefeller Museum in East Jerusalem. That was one of the first places the Israelis confiscated when they occupied the city in June 1967. Since Oslo there has been no movement in the direction of solving this problem. In fact, rather in the opposite direction, as can be seen from that episode in spring 2002, when the Israeli army loaded this huge Byzantine mosaic that had been excavated next to the Church of the Nativity onto trucks and shipped it off somewhere in Israel.

But getting back to your question about Gaza's archaeological history after Petrie. The Israelis didn't do much there after the first intifada broke out in the late 1980s. After the Oslo agreement and the creation of the Palestinian Authority, the Palestinians set up a department of antiquities. That's when Jean-Baptiste came to Gaza to work with them. A lot of their work came out of emergency excavations—after Oslo there was a huge building spree that resulted in a lot of destruction on the still-extant archaeological tissue. The site I mentioned at Tal al-Sakan, the Pharaonic stronghold that Jean-Baptiste and the PA excavated and that is now the oldest known settlement in Gaza, dating to the fourth millennium b.c., was the result of a salvage operation triggered by construction. Other excavations that began that way are the huge sixth-century monastery of St. Hilarion in Nussayrat, which was the center of monastic life not only in Gaza but for the whole region, next in importance to Syria's St. Simeon. There was also the Byzantine church at Jabaliya.

The largest of the excavations (which again started as an emergency operation) is still going on—the site of the future museum, next to the Palestinian refugee camp at Shati'. This is the ancient harbor at Blakhiya (Anthedon in Greek), which was perhaps begun by the Egyptians but was certainly completed as a walled city during the Assyrian period around 700 b.c. One of the interesting things brought to light in the methodical explorations at Blakhiya over the past decade is Gaza's place as a major point of merger/melting between the Arab caravans and the Greek merchants—in other words, a place where the meeting between East and West played itself out. For example, you can clearly see how the houses of the wealthy are laid out in the traditional manner, but how at the level of about the fifth century b.c. they begin to be ornamented in the Greek manner—the form was traditional, but the ornamentation was “foreign.” In other words, the Gazans wanted to live in their traditional structures but wanted the most beautiful available ornamentation, which was Greek at the time. Similarly, when a city wall and its entrance gate from a later (Roman) period was unearthed, it became clear that the overall harbor layout had been rearranged to fit into the Greek and Roman architecture, apparently—in keeping with the desire of the Gazans—as an expression of modernity. We find the same phenomenon at Petra, the capital of the Nabateans, who organized the caravan trade between the Arabian Peninsula and the coast.

These are all elements that came out of the excavations in the last decade,

deepening our knowledge of Gaza through time and giving a sense of Gaza's identity. This is in contrast to the Israeli excavations of the 1970s and 1980s, where all the material was removed, leaving us with the bare-boned plans but nothing to tell us about who lived there and how. Certainly the Israeli excavations were carried out in a professional manner, but in this day and age, to ship the material away is not so acceptable. In any case, thanks to the work of Jean-Baptiste and Moain Sadeq [of the PA Department of Antiquities], we now have an important collection of artifacts—pottery, important discoveries concerning coins, architectural fragments, and so on—kept in Gaza that provide a scientific backbone. In fact, by 1999, enough interesting material had been excavated to organize an exhibition, which was held in Paris in July 2000 at the Institut du Monde Arabe. Moain and Jean-Baptiste selected 221 objects, which were freighted through Haifa to Paris.

Armaly: Aren't these objects part of your exhibition as well?

Haldimann: Yes. In fact those objects never left France until they were shipped to us here in Geneva several months ago for our exhibition. While the Paris exhibition was touring other French cities, the second intifada broke out in Palestine, and Laila Shaheed, who was then the PA ambassador in Paris, organized the collection's safekeeping in a Paris storehouse. Her aim was to preserve the Palestinian antiquities from possible seizure by the Israeli army. As it turned out, her prudent attitude proved to be well justified, as the episode in Bethlehem in spring 2002 I mentioned clearly demonstrated that no cultural heritage is safe.

Armaly: Besides these items from the PA collection, the other major component of the Geneva exhibition is from the Khoudary collection. But that collection has been the subject of some controversy—the private collector in modern times.

Haldimann: Well, the Khoudary case has a number of special elements. As I've already mentioned, much of the excavation in Gaza has been emergency or salvage excavation. And a paramount point about Khoudary's collection is that it was started at a time when the Israelis were really quite intensively removing artifacts from Gaza. One could say that the driving force behind his collection has been to preserve Gaza's past for posterity.

It's important to mention that once the official Palestinian antiquities department was established, Jawdat not only did not work at cross purposes with them, but put his bulldozer shovels at their disposal when needed. The other thing that should be mentioned is that in his contracting business, where the discovery of archaeological artifacts is rarely able to bring about work stoppages if the land is privately owned, he made every effort to save what he could. Legally, of course, all underground archaeological material, like petroleum, belongs to the state, but the law in these matters doesn't mean much in Gaza. In such circumstances, Khoudary made his trucks and bulldozer operators first dump their loads in an established place so they could be sifted for any remaining fragments of columns, capitals, and so on. This is important because you have these

artifacts and you know what building site they come from, so they are not entirely without context. Similarly, when he buys artifacts, he tries to find out where they were found. In these ways, and against the background of a building spree that overwhelmed everyone, he was actually able to supplement what the antiquities department was not able to take charge of in those early years. And now this knowledge is available.

It is very important for us, as museum people, to be clear about the legal and ethical dimensions of this collection. The ethical aspects are what is most important to us, and these have been fully met. One result of the exhibition and museum project has been the formalization of an agreement between Jawdat and the Department of Antiquities whereby his collection in its entirety must remain in Gaza. No parts can ever be sold or traded; free access of his collection to all scientific work is assured. This includes the full cataloguing and official documentation of all items in the collection. In this way, he conforms to the laws established by the PA, and his collection is now legalized. His collection is known, open, its contents accounted for, and will be published in [a] catalogue. Needless to say, all the items being shipped to Geneva have been fully documented, officially inscribed in the cultural heritage list.

Armaly: To what extent is archaeological looting in Gaza still a problem?

Haldimann: Unfortunately, archaeological trafficking continues, with looting and selling abroad, be it through Israel or Egypt. These are ongoing processes borne of poverty, where survival is the primary preoccupation, and anything that brings in a few shekels is seen in that light. In some areas, what's happening is not, strictly speaking, "looting." For example, at the harbor site being excavated by Jean-Baptiste, the sea washes things away on a daily basis. According to tides and storms and the clarity of the water, many items can be found in the sea by the fishermen, who know when the time is right to have a dive. So a lot of artifacts are not the result of active digging with shovels or physical destruction of the land site, but of underwater diving.

We are not in the position to judge the people who commit these acts, because they are living in extreme hardship conditions. Our hope is that by presenting the depth of the history that lies under Gaza, the discoveries will little by little change people's way of looking at archaeology, and it won't be seen as a malediction if a rich discovery is made on your land and the authorities stop your building activities. We hope that the museum will help valorize this past and thereby stop the bleeding of the archaeological heritage that remains buried under the sands. But of course it's a long process—maybe generations, and requires economic change as well. We went through a similar process in Europe after the war.

Armaly: Museum archaeological exhibitions structure their narratives through the presentation of artifacts. Can you tell us something about the design or arrangement of this Gaza exhibition that you curated? For example, the entrance and exit are both marked by specific, carefully chosen artifacts. You already mentioned the wine amphora attesting to the fifteen-hundred-year-old Gaza-Geneva trade connection, which opens the

exhibition. But the closing object also is also full of significance.

Haldimann: Yes, the exhibition ends with a Byzantine marble column from Bayt Lahiya, recycled by the British as a fallen officer's grave marker after the third and final Gaza battle against the Ottoman forces in August 1917. The name chiseled onto the column was Lieutenant Fas Lanslow, who was from the Indian subcontinent. The fact that he was a Bengal, a member of the Bengal Lancers, makes it particularly fitting as the closing piece of the exhibition, as it evokes the whole issue of colonialism and the policies that laid the ground for so many of the disasters that continue to plague the Middle East. After the war, the bodies of those who fought in the British forces were unearthed and brought back to a central cemetery belonging to the British Commission, so the old markers were removed, which is how the column became free again.

As for the design of the exhibition, and adapting ourselves to our building here, we developed a concept based on two huge halls where the Khoudary and PA Department of Antiquities collections are blended together as the Palestinian cultural heritage of Gaza. In the first hall is displayed, in more or less chronological order, the older pieces—Egyptian, Bronze, Iron, Persian, and Roman periods. The second shows the later pieces, from the Byzantine and Islamic periods. Between these two large halls is a central “knot,” a smaller connecting room that ties all these together. And here we have a general overview of the place where the museum could be built, a model of the whole antique harbor of Blakhiya, or Anthedon, constructed according to the evidence provided by the excavations, to a scale of 1: 300. The model gives a general sense of the vastness of this harbor and some hints as to how the whole harbor city was laid out. It also gives the visiting public an idea as to where the museum could be built.

Armaly: How would you summarize the aims of your project?

Haldimann: Quite simply, there are three. First, to publicize the cultural heritage of Gaza by means of a public exhibition, which is now to be done. Second, to have Palestinian colleagues in our museums in the City of Geneva as a way of helping develop the staff for the future museum in Gaza. And third—which will obviously be the longest part—to support the construction of the archaeological museum in Gaza. In these latter regards, I should make our position very clear. The City of Geneva has absolutely no intention to tell our Palestinian colleagues and the planned museum's board of trustees how things should be done. Obviously, all the decisions concerning layout and design and all other aspects are entirely theirs. We are there to help when needed as advisors, as technical support from the City of Geneva. This is a Palestinian project, run by Palestinians as their vision of their past and the best way to present it, and the City of Geneva is proud to provide the technical support.

Jawdat Khoudary, Private Collector

Jawdat Khoudary is a prominent Gaza businessman who amassed a major archaeological collection (a selection of which forms the core of the Geneva

exhibition) over the past twenty years, largely through the contracting/construction component of his business. A plain-speaking man, warm and unpretentious, Khoudary projects a businessman's no-nonsense bottom-line pragmatism that initially seems at odds with his long-cherished (and, until recently, seemingly unrealizable) dream of preserving Gaza's rich past in an archaeological museum. A recurring theme throughout our conversations—one which seems to have relevance both for Khoudary's business choices and his passion for collecting—is his devotion to Gaza and his passionate attachment to his roots, a major manifestation of which is archaeology.

Our discussions unfolded on three continents, reflecting Khoudary's travels and the evolving political situation. I first interviewed him in Washington, D.C., where he was on a business trip in late March 2006, several months after the plans for the Gaza archaeological exhibition had been finalized. When I next interviewed him, in Geneva on 16 December 2006, Gaza had been under siege for over six months following the kidnapping of the Israeli soldier there in June. As a result, Khoudary had moved his family temporarily to safety in Cairo; most of that second interview was taken up with the impact of the Israeli incursions and the difficulties getting the pieces selected for the Geneva exhibition out of Gaza. Our last meeting, for fact-checking, took place in Cairo, where he and his family were still waiting out the situation. Although his businesses are at a total standstill, with all his workers laid off and part of a main factory destroyed during an Israeli raid, Khoudary and his family moved back to Gaza in July 2007.

Armaly: Objects from your collection make up the core of the archaeological exhibition to be held at the Geneva museum—or at least the objects with the greatest dramatic impact. How did you begin to put it together?

Khoudary: In 1986 a friend of mine started his first construction project, a fishmarket financed by the [United Nations Development Program]. I didn't have a job at the time. I had graduated from the university as a civil engineer three years earlier, in 1983, but hadn't managed to find work. I did have my interests, though, one of them being Palestine's deep roots. Since I was a child, really. My friend's project was on Gaza's seashore, and I knew he would be digging in a very rich archaeological area. So I went to have a look, while at the same time doing something productive.

I ended up spending a lot of time at the site, supervising the shovel operators. Here in Gaza, the digging is very unprofessional. Even if a site is known to be rich in archaeology, the shovel just starts digging, without paying any attention to what may be in the soil, destroying everything in its path. There are about 300 shovels working on a daily basis in Gaza, and there's no way to control and teach each of the operators how to be more professional in excavation. But I did what I could and kept my eyes open for anything that seemed relevant to history.

It was at my friend's site that I found a fantastic example of Islamic glass with an Islamic inscription, which I immediately started to wear around my neck on a chain. In Gaza, that's not very acceptable for a man, but I didn't

care. The coin was very valuable for me, and I was ready to face any comments. And in fact, since that time, my life started to change for the better. That same year I started my own contracting business, from zero, with a partner. I believed that if we could do things right, we would have success. It was important for me that we do this in Gaza, because most of the engineers at the time went to the Gulf; no one wanted to work in Gaza. For me, it was a chance to prove we can achieve success even in difficult circumstances. And we did succeed and made a good reputation. After 20 years, we are the biggest construction company in Palestine. About 70 to 80 percent of USAID projects in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank—water projects, road building, wastewater projects, and so on—are implemented by us.

Armaly: How did your contracting business intersect with your collecting of archaeological pieces?

Khoudary: From the time I started, I made it a condition that [each of] the shovel operators working for me had to be a friend of mine. I instructed them that instead of just working quickly, destroying things or throwing them onto the dump site, they had to pay close attention and bring all the archaeological pieces they spotted to me. Also, through them I would hear about where other operators were digging and what they were finding, to know where there was a rich area to go look. Of course that's not always an indication—sometimes pieces found at a site are from somewhere else, but were loaded onto trucks at another site and taken to dumping areas. So you have to establish with the operators to look carefully into what they are digging. I eventually discovered that all of Gaza is rich in archaeology, period. So my collection started. My shovel operators were bringing me pieces, capitals and vessels, even though they thought I was crazy to want them.

My collection was growing, and it was hard to know where to put the larger pieces. So I brought them home, to my father's place. He was very old and kept saying, "What do I need with all these objects?" He said it was illegal to keep them, that the Israelis were here, and that this would give their army the excuse to come to our house and take everything away. Israel had already taken a lot of artifacts out of Gaza, and he said any general could just show up and take whatever he wanted, without law. I said that this was exactly why we have to take as much as we can. So I started collecting. I am not an archaeologist and never studied history. I'm just a man who cares about archaeology and who is attached to his Arab, Palestinian, and Muslim roots. For me, archaeology is proof of our deep roots in Gaza.

Armaly: Can you tell me about a discovery that really affected you?

Khoudary: Back in 1991 or 1992, a good friend of mine who owns a bulldozer came to tell me that a real treasure was being uncovered in the Nussayrat area. It was a huge site, about 30,000 square meters of sand dunes, private land that was being divided into lots for development and sale. When I went there I couldn't believe my eyes—all these marble capitals, 1m x 1m x 1m. When the bulldozer started to level the land, it began hitting these capitals. The operator knew right away that there were

many artifacts, because already from the beginning it was possible to see that the columns were still in symmetrical placement across the area. And in fact it later turned out they were part of a complete church: the capitals were still on top of their columns, but the whole church, still standing, was now buried deep in the sand. A few months later a huge mosaic floor was revealed.

What happened in the days that followed was a disaster. There were these complete marble columns and capitals, in perfect condition, and hundreds of people struggling to load these huge things onto any vehicle they could find—donkey carts, jeeps, trucks—to take away and sell for something like \$500 each. It was chaos. No one was controlling anything. I was crying—all these pieces! At the time I had limited funds and limited space—this was 200 capitals! Where would I put them, even if I had the money? So I bought what I could, and for sure the other people took the rest and went through Palestinian brokers who sent the pieces to Israeli dealers. I had a good friend in the PLO in Tunis at the time, and I contacted him and told him there is a disaster going on, a new discovery in archaeology and you have to do something. He said don't worry, we will collect all the pieces and put them in a safe place. But nothing happened, and after a week or so the Israelis came and stopped everything and began to excavate themselves and took everything that was left away. The Israeli manager said the church's marble was some of the purest in the world. Nobody knows what exactly they took from the site, but they left the mosaic floor in the ground. It was the peanuts of the whole church—nothing. It would have been possible to have the whole church, intact. I began to get sadder and sadder about the whole subject.

Armaly: Would the situation have been different, had there been archaeological teams working nearby in Nussayrat?

Khoudary: Only if it had been their site. This was private property, and enforcing the law in Gaza is the main problem—for everything, not just for archaeology. Let me tell about a similar situation that happened a few years later, around 1998. A friend of mine who had helped me and who I owed some favors had to do an excavation near the beach and I said I would bring my Caterpillar shovel and do the work for nothing. About a meter and a half down we discovered mosaics—complete mosaics, no scratches. I was so happy! Then my friend came and told me I had to destroy them. He said if word got out, the Palestinian Authority would come and see them and then expropriate the land.

Armaly: Is that what happens when there is an archaeological discovery on private land?

Khoudary: Yes. The problem is that it is done without fair compensation. I pleaded with my friend to give me twenty-four hours to clean the mosaics and at least take some photos, but he said no. We had a big argument, and he told me to take my shovel and leave, and that he would bring another one. So I had to destroy the mosaics myself—by the shovel, can you imagine? This is something that hurts me to this day. I tried to collect it in very small pieces, but it wasn't possible.

Armaly: Clearly there are legal issues here. Under the law, are you allowed to keep this material?

Khoudary: It's a complicated question. Through the Israeli period it was not allowed, and even now it is not allowed, but there is no law and order in the area. Some people say these things I collect are not my property but Palestinian property. My answer is that if I didn't collect it, either it would be destroyed or it would go to Israel. So no one can say I did anything wrong. I spent a lot of time and money to make this collection and to keep it together, not for any gain.

Armaly: Did most of your collection come from your construction sites?

Khoudary: People also bring things to me. The network of people who know I am interested in artifacts has increased over the years, and they come to my house regularly to show me objects. This still continues up to today. It's a lot of money, but I don't want to squeeze them—I pay what I can and I am happy to protect these pieces.

Armaly: You said earlier that you had always been interested in Palestine's ancient past. As a child, did you hunt for artifacts?

Khoudary: No. I lived in Gaza City, where such things aren't evident. The people who lived in Shati' camp, for example, those are the ones who found archaeological objects. But ever since I can remember I liked old things. When I was a kid, old Gaza was really a very lovely place. Narrow streets with houses hundreds of years old. Walking there, you could just smell the history. My father's business was in old Gaza, so I knew those houses very well. Most of them are gone now, destroyed and replaced by ugly buildings. One of the buildings that was saved in the old town was the al-Omari mosque, one of the oldest in all Gaza. It was in very bad repair; in the 1980s and 1990s people didn't know how to maintain such buildings. They would buy ceramic tiles of the kind used in bathrooms and tile the walls with them. I was sad about this mosque and tried to convince people that UNESCO should do something about it, but nobody cared. In 1999, [Saudi] Prince Walid ibn Talal came to Gaza and donated one million dollars to renovate the mosque, and now it's underway.

As for archaeology, I'm not sure when I became conscious of it. I definitely remember—I must have been about seventeen—watching convoys of trucks loaded with marble columns and capitals driving north out from Gaza toward Israel. When I tried to find out what was going on, I was told that people in Israel wanted these things and that our people got good money for them. Later, I heard stories that in the 1960s, when the tile manufacturing industry started in Gaza, the owner of the factory would take marble columns and use them for aggregate for the tiles, as we don't have marble aggregate in Gaza.

Armaly: Obviously, protection of archaeological heritage is a huge issue.

Khoudary: Let me tell you something. In 2002, when the Israelis reoccupied Ramallah militarily and said they were going to do the same in Gaza, I

spent two nights with no sleep. I was so afraid that with this huge collection, the Israelis would come and take it. So I decided to bring an excavator to my garden and to bury all the objects in a big tunnel underground and cover them up again. And that's what I did. I left them in the ground for almost two years.

Armaly: It must have been strange to bury these finds once again, after having excavated them.

Khoudary: Yes, it was strange, but at the same time I was very happy that they were safely underground. And even though I didn't see them, I knew that I was walking on top of them, and that made me happy. It was certainly a lot better than constantly worrying that at any moment the Israelis could come and take everything. Or that these precious objects would be destroyed in military operations. I couldn't risk that. If money goes, I can work to earn more. But if these are gone, I won't have another twenty years to collect them again.

Before we buried these things, we documented everything. All my kids and my wife and myself. We brought the video camera and taped the entire excavation, burying all the objects, just in case we would die—

Armaly: I would love to see that video.

Khoudary: I hope my kids didn't destroy it—you know, tape over it!

Armaly: During the fighting in Gaza, did the tanks get close to your house?

Khoudary: Yes, after Arafat's office was seized. There were at least a few days when the tanks were within 1,500 meters from the house. When things calmed down, and when it seemed there was no chance the army would return, I brought the collection back up.

Of course, being a contractor, I can still move the pieces around to rearrange them in my garden. I've organized my collection to an extent by studying books, but mainly by trial and error. Every six months or so I try to reorganize objects—I bring the crane, some workers and move things around.

Armaly: Actually, tell me something about your home in Gaza, where you have most of your collection.

Khoudary: I inherited the land from my father, 10,000 square meters planted with citrus trees. In 1996, I decided to live there with my family in order to be able to display the collection while also having a nice green area to live in. It was important for me in terms of safety for the collection, but also I wanted to be able to see the artifacts, to live among them. I also knew I needed a place where I would be in a position to invite those people who should be convinced of the possibilities in Gaza for a museum.

Armaly: Did you have a lot of visitors? And in general, how did people react to your collection?

Khoudary: Here in Gaza most people don't take archaeology seriously. A lot of friends and others would see the collection and tell me I was wasting my time. I've had important visitors from the PA, and some of them would joke about my collecting pieces of marble. Even my wife used to think I was wasting my money, though later she became fond of archaeology and is now convinced that we have a mission in our house.

The turning point was when Marc-André came to visit my house in April of 2005 with the French archaeologist Jean-Baptiste Humbert. Marc gave me 100 percent confidence in what I was doing. I could tell from the expression on his face, the way he looked so carefully at every piece, that I had not wasted my time, that I had been right all along. After the decision was made to hold the exhibition, in December 2005, Marc came with the head of the Geneva museum and with the head of cultural affairs for the City of Geneva, to see my collection. They met with Abu Mazen and he gave his support for the project. And then Marc stayed on and spent days cataloging the works in my collection.

Armaly: Now that you've been working with archaeologists, what would you say about the differences in how you see the finds?

Khoudary: There is a big difference! First, my reason for collecting is my belief in my roots. Marc is interested in understanding the history of the place, the details of it—which period, which age, which civilization, et cetera. But for me, the pieces are simply proof of our roots, and that's it. I feel proud at every step to know that these pieces are valuable to our history, that they show that our roots go very deep into the ground.

Even my pieces—there's no way they would see them the way I do. For me the most valuable piece in my life is that glass coin I mentioned. For them it's just an ordinary Islamic glass coin from the Umayyad period, no more, no less. I have my own reasons for being attached to things, like a marble statue that Marc says is either Aphrodite or Hecate, from the Hellenistic or Roman period. I like it because it is beautiful and complete and because it was found by simple divers—for me it points to what pieces we can find in the sea. And another thing I'm attached to is a huge Roman capital just because the scale shows the civilizations we have had here and what can still be found in the ground. Sometimes I think something is unusual, special, and Marc-André says something else. On the other hand, I have a capital from the Nabatean civilization, which for me is not so nice, but Marc says it is one of the masterpieces of my collection.

Armaly: An important element of this entire project is the establishment of a national museum.

Khoudary: Yes, that's been my dream for a long time, to establish a Gaza National Museum that can show our past in a very modern way. I even went to Tunis and told Arafat: Mr. President, we need a national museum, as Gaza is very rich in history. But it wasn't on his agenda. In my opinion, it should be called the Gaza Museum, or the Gaza National Museum. You know why? Just to make it clear that Nablus, Ramallah, Jerusalem, Jenin, and Hebron are not included. This should be about the meaning of Gaza,

and the rest of those museums have to still be established.

Armaly: Once the museum is established, will your collection become part of the foundation?

Khoudary: Not during my lifetime, that is for sure. I cannot imagine life in Gaza without seeing these objects on a daily basis. I tried to emigrate to Canada three times. At the last minute I would cancel the trip, for one reason: In Canada I can find everything, but I cannot find my roots, I will not find the capitals, the columns, the vessels. I cannot live without these roots.

As for what will happen after I am gone, that depends on many factors and the reality in Gaza. If at the time I have to decide I see that there is a Ministry of Culture and Department of Antiquities that I trust will keep the objects in a proper and professional way, I may put something in my will about giving my collection to the museum. If I had to decide today, I would say don't give anything to them yet; keep it with the family until the proper conditions are met. I watch my youngest son telling his friends when they come to the house that he wants to show them an object that is more than 2,000 years old. Just hearing that, I know I can trust him with the collection. I know it is in safe hands if something should happen to me.

Armaly: If you keep the collection in your house, how will the museum build up its collection?

Khoudary: I hope that we will work hard to bring back the stolen pieces from Israel—I don't see why this should not be possible. Most of the museums in the world have pieces from Gaza. We should try to get those pieces too. But most important, the sea is still very rich in archaeology. If we have the museum, then we would have authorized excavations which should be carried out and take the treasures in the sea and send them directly to the museum. People have to be trained to excavate in the sea in a professional way. I believe there are entire towns under the sea. You know, the clarity of the sea is related to the season, and sometimes in December or January you can see everything: marble columns, capitals, the remains of ships, and so on. That's another important reason that the museum should be located at the edge of the sea. For now, we need to work hard to find the proper financing to establish the museum, to convince the Arabs and the international community that it's important. When the museum starts, I will stop collecting.

Armaly: You mentioned a minute ago that building a museum was not on Arafat's agenda. How will it be with a Hamas-led government? Do they have any interest in Gaza's archaeological patrimony?

Khoudary: Let's face it. In a society facing dire poverty, it's not at the top of the agenda either for Fatah or Hamas. This is the problem. They have in their minds agendas they believe are more important than history and archaeology.

Armaly: In your belief, archaeology should be on the agenda.

Khoudary: For sure, but it's complicated. The kids of the next generation need to know about their history, but Gaza people live in very dramatic situations. If we cannot offer a space for the kids to play normally, just a nice space to play, and if we cannot offer them nice streets where they can walk, nice schools where they can learn, and if we cannot offer their fathers decent jobs to earn money—believe me, it's tough to talk to them about history and archaeology. This is what sometimes makes me keep a low profile about this, because I cannot talk to a very poor man about history. Of course what he's concerned about is to feed his family.

16 December 2006

Armaly: We meet now in a very different situation from what was the case at the time of our first interview last spring—even as we speak, tanks are occupying Gaza. But since that time, too, more than three hundred objects from your collection have safely arrived in Geneva for the exhibition next April. Can you describe the sequence of events?

Khoudary: On 21 June 2006, I left Gaza with a small piece of luggage for a short business trip abroad, and then suddenly an Israeli soldier was kidnapped. The Rafah crossing was closed, and Israel started to destroy Gaza. It hurt me to be far from my family, where I could not give them security. I did my best to get them out but didn't succeed. They had to manage on their own. Meanwhile I called my colleagues at the Geneva museum to do what they could to protect a place with archaeological value. Through the Swiss government representative and UNESCO, they alerted the Israeli army that this was an important site. At that time we had already applied for Israeli permission to ship the artifacts to Geneva for the exhibition but had not heard anything back despite Swiss government pressure.

There was intensive bombing going on, and my family was afraid that the pottery would be destroyed. The smaller pieces in the collection, including pottery pieces, had been displayed in cabinets. They took all the items from the cabinets and spread them on the ground in boxes. With all these airstrikes and explosions in the background, and with me directing them over the telephone, they moved these pieces into more than a dozen hiding places. The danger was not only that our house might be bombed directly, but also the impact if a neighbor's house was hit. In fact, a house 100 meters away was hit—four floors just collapsed. Fortunately, our house was not damaged.

We spent some very tough nights. I was contacting friends in the United States to tell them what was happening and after two or three hours I got assurances that our home was not a target. In August, the Rafah border opened for one day, and my family was so lucky. The five kids and their mother spent twelve whole hours—from 8 o'clock in the evening till 8 the next morning—with 120 other passengers just sitting on the bus, not moving, parked at the crossing, waiting for it to open. They didn't even have luggage as there was no space for it, but they wanted to make sure to be able to cross. In the end they succeeded, and I met them in Cairo that evening.

The collection was still in Gaza, of course. We needed a properly qualified professional to supervise the packing. Because of the political situation, Geneva would not allow Marc to travel to Gaza. Jean-Baptiste was at the ?cole Biblique in Jerusalem, and he was willing to come. The French consulate wouldn't take responsibility, so he came at his own personal risk. It was complicated, because 309 pieces were hidden in a dozen different places just to be sure that if something happened we wouldn't lose everything. We spent forty-five days making telephone calls explaining where this box or that box was hidden. Of course it wasn't possible to get out some items, which I had buried again.

When we shipped the boxes to Rafah, the truck transport received a presidential security escort up to the end of the Palestinian side. Then we faced a serious problem, as these crates were too heavy to carry by hand, and according to the agreement negotiated by [U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza] Rice, [we were not] allowed to send an Egyptian truck to the Palestinian side. But thanks to the Egyptian government, which made a lot of efforts with the Israeli side to solve the problem, by the end of the day an Egyptian government truck was permitted to go to the Palestinian side and pick up the crates. So now, everything is in Geneva.

Armaly: Since we last met, I understand that you have signed an agreement with the PA and that you now have a legal status as a collector from the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities. What are the implications of this new legal status?

Khoudary: Realistically, most archaeological finds in Gaza in the present circumstances are going to continue to come from construction sites. Very often the objects wind up in the home of the bulldozer operator. In general, he has three choices: He can keep them in his house, where they will not be properly cared for; he can find a broker, who will sell them to Israel; or he can sell them to me. In my opinion, this is certainly the best option—it is much safer to collect these artifacts in one place, recognized by the PA and the Ministry of Culture and Department of Antiquities.

Armaly: Now you are in Cairo. What are your plans, beyond the exhibition?

Khoudary: Of course, we are waiting for it to be safe to return to our home in Gaza. We are hoping. To live in Palestine, to live in Gaza, you have to keep your hope alive, otherwise there is no way you can live here. You can't plan your own life. We're living with changes and politics and there is only uncertainty. Uncertainty is our life.

It's hard, with so much destruction, over and over again. It's more difficult to rebuild than to build. For example, many years ago we had a very nice factory, and suddenly it burned down. When I built it the first time, it was easy, I was full of hope for the future. But when I rebuilt it, I had the bad memory of what happened to that first building and had the awareness that it might happen again. Just last month the Israeli army destroyed half of our company at the Gaza border. When I first built my company, I was so happy to see every single stone rising in the construction. But now, when I rebuild it, I will remember what happened, and I will know that it can

happen again, that it will just repeat.

Still, we have no choice, and we rebuild. Look at the farmers in Gaza. The Israeli bulldozers regularly come and destroy all their trees. The moment they leave, the farmers come and replant their land. But don't you think it's different the first time one plants, and the hundredth time they do it after the tanks leave?

Jean-Baptiste Humbert, Field Archaeologist

Jean-Baptiste Humbert, a Dominican priest with degrees in theology and archaeology, has been associated with the *École Biblique et Archéologique Française* of Jerusalem as a professor and field archaeologist since 1973 and is widely published in Francophone archaeological publications, including the Geneva exhibition catalogue. I met him in Geneva, where he had come to follow up on the shipment of artifacts from the Khoudary collection which had arrived safely from Gaza; Humbert was the one who had supervised the organization and packing of the objects while the Israeli army was besieging Gaza, since Khoudary himself, in Egypt at the time, was unable to return home. Humbert gives the impression of a man who finds greater satisfaction on the excavation site than in the confines of a museum, even though the educational function and organization of a museum are subjects that preoccupy him. In contrast to the stereotypical image of the foreign field archaeologist immersed in ancient artifacts but largely disconnected from the culture in which he works, Humbert's engagement with Gaza as a living society and his deep belief in (and fascination with) the continuity of civilizations come through his conversation as clearly as his passion for his archaeological work. I interviewed him in Geneva on 18 January 2007.

Armaly: As a priest and as someone who has been in archaeology for over three decades, how did you come to archaeology and to the Middle East?

Humbert: I had always been interested in history and archaeology, and after the events of 1968 in France, when there was a real opening onto the world, it seemed a marvelous occasion to escape from the narrowness of my theological studies. I convinced my superiors to let me study archaeology at the Sorbonne. After I studied there for two years, it was decided that if I wished to continue in archaeology, I should go to Jerusalem, where the Dominicans have an old institute, the *École Biblique et Archéologique Française de Jérusalem*, which was founded in 1890.

When I started at the *École Biblique*, it was still under a strong British influence, especially of London and Oxford, through the excavations of Kathleen Kenyon. The archaeological landscape at the time was still a biblical one. This had been a tradition in Palestine, and even in Gaza, because of the influence of Flinders Petrie and the British School starting in 1890—exactly the same year the *École Biblique* was founded. I worked on some digs in Israel, but British biblical archaeology, which also had an American orientation, was never my cup of tea. For me, it was a wrong approach. So as soon as I had autonomy of decision, I left excavations in Israel, and in 1981 I opened a site in Jordan. There, I recovered contact

with the Arab world, which had been my wish, because with biblical archaeology I had felt cut off from the European sense of research, from my French and European colleagues.

Armaly: In terms of archaeology, how would you characterize the difference between the British/American or biblical approach and the European one?

Humbert: Biblical archaeology, which I often call Protestant archaeology, set out to provide evidence that the Bible is true. It has tried to organize a commentary, a landscape for the Bible, using the most up-to-date sciences. For the European (or perhaps I should say Latin) tradition, this approach has no interest whatsoever. It's a wrong direction—it misses the target. The truth of the Bible and the truth of archaeology are not of the same nature; they should not be mixed. The tools are not the same. Even in biblical lands, archaeology cannot aspire to uncover the Bible but only to try to discover or shed light on the people who wrote the texts. Archaeology's truth can only be a human truth; it should be kept in the strict frame of anthropology. So even when we work in the same place, we are not usually looking for the same thing.

Much has been written about the difference between the two approaches, and it's a very complicated question. But if one were to simplify to the extreme, it seems to me that the British American method is based on belief in the number, while the European or Latin method up to now is dominated by the word. The British and the Americans (actually, the British a bit less) think in terms of the archaeometry, of the hard sciences—mathematics, chemistry, physical anthropology. But our method or tradition finds that statistics are inadequate, that the number, with its apparent definitiveness, closes, reduces, limits, while the word opens onto other words; the word is moving. The truth is unfortunately—but also fortunately!—always incomplete. And archaeology will never be able to provide but a minuscule fraction of what the human being was in antiquity.

Armaly: After many years in Jordan, Iran, and elsewhere, how did it happen that you came to Gaza?

Humbert: It wasn't my decision originally. In the early 1990s, when international politics began to move quickly with regard to autonomy for the Palestinians, the French government asked me to open a program there. I was based at the *École Biblique* in Jerusalem at the time but was leading an interesting excavation in northeastern Jordan, and I said I wasn't interested. But they insisted. They had been funding my archaeological work and my institute for many years, and it became clear that I didn't have much choice in the matter. They told me to open the program in Palestine and to join the new Palestinian antiquities department. Of course, I wasn't the only one on the beach. Young European archaeologists doing small jobs with this or that dig were also invited to cooperate with the Palestinians. There was a meeting in Jerusalem in 1994 of maybe fifty archaeologists to discuss what was the best way for positive cooperation. Everyone agreed that this was a fantastic opportunity. And of course it was fantastic, but many were thinking only of new and exciting sites [be]coming available, not realizing that it's one thing to have a beautiful site all ready to

be excavated, and quite another to have to do a quick excavation at the side of a new road where construction is underway, or to have to do a lot of cleaning before you can go to work. So that's why people started to get nervous, and there was this unpleasant atmosphere of intense competition.

I checked around and discovered that everyone was interested in Jericho. First of all, Jericho is so close to Jerusalem, and the new fashion in archaeology today among the younger generation is to do archaeology in comfort. Jericho was 25 minutes from Jerusalem, so you could come back at night and have a terrific dinner and a drink, to have a comfortable life. Secondly—and this was interesting for me as well, since I had worked on a marvelous Umayyad palace in Jordan—Jericho has one of the most beautiful Umayyad palaces in the world, which was completely excavated in 1935–38 by the British archaeologist [Robert] Hamilton. But to escape from the competitive atmosphere, I decided to go to Gaza, because no one expressed any interest in going there. I thought that Gaza would be far from conflicts. People said that I was crazy, that Gaza was difficult, far from Jerusalem, and that the Israelis wanted to close the area, which would make it difficult to get in and out. But I chose it anyway. And in the end, it turned out to be one of the most beautiful archaeological experiences of my life. It has also been a marvelous human experience, because the people of Gaza are so civilized.

Armaly: What made Gaza special for you, archaeologically?

Humbert: Gaza is a treasury for the archaeologist. There are so many new sites, new discoveries—not much has been done here. Gaza of course is a “gateway” of the East on the Mediterranean. We know from the historical sources that the contact between the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean—in other words, between the Classical West and the Greco-Roman world on the one hand, and Arabia, Ethiopia, India, and China on the other—was especially through Gaza. One hopes to find traces of this, but one of the difficulties in Mediterranean archaeology is that we find quite a lot of items from the Indian Ocean in the southeast corner of the Mediterranean, but it is very rare to find western items in India or China. Some Greco-Roman influence has been found in South Arabia, but not much. There seems to have been a huge transfer of goods especially in one direction—from east to west. It's hard to judge what was the exchange, what they were interested in obtaining from the West. Some Roman texts refer to gold payments made to South Arabian kingdoms, and a text found in northern Yemen speaks of receiving forty women from Gaza, so one can assume a slave trade.

Anyway, we have not found much evidence of the trading itself, except for Nabatean coins and painted shards, the Nabateans having been the link with southern Arabian kingdoms. Gaza's archaeological wealth lies elsewhere. Just moving the sand dunes reveals an astonishing density of human activity; sites of different periods are very close to each other. Recent excavations unearthed a large, totally unknown and unexpected urban installation from the middle of the fourth millennium b.c. and Egyptian military settlements from the second millennium b.c. (under Thutmosis III and the Ramses) close to Wadi Ghazza. We have also

identified under the sand the classical Palestinian town and harbor of Anthedon, which previously had been known only through historical sources, and rich Byzantine churches and monasteries are under excavation.

Armaly: Given the consistently negative press Gaza always gets, it was interesting to hear you refer a few moments ago to the marvelous human experience there.

Humbert: Yes, it was not what I expected. It was a surprise for me too. But the Gazans are marvelous people. When I started there I was expecting difficulties, but it was the opposite. I have done archaeology in other parts of the Middle East, and each time there have been problems with people destroying the results of the excavations, apparently as an expression of anger at the foreign archaeological intrusion. In Gaza, there has been never been anything like that. In this place where people have to struggle for their very survival (and I'm talking about simple people here, the people who live near the archaeological sites), you find a remarkably civilized social culture. And they also turn out to be very open to archaeology if given a chance, and they can become truly interested in what you are doing.

Let me tell you a story. You know that the site where they're planning to build the museum, the ancient Anthedon, is right next to Shati' camp. The workers I hire are from the camp. When I first came to excavate in Gaza, the PA Department of Antiquities said, if you want to work in archaeology in cooperation with us, fine, but you have to help us to save sites. I said OK, show me. They took me straight to the camp. There was a big sewage draining project starting, and they had done a cut of the site. They showed me the stratigraphy and said, what do you think, is it important? I said yes, it's very important. And they said please, then, if you want to excavate, excavate here. So we organized training for archaeologists and workers and so on. And that was the beginning of a very fruitful cooperation.

Before we started the excavations, we had to clean the slope at the top of the beach. For thirty years, people had been throwing rubbish there. Believe me, it was two meters deep in some places. People from the camp came to watch these foolish foreigners cleaning their rubbish and asked why we were doing it. I said we wanted to excavate at that place because there was a huge beautiful city below. They would laugh, though good-naturedly. They thought it was crazy to think that there could be a city under the rubbish. Two months later we found Hellenistic houses and other structures from the third century b.c. in an excellent state of preservation—we've now reached levels of the eighth century b.c. There was a lot of excitement in the camp. A lot of people came, and they were interested. I said these are your ancestors who built these houses, who were trading with Greece in ships. Slowly they became proud. Some of the same people who had laughed came and told me, with a kind of wonder: This is the first time you visit Gaza, and we were born here, and you knew we had a city below and we never knew.

Armaly: But surely at the same time there must be, or must have been, a

very real tension between the needs of the camp and the demands of archaeology.

Humbert: Of course. The crucial issue here is that Gaza is very, very poor. That is why workers on construction jobs often sell things they come across while digging foundations or sewage lines, or why some people dig under their own houses. They are very poor. Yet they are very receptive to archaeology when it's made real to them, not abstract. That's where education comes in. And at the official level, with all these pressing needs, archaeology is not a priority for them. From some people's perspective, it's hard to understand why money should be spent on archaeology when the people are living in such hard conditions, without money for bread and so on. I tell them that it is better to provide work for the people, to give them the conditions for work so they can get money to buy bread. In fact, I have a kind of running dialogue with some educated people about this dilemma. I remember being told that I seem to think myself king of Gaza when it comes to archaeology. I said not at all, I am the slave of Gaza, because I try to save its patrimony, not for myself, but for the people, so that makes me their slave.

There is also the problem of pressures on land, especially in and around Gaza City. When I look at photos I took twelve years ago, I am astonished to see how much the city has grown and changed. The built space has much more than doubled in size. I would estimate that about 95 percent of the buildings have been built in the last ten years. The population is growing, so the municipality is building a lot. In these conditions, the problem for the Department of Antiquities is to save as much as they can of what is most important. It's very difficult. They are doing the best they can with limited means. The antiquities department does soundings of potential archaeological areas where building projects are begun, and they call me if there are difficulties in interpreting the findings. If the site is important, efforts are made to save it. Actually, the entire purpose of the new museum project under the Swiss initiative is precisely to help save as much as possible.

Armaly: Given the richness of Gaza archaeologically and all this building, is emergency or salvage excavation a common way of discovering important finds?

Humbert: Certainly. Most of the important sites were discovered that way. Actually, there's another example in Shati' camp that also illustrates the tension between the needs of the people and archaeological work. A few years ago—I think it was in 2000—the people wanted to build a sports center for the youth of the camp. It was right near a big mosque that had been built a few years earlier. The area was already known to be rich in archaeology at the time the mosque was built, but the people told me, we need a large mosque for the people and youth of the camp. And I said OK, I agree. And I do deeply agree. In any case, when the deep foundations of the mosque were built, and a sounding was done, it did not reach the archaeological level because of the slope.

But when the sports center was to be built nearby and we did salvage

excavation on the spot, we discovered beautiful Hellenistic houses with painted walls. This was a really important discovery, with implications not just for the Middle East but for the whole Mediterranean area. So of course it confronted us with this issue—and it is a real issue, even for me, an archaeologist: What is more important, to provide something that brings some happiness to the people, or to do archaeology? This is a huge dilemma. Naturally, some people told me that it was more important to have a sports facility for the youth than to save a Hellenistic house that is ruined. They said that they were looking to the future and that I was looking to the past. My answer was that we are all looking to the future, in the same direction, but in two different ways. In the end, after a lot of debate and discussions, the city administration and the neighbors took the decision to cancel the sports hall project. Since that time, the whole area is off limits for building, and the area where the sports center was to be is now the site of the future museum.

Actually, one of the reasons I am deeply committed to the museum project, besides the fact that it's one of the best fruits we can hope for from field archaeology, is that I believe it will have tremendous impact on the people, that it will open their minds to their own history, to their archaeology, which is not just the archaeology of Palestine, but of the Middle East, of the Mediterranean. The people are receptive, but it is hard in their desperate situation. That's why I wish it would be possible to show some of them the Geneva exhibition, it could be another story that would run through the camp and would keep this narrative of pride going. I have this mad wish that the workers who have been doing the hard labor of excavation in the sand could see it, because it would make them truly understand the aim of their work. When you're poor, it's natural to want to know how much this or that piece can be sold for. And you tell them that it's not being sold, that it's the patrimony of Gaza, their patrimony. But that's very abstract. They are not able to see the result, the whole. If they saw the exhibit, it would make them proud of Gaza.

Armaly: The Geneva exhibition is not the first of Gaza archaeology. There was one in Paris back in 2000. What was the response from Gazans who saw it?

Humbert: That show was quite small, but it's a good example, because a number of the Gazans who did see it visited the archaeological sites when they returned, and said, now we understand what you wanted to do with archaeology, it is not only like they did for generations, to excavate, to find items and sell them for money. It made them understand the historical importance. Obviously these weren't workers or people from the camps, but it shows what a difference it makes when people see the results.

Armaly: The Paris exhibition displayed the collection from the PA Department of Antiquities, did it not?

Humbert: What was shown in Paris was not from a prior collection but the production of the excavations we had done. In archaeology, we do the best we can, but it takes a very long time to accumulate a visible patrimony. That's why it was a very small exhibition. It was interesting to show a

skeleton of Gaza's history, but it is not enough. That's why the addition of the private collection in the Geneva exhibition was important, even if it is without the flesh of the story. That's what is always missing in private collections—but never mind, the richness of Gaza's heritage shows through, which a regular exhibition showing only archaeologically excavated objects from Gaza cannot do at the moment.

Armaly: Your reference to the private collection in the Geneva exhibit leads me to ask how you, as an archaeologist, see the role of collectors in the field?

Humbert: We are living in an era of American political correctness, of sitting in judgment on the world. And there is a big campaign against collectors in the archaeological departments of U.S. universities, antiquities departments, and so on. Of course there's no doubt that collectors have a very negative impact insofar as collecting encourages the looting of sites. OK, agreed. But I am sorry, there have been collectors ever since antiquity. The Greeks, the Romans made collections. Whatever the situation today, throughout history collectors have been the dynamism that drove archaeology. Archaeology in a sense is the product of collectors, from the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, and we have to acknowledge that. I do believe that archaeology in the last analysis belongs to the people, to the nation, to everybody, but we need to find ways, and slowly we are doing this through museums, to open private collections to the public.

Specifically concerning Gaza, the collector issue is complex, perhaps a special case. Here, you have certain people with the means to buy who are buying objects precisely to get around the looters who are giving the profit to the neighboring land. So they have done a huge defensive service. It is not the best way, but in the end, in today's circumstances, it is the only way that much can be saved.

Armaly: Tell me how you would see the projected museum.

Humbert: One aspect, certainly, is storage. You know, when museums began in the eighteenth century, their first function was essentially storage. One of the big archaeological problems in Gaza is the lack of a place to store what we find. The ministry is poor, without the funds to build such a place. I have been renting places for the objects and have to find money to pay the rent. The pity is that the preservation of what we have been able to gather of Gaza's heritage is still today in the charge of foreigners. But I understand, as Palestine has no budget for that. The museum will do that.

The main function of the museum, of course, is education, and a lot of thought will need to go into the manner of display, how to show the works. I would see that as different from the display of an exhibition, as in Geneva, where chronology is the main organizing principle. Visitors in Geneva for the most part would already have a historical framework in mind, so a chronological organization makes sense. But for the people in Gaza, who will be the primary beneficiaries of the museum, history is not the first level at which to read "what is Gaza." Here, in my opinion, it is better to organize

a topology behind the objects, what is perhaps on the border between the collector and the archaeologist. The collector is interested in the beautiful object, its aesthetic value, rarity, and so on, but the archaeologist is interested in what is behind the object—the people who made it, their way of life, witnesses of religion, faith, the connection with international trade, their neighbors, and so on. And in fact, these are the details that from my experience are much more interesting for the people of Gaza today. It is difficult to tell Gazans to look at the beautiful object we recovered in your land, because they tell you it just seems everything is broken. But when they understand what it means, what it tells them about who they are, where they came from, they are interested. So it seems to me to be much more interesting for the museum to give a sense of what happens behind the object.

For me—and this is not just my view, but widely shared—there is also an ethical dimension to the museum in Gaza, and that is its role in helping to restore to the people of Gaza a sense of pride in their history and land. Having lived in Palestine for so many years, I feel this is a contribution that archaeology can make to this place whose scenario today is in so many ways desperate and humiliating. Many Palestinians think that the best way to restore pride is through an archaeology that focuses on the Islamic period. For myself, as an archaeologist, this implies a discontinuity that doesn't exist. History is a whole, and its strength is its continuous evolution.

One of the most powerful lessons I have taken from my many years of doing archaeology here in the Islamic world is the overwhelming sense of an amazing continuity, the profound realization that Islam is in perfect continuity with Christianity, just as Christianity is in continuity with Judaism. There is no break. Just as there is no break between the ancient world and Islamic civilization—Islamic civilization, too, comes directly out of antiquity. I do not believe that one can have any understanding at all of Islam without realizing this. You see this continuity so clearly when you do archaeology: Bronze Age, neo-Assyrian, Aramaean, Hellenistic, Roman, and then the early Islamic period with Umayyad palaces, early mosques in Iran. And suddenly you realize—I realized—that this was my world, too; this is not a world in any way alien. This is a world in perfect continuity with mine. Archaeology makes you see that. This continuity is endlessly fascinating for me. If I had a second life, I think I would devote it to the study of Islam, the Qur'an, Arab civilization, precisely to explore more deeply this continuity. Because here I met a world so rich, so solid, with such deep, deep roots. But it is too late. I am too old.

Moain Sadeq, Antiquities Department Administrator

A trained archaeologist and professor of archaeology both in Gaza and abroad, Moain Sadeq has been the director of the Palestinian Department of Antiquities in Gaza since its establishment in 1994. He has numerous published articles to his name, including significant contributions on Gaza's archaeological sites and the Islamic period in the Geneva exhibition catalogue. With the travel difficulties endemic to Gaza, no meeting between us was easily arranged. After the exhibition opened, we agreed to hold the interview by telephone, which in turn was delayed when communications

were cut off during the intense Hamas-Fatah clashes leading to Hamas's takeover of the Gaza Strip in June. The telephone interview finally took place on 3 July 2007.

Armaly: You have been head of the Gaza branch of the PA Department of Antiquities ever since it was established—in fact, you are the one who set it up in 1994. Can you tell us something about your role and what the Gaza branch does?

Sadeq: My primary role is to secure the sites that have been excavated in Gaza since the beginning of the twentieth century and to develop them, investing in them not only for their own sake, but also with eventual tourism in mind. The department is also responsible for new and ongoing excavations that are being carried out around Gaza by Palestinian as well as Palestinian-European teams.

As you know, there's a real shortage of land in Gaza, with constant new construction threatening potential sites, so some of the excavations are not "planned." We're often forced to conduct rescue or salvage operations to get as much information or as concrete a picture as possible of the site and its context—it's sometimes a question of excavating as much as is possible in the circumstances, and sometimes we lose sites [to construction] that elsewhere would have been excavated fully.

Armaly: How large a staff do you have for these tasks?

Sadeq: We have fifteen archaeologists at the antiquities department here in Gaza. Almost all of them have bachelor's degrees in archaeology from various Arab universities, one has a master's in archaeology from Iraq, and one—myself—has a Ph.D. I got my doctorate at the Free University of Berlin (former West Berlin) and have a post-doc from the University of Chicago. In addition to the archaeologists, the department has a trained technical staff specialized in reparation/restoration of mosaics, marble, limestone, and ceramics. Some of the technicians were trained in France through our cooperation with the *École Biblique*, our main partner in excavations, and others in Tunisia. We've also trained people on site, especially in the restoration of ceramics.

Armaly: Aside from the *École Biblique*, what other European archaeological institutions work with you, and how many of the sites are jointly excavated? And actually, how many developed sites are there in Gaza?

Sadeq: All the excavated sites here need to be developed. One of them, namely the site of the Byzantine church in Jabaliya, has been protected and partially developed by the Department of Antiquities. The harbor site of Blakhiya will be developed by us in cooperation with the Museum of Art and History in Geneva, which will help us establish an archaeological museum close to the site. Palestinian architects and civil engineers are also involved in these plans. We also work with the French Center of Archaeological Research in Paris, the Gothenburg University of Sweden, and the University of Wales in Lampete. The Palestinian archaeologists from our department work with these different teams.

Armaly: With the West Bank and Gaza so cut off from each other geographically, what kind of a connection is there between the two branches of the Department of Antiquities?

Sadeq: It's extremely difficult. Obviously we can't have any real field contact because of the political situation—the geographical [disconnect] was a problem right from the outset, from the very establishment of the PA. It's gotten much worse, of course. So although we are one institution, a single PA archaeological body, the Gaza and West Bank sections operate quite separately in the field because of the territorial situation.

This makes things very difficult for us, especially since in Gaza we are in need of technical and financial resources. Most of the international institutions are located in Ramallah, and for political reasons their personnel don't come to Gaza to discuss our needs. The main technical support for the Palestinian Department of Antiquities in Gaza has come from France—specifically from the *École Biblique*, with Jean-Baptiste Humbert, as well as from the French Center for Archaeological Research, headed by Professor Pierre [de] Miroschedji. In the last year or so, since planning for the Geneva exhibition and the future Gaza museum got underway, there has also been cooperation with Switzerland, which is very important.

Armaly: To what extent is archaeological looting a problem in Gaza?

Sadeq: I would say that the problem of looting and smuggling artifacts in Gaza is not nearly as serious as it is in the West Bank, simply because Gaza, as you know, is sealed off. Gaza is like a jail. The sites are well monitored, and it's not so easy to smuggle artifacts outside. But the West Bank border is more open, and many sites, especially in area C, are not controlled by the Palestinian Department of Antiquities.

So for us in Gaza, the most important loss is the damage to the sites and potential sites caused by construction and the pressures on the land. We have managed to control looting in various ways, but with Gaza's very dense population, the pressures of "development" are much stronger than our power. So our main problem here is robbery by fast urbanization.

Armaly: Is there a problem in terms of storage facilities?

Sadeq: We store our artifacts in several places: at the Department of Antiquities itself and at an off-site facility we rent in the basement of a high-rise building in Gaza City. Artifacts that are not yet certified or catalogued are kept with the French mission in Gaza.

Armaly: In addition to your position as head of the antiquities department in Gaza, you are also involved in teaching there, are you not?

Sadeq: Yes, I continue to teach archaeology at both the Islamic University of Gaza and al-Aqsa University, and I co-designed the archaeology curriculum for both. In fact, I've been with the educational system in Gaza since 1991, when I cofounded the Faculty of Education in Gaza, which

later became Al-Aqsa University, and became dean of its Gaza City branch. But I'm not here all the time—I spend a semester each year in North America, teaching at the University of Chicago, Montclair State University in New Jersey, and this fall at the University of Toronto.

Armaly: As a professor of archaeology in Gaza over the years, have you noticed any increase in interest in the subject from students?

Sadeq: I would say yes. It seems to me that there's been a growing interest over the years, and there are more students registering for archaeology courses. As people become aware that we have so many archaeological sites here, they want to learn more, so more students sign up. Some of the courses are given in the field, so they can see the various types of objects from various periods in their setting.

The serious problem in teaching archaeology here is that there is no good library in Gaza, and since we are so isolated there's nowhere to borrow from. That's a very important lack if you want to teach archaeology effectively. Another shortcoming is that we have not been able to meet our target in involving students in actual digs—but this should change, as the Department of Antiquities now has plans to integrate university students in some of its current excavation sites, where they can be trained under professional supervision.

Armaly: I'm wondering whether the situation of chaos and dire poverty in Gaza doesn't make it difficult to raise public awareness about archaeology. I mean, doesn't it seem like a luxury to people who are very poor? I'm thinking in particular of the Blakhiya excavation site, where the future museum is planned, but also in general.

Sadeq: I think people are ready to support activities that further their knowledge about the importance of artifacts and Gaza's heritage. We still need to do more to get information out, but I've been trying to do this in various ways. For example, I've produced documentary films on seventeen different sites in Gaza and the West Bank and was involved in publishing several tourist guides. I've also moderated a television program, in which I have been inviting various specialists in archaeology, architecture, and the environment to talk about the sites and the importance of the finds. Almost every day you can see something about archaeology on television.

Armaly: Specifically about the excavation site in Blakhiya, how do the residents of the Shati' camp, right next door, for example, react to the museum project?

Sadeq: I think they're very happy about it. The future museum close to the site will help to develop the area, will surely also increase the value of the land in the area, and will draw tourists and create jobs for the people living nearby. Such a project will open Gaza to the international community and present the cultural face of Gaza. People understand its importance. The museum project will have many benefits to the wider community as a place for showing visual evidence of Gaza history and archaeology, as a scientific institution, where students of archaeology and history can see artifacts

dated to various historic ages and for different purposes.

Armaly: More generally, how do you see archaeology's place in Gaza's future?

Sadeq: I like to think of archaeology as Gaza's oil. We do not have natural resources here, but we do have this rich cultural heritage. Gaza is at the crossroads of civilizations, and its archaeological sites reflect many cultures—Canaanite, Egyptian, Assyrian, Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Islamic. Gaza is also on the Via Maris, the road to Egypt, the road used for the military campaigns of the Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Macedonians—all the conquerors from earliest times down to the present. This was the road taken by Holy Family on their way to Egypt. So besides being used for commerce and conquest, it was also a pilgrimage route. All this gives Gaza potential for tourism.

Armaly: The exhibition in Geneva, of course, tries to give a sense of this great sweep of civilizations passing through. How much local awareness about the exhibition do you think there is?

Sadeq: The Palestinian people know about the exhibit, which was publicized by the Department of Antiquities and European institutions such as the Musée de la Bible, our main archaeological partner in the exhibition—actually, the exhibition represents our long archaeological cooperation with the Musée de la Bible. Recently, the Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage in the West Bank and Gaza Strip participated in a workshop organized by the Islamic University of Gaza and UNESCO, and I saw how aware the students were about the exhibit, asking how long it would stay in Geneva and when it would return to Gaza.

Armaly: That's a question I wanted to ask. As I understand it, the part of the PA collection that will be on display in Geneva has been out of the country since the year 2000, when it was exhibited in Paris. What are the plans for repatriating the works, along with those of Jawdat Khoudary, which were recently shipped for the exhibition?

Sadeq: Of course the plan is for the objects to come back to Gaza. All objects are registered in a catalogue, and there is Israeli approval to bring them across the border back into Gaza. The question is when. I assume it will be very difficult in the current situation. I can't speak for Jawdat's collection, but for our pieces, I would like to see them kept—ideally, exhibited—in Europe as long as possible, and to get them back only when we are able to protect them, to present them, and maintain them in a professional way.

Armaly: This brings us, I think, to the museum. How involved are you in the museum project? Is your department coordinating with UNESCO on the museum?

Sadeq: As one of those directly involved, I can say that there is good coordination on the project between UNESCO, the museum in Geneva, and the Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities. And of course with

the ?cole Biblique, which has been a terrific support for us for twelve years.

Armaly: How do you see the future of archaeology in Palestine—not only in Gaza itself, but also as a unified effort with the West Bank?

Sadeq: In my view it is not possible to speak about sites in Gaza separately from those in the West Bank—the entire area of Mandatory Palestine is one integrated historical and archaeological environment, where the current political borders have no meaning. If I excavate in Gaza, I have to think of the sites from the same period that have been excavated in Israel. When political circumstances permit, site visits by archaeologists across the border would be very important. Of course, everything is getting more and more difficult.

Developing sites and investing in them for tourism requires regional and international cooperation. The Palestinian archaeology is not just for the Palestinian—it is a part of world cultural heritage. And accordingly, its protection for the next generations should be understood as an international target or duty.

Armaly: Getting back to the more immediate situation in Gaza, would you say that the different Palestinian governments have different agendas regarding archaeological sites?

Sadeq: With regard to archaeology, there's only one agenda in the PA. At our department we have our duties, tasks, and responsibilities, and we steer clear of politics. Our duties and responsibilities don't change. All political parties in Palestine understand our role and know that our job is to save our heritage and develop our sites. No government has ever pressured me or asked me to do anything differently or made any demands. So far. So I feel free, for now. The guards are still at the sites—if I have a problem at any site, I will ask the support of any local community or executive power that can provide it. I have been working here for many years and will ask any power existing to protect our cultural sites, because if we lose them, they are gone forever, and we can not dig them again.

Fareed Armaly, an artist and curator whose international career in the arts includes large-scale collaborative works on the theme of Palestine, is the former director of Künstlerhaus Stuttgart. Invited by the Geneva museum to be the participating artist in its Gaza archaeological exhibition, he created a multifaceted installation titled “Shar(e)d Domains,” which uses as its starting point a key artifact on display in the exhibition itself: an ancient Gaza amphora discovered as shards during excavations under the Geneva Cathedral. The centerpiece of his installation is a sculptural representation of the seams resulting from reassembling the shards. Titled “New Amphora,” it is simultaneously a faithful replication of the artifact and a strikingly modern and original form. Prominently displayed in the exhibition along with a text by the artist, the “new amphora” embodies the idea of historical narrative as a reassembled but incomplete collection of fragments. Armaly currently lives in Berlin.

[†]Musées d'Art et d'Histoire Genève, Gaza à la croisée des civilisations, Geneva, Chaman Edition, 2007. For further information, write contact@chaman.ch.

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