ACOR has digitized nearly 30,000 photographs from its archives which are available online. This is a vital continuation of the organization’s strategy to share knowledge with researchers, professionals, and the general public. Drawing on private collections from individuals such as Jane Taylor and Rami Khouri and the work of past ACOR directors, and with the archive reaching back almost eighty years, Picturing Change: The Role of Photographs in Cultural Heritage illustrates photography’s function as an invaluable tool for posterity; recording the region’s changing landscapes, archaeological sites, and ways of life, while reflecting on ACOR’s own history and efforts in supporting archaeology and cultural preservation.

This pop-up exhibition touches on several key themes: Archaeology, Nature, Urbanization, Threatened Heritage, Anthropology, Technology, and the evolution of ACOR. Juxtaposing images taken by individuals at various heritage sites across Jordan, photography’s role in capturing change becomes evident. Bert de Vries’ documentation of historic flora indicate what once was, but his photograph at Umm el-Jimal extends its relevance to one of ongoing archaeological preservation: offering a visual reference of a prior state to which damaged landmarks can be restored. Now, with Amman’s population of 4 million, and the capital becoming more densely urbanized, it is especially necessary to record this changing landscape. As we see here, photographs help us sustain and recall the past into the present: they help show how places, people, and environments can change through human activity and rapid global and regional developments.

The images presented here (unless otherwise indicated), have been digitized thanks to the support of a 2016-2020 grant by the U.S. Department of Education Title VI).
ACOR - These three photos represent ACOR’s evolving geographical locations. As ACOR Director from 1988-1991, Bert de Vries inherited the ACOR building as we know it today (minus the 6th floor and 5th floor extension). The picture below (right) is of ACOR’s first building which was occupied by Bastiaan van Elderen and Henry Thompson, ACOR’s only residents at that time. As a result of ACOR’s expansion in the late 1970s and 1980s, when it was becoming a much larger operation, the center moved to the larger building located near the 5th Circle shown in the image below (left). By the late 1970s it was clear that ACOR would need a much larger residence in order to fulfill ACOR’s ambitious plans. David McCreery, then director, oversaw the construction of the new ACOR premises, completed in 1986.
NATURE  Bert de Vries was ACOR's director from 1988-1991. Over the years in the area of Khirbet Salameh, behind ACOR, he saw many cycles of blooming, and in times of difficulty he would leap out of his chair and go outside to take photos. Bert says, “It becomes you and a lens and a subject. To get everything right, you just lose everything else. It was a great escape and I really enjoyed it and keep going back.” The site is a haven for wildlife and in the 1990s, a survey of the species at the site revealed over 66 species of plants. A further study found that many of these species are disappearing from the city, so these photos act as a record of botanical presence. The site is currently home to animals such as foxes and lizards. The first photo depicts the “Iris Nigricans”, a black iris, which is Jordan’s national flower. Nine different kinds of irises have been identified in Jordan, and one kind, the Iris Vartanii is now thought to be extinct in Jordan.
ARCHAEOLOGY - Archaeologist Bert de Vries is very fond of this photo and has photographed this structure a lot. It's a doorway at Umm al-Jimal, a site where he has done fieldwork for much of his career as an archaeologist and architect. In this photo you see this second-floor doorway precariously balanced with one doorpost stone hinged out, with only around 3-4 centimeters of contact at its bottom. About four years ago, some young men leaned against it and it toppled over completely. This picture, however, could be used to reconstruct it. “It just shows how fragile and dangerous these buildings are” says Bert. The beauty of such structures and the dramatic tension between collapse and preservation their story tells have kept him a spellbound over the years of fieldwork at Umm al-Jimal.
ARCHAEOLOGY - The first archaeological expedition to Iraq al-Amir was conducted by Paul Lapp in 1961 and 1962. Paul excavated part of the palace/qasr and his wife Nancy Lapp processed artifacts, such as pottery sherds, from the site. Over a ten-year period, starting in 1979, the French Institute (then IFAPPO) and the Department of Antiquities of Jordan restored the Qasr to two stories. F. Larche and J. P. Lange made drawings and cardboard cutouts of each of the fallen stones, which helped them piece the palace/qasr back together.
ARCHAEOLOGY - The eighth-century Umayyad audience hall at the Amman Citadel (Jabal al-Qala’a), has been restored several times. The latest and most extensive restoration took place in the 1990s. In 1990 ACOR completed the initial Citadel Feasibility Study and in 1995 the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities of Jordan, in partnership with USAID began the restoration process. Over the many seasons of excavations several ACOR staff members served as directors on the project including Kenneth Russell, Glen Peterman, and Pierre Bikai and the Temple of Hercules project was initiated by ACOR director Bert de Vries.

During the excavations of this audience hall, led by the Spanish Archaeological Mission, archaeologists and archaeologists theorized based on comparative architectural evidence that the building might have been once covered by a dome. In 1998 the present silver dome was added which helps to protect it from humidity and allow the building to be used for cultural events.
TECHNOLOGY. Drone photography is now widespread but before drones were invented, one method of photographing from above was to use a boom (and there were different kinds: monopods, bipods, and quadripods). A monopod can have legs about 9m long, with a boom extending one leg to a height of up to 16 meters. The pod is lifted up by two to four lines, which are fixed to the ground. A camera is then lifted to the top of the boom and pictures are shot by means of an inbuilt delay mechanism. Pictured here is Dino Politis and Louise Martin who are using a boom made by Jerry Martin for the British Institute in Amman (CBRL).

Pictured here is Joseph A. Greene (now at the Semitic Museum, Harvard University), who was a CRM specialist at ACOR. In the late 1980s ACOR had roughly eight personal computers, each with only 15 MB of memory. It was the ‘stone age’ in information technology. Joe was trying to create a GIS system: merging alphanumeric data with photographic data. The outcome was JADIS (Jordan Antiquities Database and Information Systems), a program, made by ACOR in cooperation with the Department of Antiquities.

In the 1800s, scientists first began experimenting with the photovoltaic effect, which uses sunlight to create electricity. In the 1980s traditional energy was still cheaper but over time solar power has become much more efficient and cost effective. With over 300 days of sunshine each year, Jordan is well-suited to using solar energy as a power source. According to The Jordan Times, in 2015, over 400 mosques across Jordan were running their electricity largely on solar energy.
ARCHAEOLOGY - Within Darat al Funun, now a modern art foundation, lies the archeological site of a 6th century Byzantine church and an ancient cave. The site was first identified in the 19th century and in 1993, under the sponsorship of Darat al Funun – The Khalid Shoman Foundation (then part of the Abdel Hameed Shoman Foundation) led by Suha Shoman, and with the approval and encouragement of the Ministry of Tourism and Department of Antiquities, ACOR’s director, Pierre M. Bikai, directed excavations at the site. ACOR’s Conservation Technician Naif Zaban worked on this project, soon after starting archaeological work at the Amman Citadel in 1990. Restoring ancient sites can allow them to be used for contemporary purposes. Music concerts and poetry performances now take place amongst these ruins at Darat al Funun, drawing large crowds.
THREATENED HERITAGE - In recent years, the use of drones is helping to document antiquities looting in the region. Archaeologist Austin “Chad” Hill has used his drone to take aerial photos at this Early Bronze Age cemetery and Iron Age site. The earlier image was taken by Jane Taylor in 1998 whilst she was on one of her many trips taking aerial photographs of Jordan. By comparing the two photographs taken from nearly the same perspective, one can easily see just how much looting has intensified at the site over the past two decades, and why drone photography has an important role to play in ongoing documentation of change over time at sites. Along with Morag Iversel, Chad co-directs the Landscapes of the Dead, which is a part of Follow the Pots, an initiative attempting to bridge the disconnect between demand for archaeological objects and the destruction of archaeological sites in order to meet the demand.
ANTHROPOLOGY - Photographer Jane Taylor set up this shot and asked a Bdoul woman to demonstrate a traditional method for making cheese using a goat’s skin so she could photograph this activity. Cheese making in this fashion is not as popular as it once was so this photograph acts as a testament to an old practice.

In the 19th and 20th century, As-Salt was the main city in what was to became the Emirate of Transjordan, until Amman was chosen as the capital in 1921. Amman’s rapid growth quickly eclipsed Salt’s status as the country’s most prominent city. Amman now has a population of 4 million, while Salt has 90,000 people. This relatively slow growth of Salt has helped preserve its traditions and architectural character.
NATURE - The Azraq Wetland Reserve is a nature reserve that was established in 1978 and covers 12 square kilometers. In the 1960s water began to be pumped out of the natural spring to help support Amman's growing population needs. The spring dried up, and by 1992 the oasis's resident water buffalo populated had died and most migratory birds had left. The below right image shows the wetlands in 1985, and the picture to its left shows them 10 years after the effort to start increasing water levels and conserving the hotspot for migratory birds. The photograph above shows the Reserve as a rejuvenated place for wildlife, although it is still only 10% of its original size.
URBANIZATION. In 1947 two years after this photo was taken, the population of Amman was 33,110. By 1952 Amman’s population was at 105,000 people. In 2004 the population was 1.9 million and today it stands at 4 million, quadrupling the population in only 15 years. This rapid growth is attributed to several successive waves of refugees and migrations from Palestine in the 1940s, Iraq in the 1990s, and Syria since 2011.
ARCHAEOLOGY—There are two ancient theatres at Umm Qais, with the West Theatre being the smaller. Constructed from black basalt, it once seated about 3,000 people. A vaulted passageway supports its row of seats and there is a row of elaborately carved seats for dignitaries near the orchestra. In the center was a large headless marble statue, the Seated Goddess of Gadara, which depicted Tyche, the goddess of fortune, chance, providence and fate, which for a time was positioned as if she was a seated member of the audience. Created in Asia Minor it was exported from there to Gadara and the statue is now on display at the local museum.