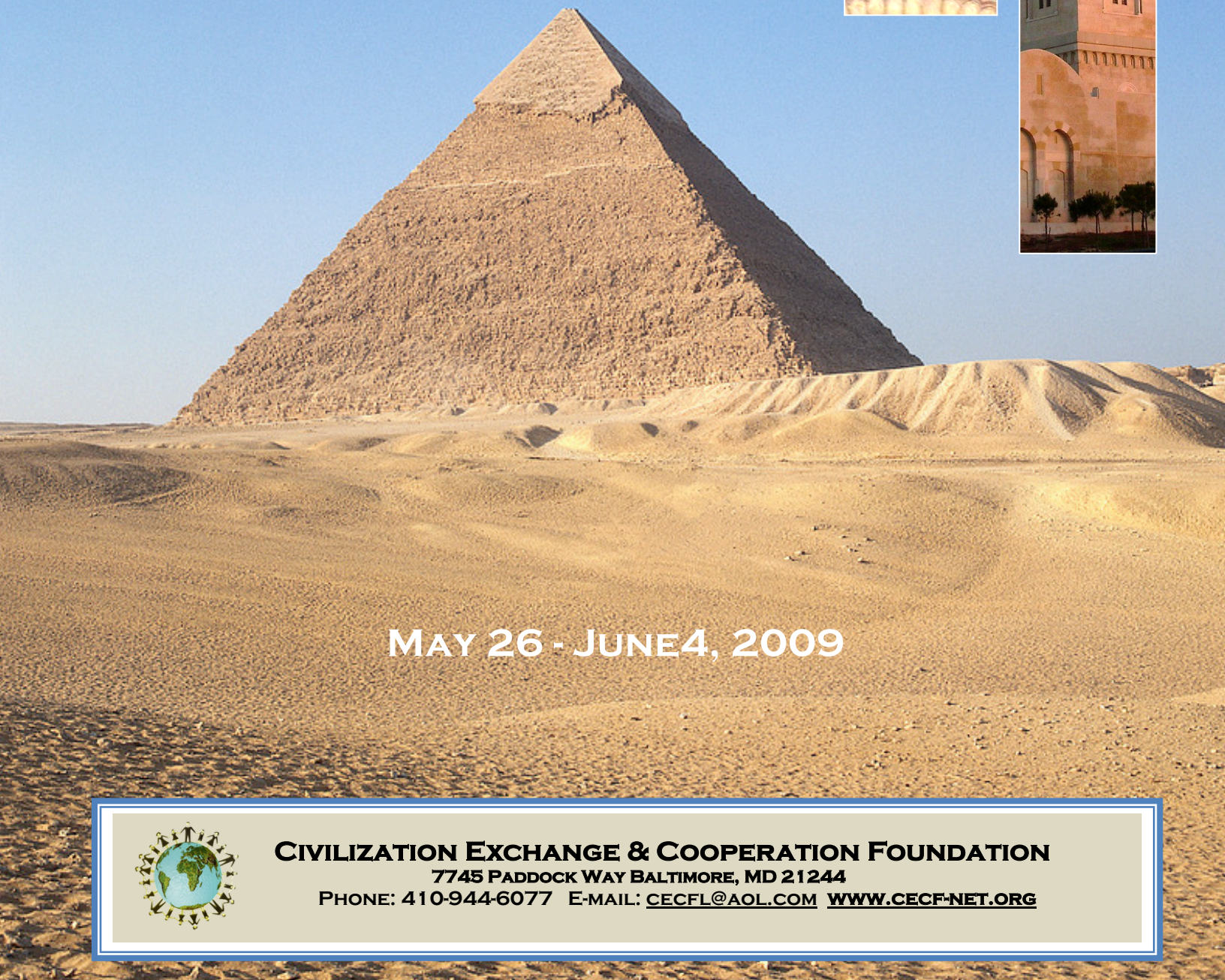
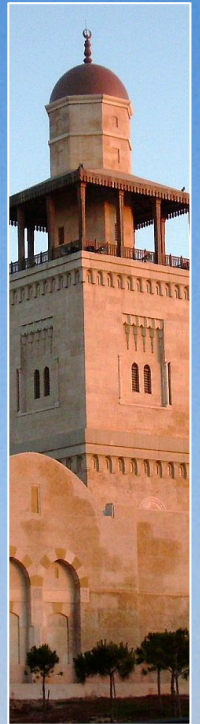


2009 EGYPT AND JORDAN STUDY TOUR: DISTINGUISHING ISLAMIC RELIGION FROM CULTURE



MAY 26 - JUNE 4, 2009



CIVILIZATION EXCHANGE & COOPERATION FOUNDATION

7745 PADDOCK WAY BALTIMORE, MD 21244

PHONE: 410-944-6077 E-MAIL: CECFL@AOL.COM WWW.CECF-NET.ORG



INTRODUCTION

The 2009 Egypt and Jordan Study Tour was a study abroad experience sponsored by the College of Notre Dame of Maryland (CND) in collaboration with Civilizations Exchange & Cooperation Foundation (CECF). The Study Tour was developed as a cultural exchange opportunity for American students and professors, to assist them in acquiring a deeper understanding of the differences between Islamic religion and the nuisances of culture and politics that can often affect how this religion is practiced.

Study tour participants were able to explore the rich Islamic traditions and cultural practices of people who have inhabited predominately Muslim lands for centuries. Students were extended the opportunity through this program to experience the struggle with modernity, globalization, and the causes of extremism that exist in our society today.

This program underscores the need to build relationships between the Muslim world and American Society. The program aimed to raise awareness and increase the understanding and tolerance of other cultures in order to promote further cooperation with America. The students were mentored and inspired to be advocates in this process when they returned to American.

The study tour participants were composed of people with diverse interfaith backgrounds, ages, and occupations. The participants were allowed to deepen their understanding of both Christian and Islamic traditions through first-hand experiences with the daily activities of the people. In addition, the lecture was enhanced through visits to rich historic sites and interactions with professors, students, politicians and religious leaders. Students were exposed to the immense beauty, delectable cuisine, and gracious hospitality of Jordan and Egypt.

PARTICIPATION

CECF conducted the Egypt-Jordan Study Tour in collaboration with the College of Notre Dame of Maryland. Participants from Loyola College in Maryland and Coppin State University also took part in the tour. Other participants included college & university students, clergy and professionals from the community making a total of 33 participants.



Delegation poses for group photo in front of offices of the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar when visiting Cairo, Egypt



EGYPT

MAY 26 – 31. 2009

Egypt is located mostly within North Africa with the Sinai Peninsula forming a land bridge to the Middle East. Bordered by Libya to the west, Sudan to the south, and by the Gaza Strip and Israel to the east, Egypt plays an important role in geopolitics stemming from its strategic position. Egypt is famous for its ancient civilization and some of the world's most famous monuments, including the Giza pyramid complex and its Great Sphinx.



CULTURAL EXCHANGE PROGRAMS

THE GRAND IMAM OF AL AZHAR - CAIRO, EGYPT

The Egypt cultural programs and the first of many official meetings with dignitaries and scholars were initiated with a visit to the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Sheikh Mohamed Sayed Tantawi. The Al-Azhar representatives provided the participants with an overview of the major tenets of Islam and the principles that guide Muslims throughout their lives followed with a questions and group discussion. The lecture emphasized the long history of tolerance and diversity inherent in the Islamic religion, which is in contrast to the extremism being promoted and witnessed in some regions of the world in our modern-day society.

The office of the Grand Imam collaborates also with Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt, which is recognized as one of the world's premier Universities for Islamic Studies for future Islamic scholars and leaders. The University has great importance to the Muslim world and is one of the most influential Sunni Muslim institutions.



Scholars from Al-Azhar University in Cairo lecturing on the tenets of Islam

The lecture concluded with an honored appearance



by the Grand Imam of the Al-Azhar, Sheikh Mohamed Sayed Tantawi. Sheikh Tantawi has traveled and taught extensively

throughout the Muslim world and returned to Egypt in 1985 to become Dean of the Faculty of Ausol Aldeen in the prestigious Alexandria Religious Institute. In 1986, Tantawi was appointed as Grand Mufti of Egypt and held this position for almost ten years, until he was appointed Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Mosque and Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar University by the President of Egypt, Hosni Mubarak in 1996.

Ancient texts on display at the Al-Azhar University Library

After the lecture,

participants toured the Al-Azhar Library, which houses some of the oldest Arabic scripts in the world. A personal tour was provided by the librarian providing the historical context and literary significance of certain texts, as participants browsed the extensive collection of ancient writings.

EGYPT IN PERSPECTIVE

THE INFLUENCE OF AMERICAN CULTURE, POLITICS AND BUSINESS WERE FELT IN THE STREETS OF EGYPT. STUDENTS WERE SURPRISED TO FIND FAST FOOD OF ALL VARIETIES ACCESSIBLE ON THEIR MANY LUNCH BREAKS. THE PRESENCE OF AMERICAN ENTERPRISE MADE THESE LANDS NOT FEEL AS FOREIGN AS SOME HAD ANTICIPATED.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE RECENT ELECTION OF AMERICA'S FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN PRESIDENT WAS TANGIBLE AND OBAMA'S SCHEDULED TRIP TO EGYPT WAS AN INDICATION THAT THE DOORS WERE OPENING TO GREATER DIALOG WITH PEOPLE IN THIS PART OF THE WORLD.



Street wares showcasing the influence of American politics on the lives of Egyptians suggesting Obama as the "New Tutankhamen of the World". The visit of the delegation coincided with the historic visit of President Obama to Egypt in 2009 and his "Cairo Address." This T-shirt was not found in the tourist district of Khan Al Khalili, but rather a place where locals Egyptians shop.

"It is encouraging to see that an American President could encourage optimism in the Middle East after years of tense relations."

-Christian Student



Visiting the Greek Orthodox Church of St. George in Old Coptic Cairo, Egypt

OLD COPTIC CAIRO

The population of Egypt is relatively homogeneous with the overwhelming majority (over 90 percent) being Arabic-speaking Sunni Muslims and 6 percent Christians with most belonging to the Coptic Orthodox Church, the historic church of Egypt. Study Tour participants toured the Old Coptic Cairo District (Masr al-Quadima), the oldest part of Cairo with settlement occurring as early as the 6th century BC.

During the spread of Christianity, Egypt became a Christian strong hold with as many as 20 churches standing within one square mile in the Coptic District. Only 5 remain today along with the oldest mosque built in Egypt.



Mosaic tile mural depicting Mary and Jesus

The participants toured places of worship from all three Abrahamic religions; Islam, Christianity and Judaism. Houses of worship toured included the Hanging Church, Greek Orthodox Church of St. George, Crypt of the Holy Family, Ben Ezra Synagogue, and Amr Ibn Al'As Mosque. These buildings were in walking distance of each other, indicating the rich religious diversity that is found in Cairo. As participants toured these buildings throughout the day, they heard the Islamic call to prayer, the Athan, which occurs five times per day. These calls indicate the significance that Islam plays in the day to day lives of people, expressing to visitors that it is more than a religion; it is a way

of life for Muslims. The students were allowed to observe the afternoon prayer in the Amr Ibn Al'As Mosque. The Study Tour also visited the Egyptian National Museum, which houses the largest collection of Ancient Egyptian antiquities in the world.

“Humanity has been engaged in religious conflicts for thousands of years over such minor differences. The situation sometimes seems hopeless, but the sites we visited today gave me hope.”

—Christian Student

ISLAMIC CAIRO

After viewing the earliest settlements of Cairo, the participants were taken to Islamic Cairo where a program on Islam and the nature of prayer was conducted by Imam Mohamad Bashir Arafat. This lecture was held at the Al-Hakim Mosque where students sat in traditional style on the floor. The lecture touched on the concept of the five daily prayers “Salat”, the wisdom of the straight line, bowing and prostration on the ground, the brotherhood and sisterhood in the prayer, and the importance of ending the prayer with the greeting of “peace.” A short interfaith discussion followed the lecture and students were encouraged to explore their thoughts and perception regarding the similarities and differences between monotheistic religions stemming from the Abrahamic traditions.



This picture of an Islamic arch adorned with decorative tile work and Arabic calligraphy was taken in the Hanging Church in Cairo. It is the same decoration and calligraphy found in many mosques in Cairo. It shows the shared culture of Art between Muslims and Christians of Egypt.

ALEXANDRIA, EGYPT

The Study Tour moved from Cairo on to the City of Alexandria, which was one of the most prominent cities in ancient times and founded by Alexander the Great in 331 BC. Until the Muslim conquest in 641AD, it was Egypt's capital for nearly a thousand years.

In Alexandria, participants enjoyed breathtaking views of the crystal blue waters of the Mediterranean Sea as they toured the Fort of Qaitbay, a 15th century defensive fortress built upon the ruins of the Lighthouse of Alexandria.



The Fort of Qaitba along the coast of Alexandria, Egypt

During the Study Tours excursions in Alexandria, students toured the Morqoseya Church, a Coptic Orthodox Church. Participants observe a portion of the Sunday mass and the rituals that occur during worship at a Coptic Church. After mass, the students learned from the Bishops about the Coptic Orthodox denomination and its distinct traditions. The priests touched upon the issues that Egyptian Christians face as a minority in a majority-Muslim society. This discussion enlightened many Christian participants on the struggles endured by minority faiths living in Christian America. Many students were struck by the resolve of these individuals, who are a part of a population in the Middle East that is in decline.

A dinner banquet with Alexandrian civil servants (lawyers, judges, and police officials) explored the politics that guide Egypt and the Middle East. A brief yet informative history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was provided as few students understood the nature of this conflict although it is in the news media regularly in the U.S. Many were surprised to discover the original peace agreement stemming from the Israeli and Palestinian War allocated considerably more land to the



Dinner with local politicians in Alexandria, Egypt

Palestinians than they hold today, which was taken by Israel by force after the War. In current peace negotiations, Palestinians are asking for only 22% of the land originally allocated to them through the original peace agreement. After the banquet, students reflected that few Americans will ever have the opportunity to engage in such an honest dialog with citizens from the Middle East. Generally, most Americans only hear the Israeli side of this complex issue in our daily news broadcasts. After lecture, the guests kindly dispersed among the participants to allow for continued one-on-one dialogue over dinner.



TOURING HIGHLIGHTS

One of the greatest tourist destination in the world, Egypt's ancient past has interested and mystified people for centuries. The Study Tour was designed to provide participants an up-close experience with these ancient lands, culture and people. The participants were able to sample the diverse food and see some the greatest wonders of the world while traveling in this country.

Students enjoyed traditional Egyptian food at the Felfela Restaurant on their first day in Egypt and later feasted at the Abu-Tarek Restaurant, where students ate a traditional Egyptian vegetarian dish called Kushari. Participants were pleased to find the amenities at the restaurants and hotels very comfortable. In Cairo, the participants made the Grand Pyramids Hotel their home base between educational programs and site seeing.

One of the tourist highlights of the group's stay in Cairo was the Nile Dinner Cruise. Participants were able to look across the banks of the great Nile River at night and feel the cool breeze from the upper deck of the boat. The cruise included entertainment, featuring a live band, a belly dancer, and a gratifying dinner of Egyptian cuisine.

On the fourth day in Egypt, students traveled to the Pyramids of Giza. Participants gazed at the Pyramids from different perspectives and reflected on the wonders of how these immense structures were erected. The tour ended with a visit to the Great Sphinx of Giza.



The Great Sphinx at the Giza Plateau, Egypt



Egyptian snack vendor and dinner being served at the Felfela Restaurant in Cairo, Egypt



Sunset views of the Cairo skyline from the Nile River boat cruise.

The statue of a reclining lion with a human head stands on the Giza Plateau on the west bank of the Nile and is the largest monolith statue in the world

In Alexandria, the students were visited the Library of Alexandria, where participants viewed the ancient library and learned about its history and collection.



JORDAN

MAY 31 — JUNE 4, 2009

Jordan is part of the lands that once made up the Ottoman Empire. Jordan lies in the center of the Middle East, sharing its northern border with Syria, eastern border with Iraq, its southern and eastern borders with Saudi Arabia, and western border with the Jordan River, the Dead Sea, and Israel. After the 1967 war with Israel and Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait, there were sudden and massive influxes of Palestinian Arab refugees, who now make up more than two-thirds of the population.



CULTURAL EXCHANGE PROGRAMS

MOUNT NEBO AND THE DEAD SEA, JORDAN

Jordan has a rich religious history. For Jews and Christians, it is part of the Holy Land, sacred for its connection to the Jewish patriarchs Abraham and Moses, as well as Christian biblical figures such as John the Baptist. Jordan is equally important in the history of Islam, as many tombs of Prophet Mohammed's (peace be upon him) companions are located in Jordan. Jordan is where the non-Arab world was first in contact with Islam more than fifteen hundred years ago.



While in Jordan, participants traveled to Mount Nebo, the site where Moses looked out on to the Promised Land, but did not enter. This site plays a significant role in the histories of all Abrahamic religions, but is particularly important to those of the Christian faith. These sites inspired reflection on the rich Biblical history of the area with many of the Christian students feeling very “close” to the origins of stories discussed in the Bible.

After gazing at the breath-taking views, the tour continued down the mountains that overlooked the Dead Sea to access these sacred waters. Access was limited to the beaches, but admittance was allowed through a resort where some participants basked in the water of this landmark and reflect on the great happening that occurred along its shores.

Students also visited a Muslim holy site, the Cave of Seven Sleepers and its accompanied mosque. This story is discussed in Qur'an, which tells of seven pious Christian youths who escaped Roman religious persecution by miraculously falling asleep for over 300 years in a cave. This lesson touched on the necessity of miracles for religious belief, which is a common thread between

The Monument to Moses positioned on the Mountains overlooking the Dead Sea.

Islam and Christianity. Later it was discovered through Sister Eileen's research that a similar story exists in Roman Martyrology as the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus.



The blue tiled dome at the King Abdullah Mosque that reflect the blues seen in the beautiful Mediterranean Sea

AMMAN, JORDAN

Students toured several Islamic grand mosques, including the King Abdullah I Mosque and the King Hussein Bin Talal Mosque. The Sunset prayer was observed and students later met with the Imam, who provided a brief history on the mosque, which had recently received attention due to a visit by Pope Benedict two weeks prior to the group's visit. The program at this mosque centered on Islam, its teachings, and how the Islamic religion is founded on the principles of peace, moderation, and tolerance. Students also visited a Christian church in Amman called the St. George Greek Orthodox Church and learned of its historical significance in the area. About 6 percent of the people of Jordan are Christian and ninety percent of the population Sunni Muslim.



Golden Minarets of King Hussein Bin Talal Mosque

JORDAN IN PERSPECTIVE

A KEYSTONE MOMENT OF THE TRIP CAME WHEN MEETING FR. HADDA AT THE JORDANIAN INTERFAITH COEXISTENCE RESEARCH CENTER (JICRC), WHO EMBODIED THE MESSAGE OF DIVERSITY, TOLERANCE, AND COEXISTENCE OF FAITHS IN HIS WORK AND THE CENTER'S MISSION.

JICRC PROMOTES MUTUAL RESPECT AND COEXISTENCE AMONG MUSLIMS AND CHRISTIANS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE ENTIRE WORLD. FR. HADDAD STRESSED THAT OVER HALF OF THE WORLD'S POPULATION ARE MUSLIM AND CHRISTIAN. WITHOUT PEACE AND JUSTICE BETWEEN THESE COMMUNITIES, THERE WILL BE NO MEANINGFUL PEACE IN THE WORLD.



Father Haddad with Imam Arafat at the Jordanian Interfaith Coexistence Research Center
“[Fr. Haddad] spoke the language of Qur'an,”
emphasizing his heritage as an Arab, living in a Muslim country, who happens to be a Christian.”

- Muslim Student

Following the tour and discussion at the JICRC, students attended a panel discussion at the University of Jordan with Islamic Law professors. The state religion of Jordan is Muslim, as indicated in the constitution. Many Jordanian laws are based on the Qur'an and the Hadith, a collection of Prophet Mohammed's (peace be upon him) sayings. These laws are enforced in religious courts called Shari'ah courts, which have jurisdiction over personal matters. The discussion with the professors focused on the nature of Islamic law and misconceptions held by many Westerners on this subject. After the panel concluded their remarks, lunch was served with the professors and the Dean of the School of Islamic Law in attendance.



A panel of Islamic Law Professors hosted at the University of Jordan



TOURING HIGHLIGHTS

Jordan has a rich culinary heritage that was greatly enjoyed by the students. An ancient legend from six thousand years ago tells of an Arabian shepherd who put his supply of milk in a pouch made from a sheep's stomach before making a journey across the desert. The rennet in the lining of the pouch, combined with the heat of the sun, caused the milk to form curds, and cheese was discovered. Students were able to enjoy Jordan's unique cuisine from a quick bite at the *Lebnani Snack Restaurant*, a Lebanese fast food chain, to a sumptuous feast at the *Bawwabet Jerash Restaurant*. Students also toured the Wild Jordan Cafe, where participants heard about Jordan's eco-tourism industry and were able to enjoy breath taking panoramic views of the countryside.

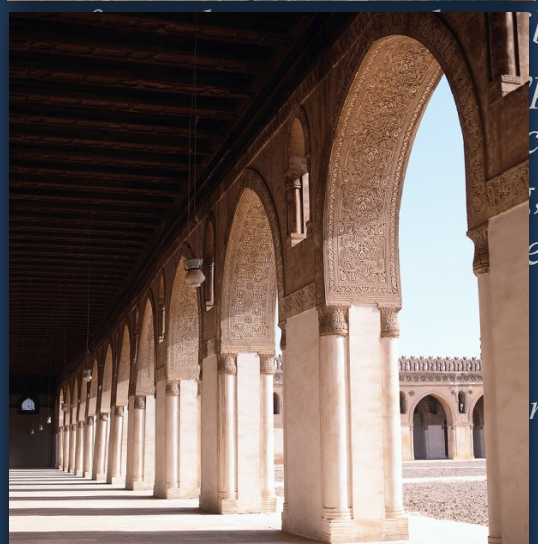


In Jordan, folk art survives in tapestries, leather crafts, pottery, ceramics, and wool/goat hair rugs with colorful tribal designs. These items were viewed through shopping outing taken by the students during breaks.

Students also visited Jerash (Antioch), an ancient Roman city north of Amman. Students toured the Roman sites and were able to see a training re-enactment of a Roman brigade. The performance included chariot races and fierce gladiator fights, providing students some understanding of the harsh conditions people endured during the Roman times.



*Student as the Roman
Ruins of Jerash, which
included a re-enactment of Roman
fighting strategies*



possible
e of Notre
ppig's
upport.

e efforts
hfouz,
Bashar
hfouz and
vilizations
on.

ist
be our
pt
ctives
;,
ening,

n Student

NGE & COOPERATION FOUNDATION
DOCK WAY BALTIMORE, MD 21244
E-MAIL: CECFL@AOL.COM WWW.CECF-NET.ORG