

The Virtual Illés Initiative: Jerusalem At Your Fingertips



What is the Illés Relief?

In 1873, a little-known Hungarian craftsman by the name of Stefan Illés completed what was to become an awe-inspiring marvel and the top attraction at the 1873 Vienna World's Fair: a miniature, 1:500 scale relief of Jerusalem.

With the help of three German documentarians — Dr Conrad Schick (1822–1901), Dr Titus Tobler (1806–1877), and Dr Carl Sandreczki (1810–1892) — Illés aimed to create a highly original toponymy of the Holy City “as the Natives see it.”

The result?

A 4.5 × 5-meter topographical and architectural model of Jerusalem, noted for its geospatial accuracy, as well as its recording of non-extant parts of the city and surrounding landscape, which have undergone extensive alterations since the relief's completion.

1873

The Virtual Illés Initiative

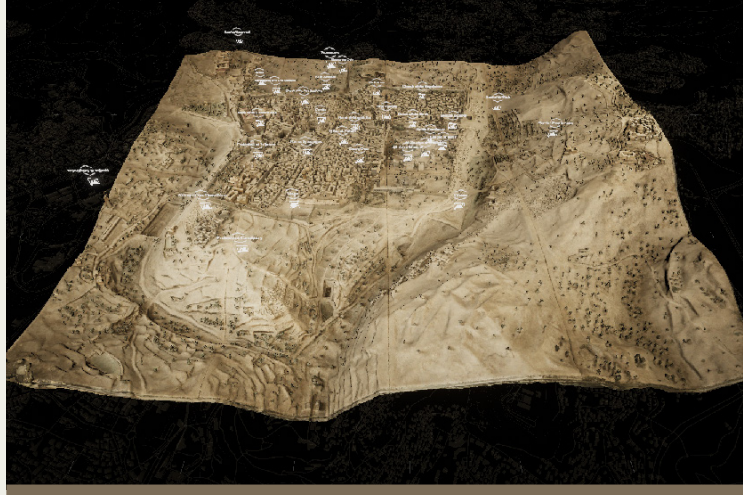
The Virtual Illés Initiative involves **four phases**, culminating in a captivating, immersive installation designed to tour internationally.



Phase 1

Digitized 3D model of the Illés Relief

Photogrammetry process captured a precise digital replica of the model to enhance accessibility for research, education, and global cultural engagement.



Phase 2

The Virtual Illés Initiative on STEAM

Educational application that reconstructs models and archival materials within an interactive 3D map of Jerusalem.



Phase 3

Community engagement and digital training workshops

Crowdsourcing campaign to collect and preserve shoebox archives and an immersive student training program in Jerusalem focused on digital tools for cultural heritage documentation.



Phase 4

LIVING JERUSALEM - Global immersive exhibition

Scalable multi-sensory exhibition will engage participants with late-19th-century Jerusalem and the living city of today.

COMPLETED

NEXT STEPS

Community Engagement

A global crowdsourcing campaign encourages individuals to share their hidden archives, personal documents, photographs, memorabilia, and audio/video files of Jerusalem. These contributions will be screened using Google Forms automatic parameters, then curated by a research associate to enrich and annotate the Virtual Illés Initiative.

The addition of multivocal content that represents the diverse cultural experiences of the Old City will extend the scope of the project from late-Ottoman Jerusalem to the present.



Jerusalem | 1967



*The Ecce Homo Arch
in the Via Dolorosa
Cecil V. Shadbolt | 1888*

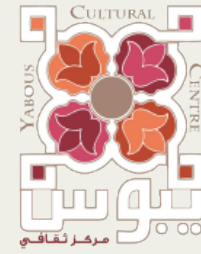
2025

Phase 3

SENSING JERUSALEM

A collaborative digital art making and skills building series of workshops

Yabous Cultural Center, Al-Quds | 2026



Our team, along with outside experts in digital humanities, will offer training sessions for selected Palestinian students at the Yabous Cultural Centre in Jerusalem over a period of three months. The workshop series is designed to equip students with both practical and theoretical skills for documenting and preserving invaluable cultural heritage. Students will progress through each stage of the process, from field documentation to digital modeling and interactive visualisation.

The series will culminate in two exhibitions: a local showcase at the Yabous Cultural Centre and a future immersive exhibition that brings together all participants' work in a dynamic, interactive format.

2026

THE VIRTUAL ILLÉS INITIATIVE

SPONSOR OUR TRAINING

Your sponsorship of our training program will directly empower the next generation of cultural stewards to contribute to the protection, valorization and dissemination of Jerusalem's cultural heritage in a rapidly evolving digital landscape.

[CLICK HERE TO DONATE NOW](#)



Phase 4

LIVING JERUSALEM - The Virtual Illés Initiative Immersive Exhibition

LIVING JERUSALEM is an immersive traveling exhibition set to launch in 2026-2027. It invites global audiences to explore the rich, layered histories of Jerusalem while addressing the urgent threats to its irreplaceable cultural heritage. Through interactive augmented reality (AR) projections and dynamic 3D printed models, visitors will be transported through the past, present, and future of Jerusalem.

This exhibition allows visitors to journey through time, deeply engaging with emotions of awe, authenticity, and belonging.

SUPPORT THE EXHIBITION

By donating to the LIVING JERUSALEM exhibition, you play a vital role in safeguarding and sharing Jerusalem's cultural legacy with audiences around the world.

[CLICK HERE TO DONATE NOW](#)

2026-27

THE VIRTUAL ILLÉS INITIATIVE



USING SMARTPHONE-BASED WEB AR, VISITORS SCAN 3D-PRINTED MONUMENTS FROM THE FOUR QUARTERS OF JERUSALEM.

AS USERS TRACK AROUND THE MODELS, THEY TIME TRAVEL THROUGH HISTORICAL NARRATIVES FROM THE 19TH CENTURY TO THE PRESENT DAY.

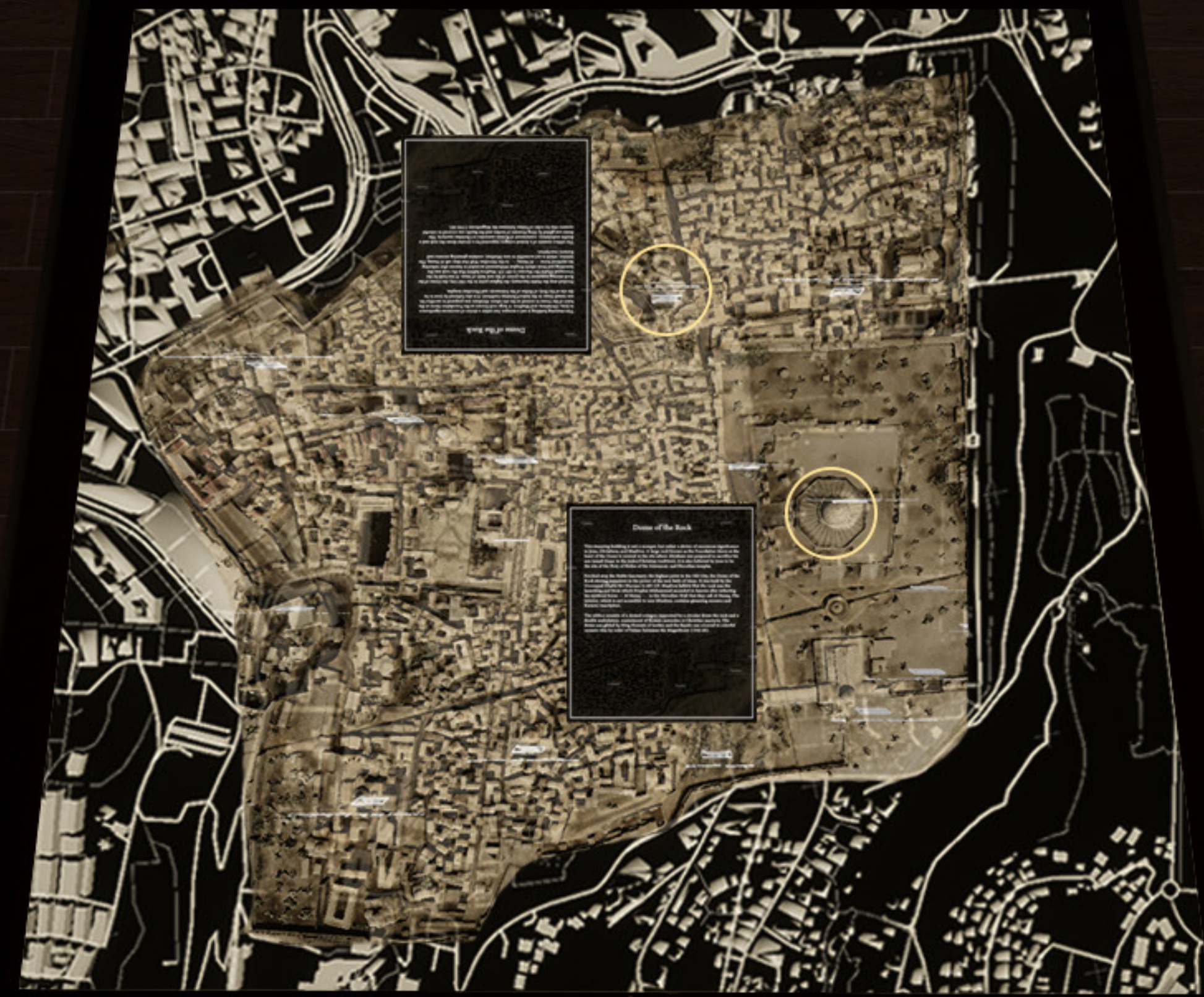
STORIES INTERTWINE AND DIVERGE DEPICTING JERUSALEM AS A LIVING INTERSECTION OF TIME, FAITH AND HUMANITY.

Phase 4

DIGITAL PROJECTION MAP LAYERED OVER 3D-PRINTED TOPOGRAPHIC MODEL (FROM GIS DATA) OF THE ILLÉS RELIEF.

TOUCH SENSITIVE CAMERA ENABLES ENDLESS COLLABORATIVE EXPLORATION.

VISITORS CAN INTERACT WITH 50+ MONUMENTS FROM THE VIRTUAL ILLÉS INITIATIVE ON STEAM AND THEIR CORRESPONDING ARCHIVES.



2026-27

THE VIRTUAL ILLÉS INITIATIVE

SUPPORT THE EXHIBITION: DONATE HERE

LIGHT REFRACTIONS TAKE VISITORS ON A JOURNEY THROUGH THE PHYSICAL SPACE.

THESE REFRACTIONS LINK THE MONUMENTS IN UNEXPECTED WAYS, REVEALING THE KALEIDOSCOPE OF NARRATIVES AND PERSPECTIVES THAT EXIST WITHIN JERUSALEM.

LIVING JERUSALEM

LIVING JERUSALEM is a traveling immersive exhibition launching in 2026-27, that invites global audiences to explore Jerusalem's layered histories and confront the urgent threats facing its irreplaceable cultural heritage. Interactive augmented reality (AR) projections, dynamic 3D printed models, and 4D projections will transport visitors to the past, present, and future of Jerusalem. In this exhibition, visitors are transported across time, experiencing Jerusalem's past, present, and imagined future while engaging deeply with emotions of awe, authenticity, and belonging.

The Virtual Illés Initiative is a pioneering digital humanities project that aims to compile historical records and facilitate universal access to uncovered facets of Jerusalem.

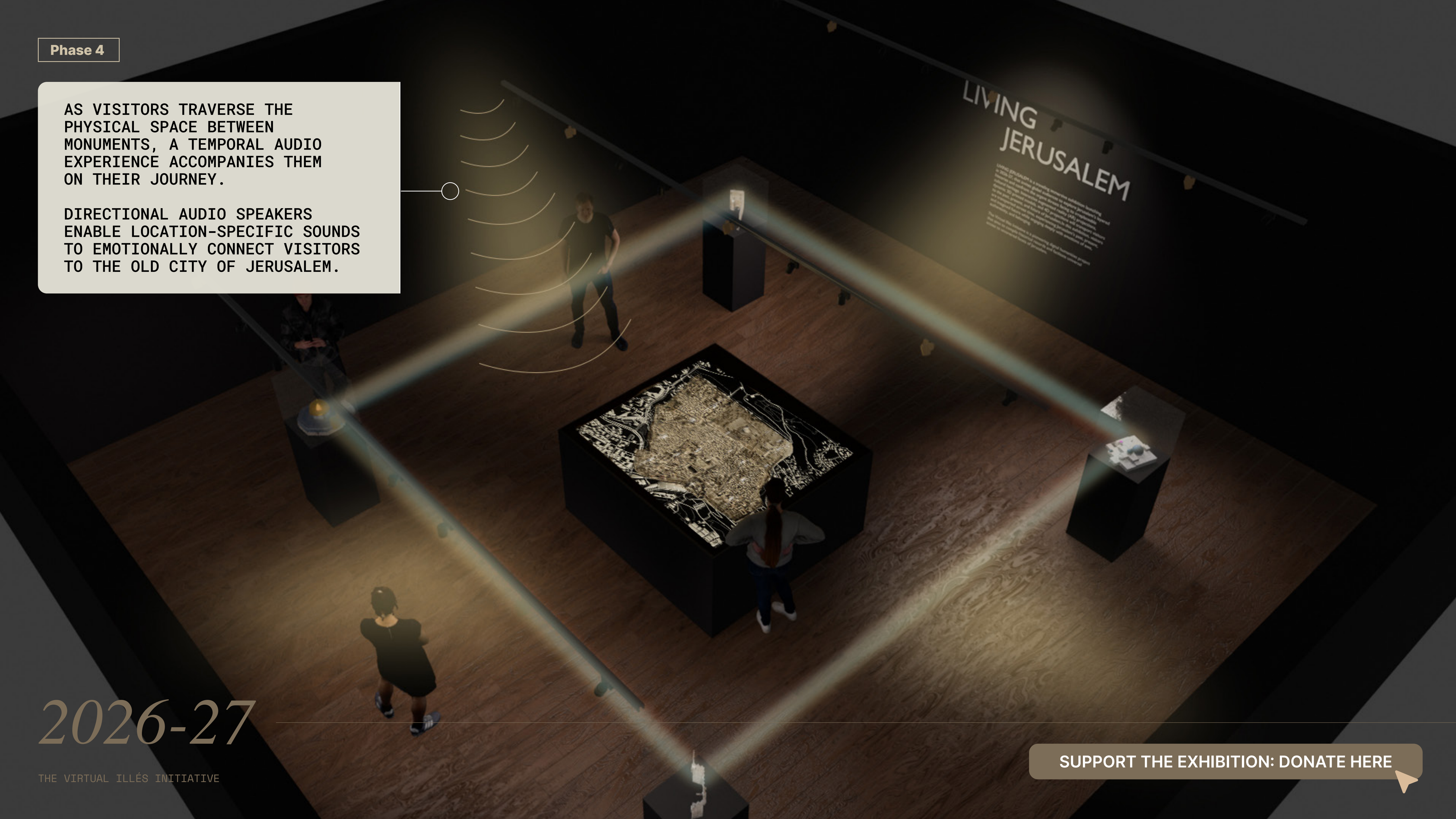
2026-27

SUPPORT THE EXHIBITION: DONATE HERE

Phase 4

AS VISITORS TRAVERSE THE PHYSICAL SPACE BETWEEN MONUMENTS, A TEMPORAL AUDIO EXPERIENCE ACCOMPANIES THEM ON THEIR JOURNEY.

DIRECTIONAL AUDIO SPEAKERS ENABLE LOCATION-SPECIFIC SOUNDS TO EMOTIONALLY CONNECT VISITORS TO THE OLD CITY OF JERUSALEM.



2026-27

THE VIRTUAL ILLÉS INITIATIVE

SUPPORT THE EXHIBITION: DONATE HERE

Get Involved

Please join us in protecting Jerusalem's memories and in providing global access to them.

*"In Jerusalem,
and I mean within
the ancient walls,
I walk from one epoch
to another without
a memory to guide me."*

— MAHMOUD DARWISH

Ways to support

1. **Donation:** Your contribution will help us to realize our mission to protect vulnerable cultural heritage in Jerusalem by sponsoring training, funding research and expanding our reach by supporting the LIVING JERUSALEM exhibition. In appreciation of your support, you'll receive insider updates and special acknowledgment on the project.

Click the button below to donate through our website.

DONATE NOW

2. **Press & Media:** Help us amplify the project's reach by sharing it through your press and media networks. By offering media coverage or facilitating press opportunities, you play a vital role in building awareness, driving engagement, and opening doors to wider community support.

For media enquiries or to discuss a potential feature, please contact us at info@archjerusalem.org

3. **Technology:** Contribute equipment or digital infrastructure to support our efforts in digital archiving, 3D mapping, and the development of immersive exhibitions that preserve and share Jerusalem's cultural heritage.

Become a Museum Partner

We are actively looking for museum partners worldwide to host and expand our project's reach. This is a unique opportunity to play a vital role in safeguarding and sharing Jerusalem's cultural legacy with your audiences.

To learn more about becoming a museum partner, please contact us at info@archjerusalem.org.

Why partner with us?

- ✓ **Cultural Impact and legacy building:** Be part of a pioneering digital humanities project with long-term impact through innovative cultural heritage preservation and immersive storytelling.
- ✓ **Global Visibility:** Our LIVING JERUSALEM exhibition is anticipated to be to drive high community engagement across digital and physical platforms globally.
- ✓ **Backed network:** Join a growing network of NGOs, scholars and partners that share our aim to help protect vulnerable heritage in Jerusalem.

[Learn more about our partners and collaborators.](#)