Aga Khan Documentation Center

MIT Libraries

ARCHNET 3.0

Redeveloping a platform for greater accessibility and compatibility

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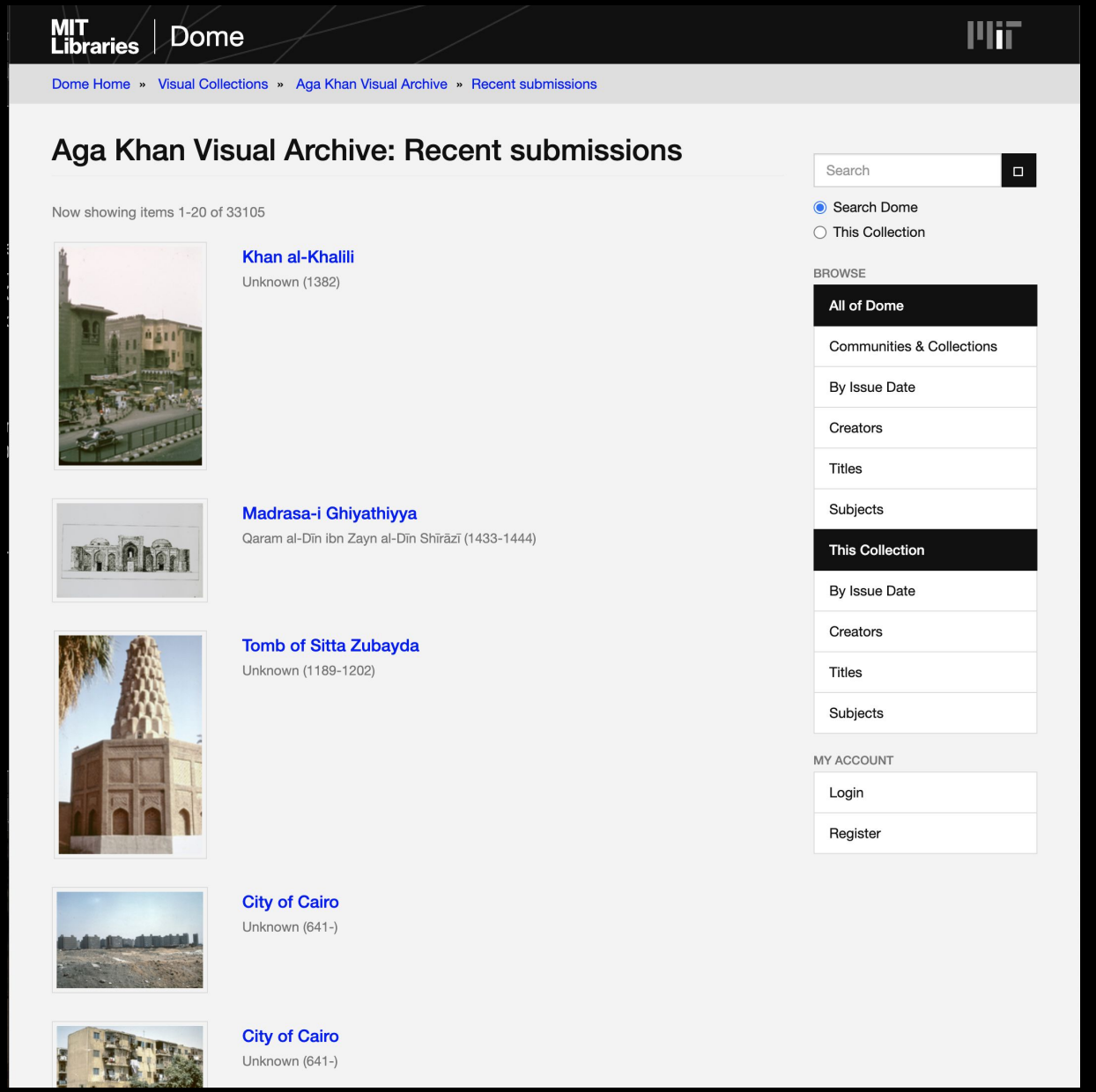
MELCom International Online Conference

A Brief History of ARCHNET

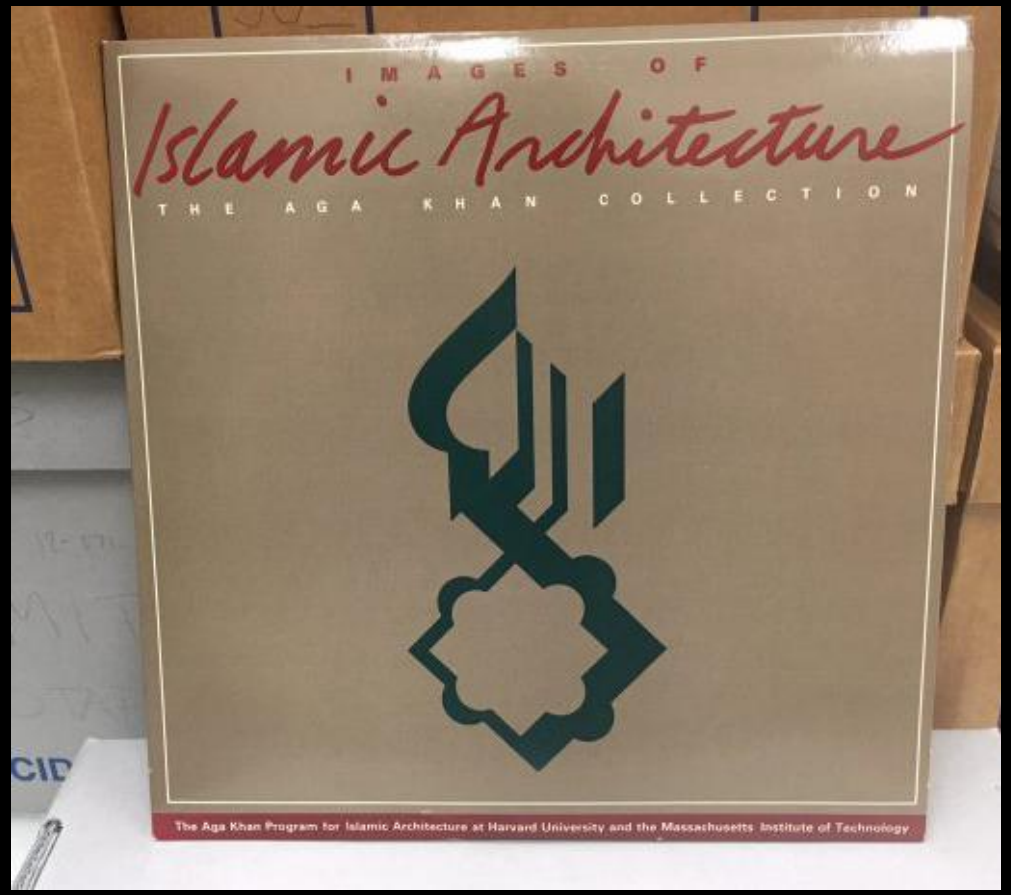
1979 Establishment of the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at MIT and Harvard (AKPIA)

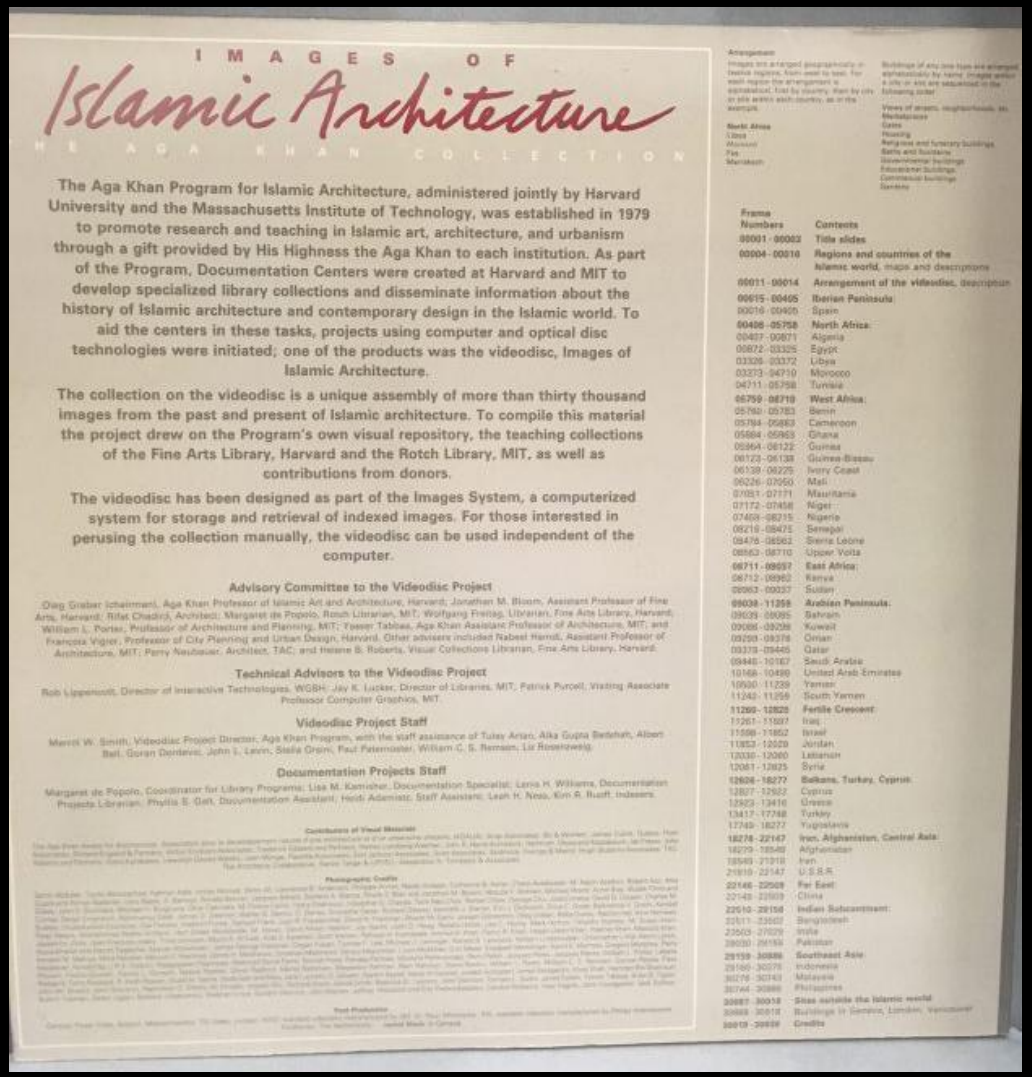
- Established through a gift provided by His Highness the Aga Khan to each institution.
- Documentation Centers created at Harvard and MIT to develop specialized library collections and to disseminate information about the history of Islamic architecture and contemporary design in the Islamic world
  - Publications, conferences, seminars, research travel grants, etc.
  - At MIT grantees had to provide copies of images to the Documentation Center
    - Aga Khan Visual Archive – Currently available on MIT DOME, with selections on Archnet



https://dome.mit.edu/handle/1721.3/45936

1985 Laser Disc




IMAGES OF

Islamic Architecture

THE AGA KHAN COLLECTION

The Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, administered jointly by Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, was established in 1979 to promote research and teaching in Islamic art, architecture, and urbanism through a gift provided by His Highness the Aga Khan to each institution. As part of the Program, Documentation Centers were created at Harvard and MIT to develop specialized library collections and disseminate information about the history of Islamic architecture and contemporary design in the Islamic world. To aid the centers in these tasks, projects using computer and optical disc technologies were initiated; one of the products was the videodisc, Images of Islamic Architecture.

The collection on the videodisc is a unique assembly of more than thirty thousand images from the past and present of Islamic architecture. To compile this material the project drew on the Program's own visual repository, the teaching collections of the Fine Arts Library, Harvard and the Rotch Library, MIT, as well as contributions from donors.

The videodisc has been designed as part of the Images System, a computerized system for storage and retrieval of indexed images. For those interested in perusing the collection manually, the videodisc can be used independent of the computer.

Advisory Committee to the Videodisc Project

Oleg Graber (chairman), Aga Khan Professor of Islamic Art and Architecture, Harvard; Jonathan M. Bloom, Assistant Professor of Fine Arts, Harvard; Rifat Chadirji, Architect; Margaret de Popolo, Rotch Librarian, MIT; Wolfgang Freitag, Librarian, Fine Arts Library, Harvard; William L. Porter, Professor of Architecture and Planning, MIT; Yasser Tabbaa, Aga Khan Assistant Professor of Architecture, MIT; and Francois Vigier, Professor of City Planning and Urban Design, Harvard. Other advisers included Nabeel Hamdi, Assistant Professor of Architecture, MIT; Perry Neubauer, Architect, TAC; and Helene B. Roberts, Visual Collections Librarian, Fine Arts Library, Harvard.

Technical Advisors to the Videodisc Project

Rob Lippincott, Director of Interactive Technologies, WGBH; Jay K. Lucker, Director of Libraries, MIT; Patrick Purcell, Visiting Associate Professor Computer Graphics, MIT.

Videodisc Project Staff

Merrol W. Smith, Videodisc Project Director, Aga Khan Program, with the staff assistance of Tulay Artan, Alka Gupta Bedekah, Albert Bell, Goran Dordevic, John L. Lavin, Stella Orsini, Paul Paternoster, William C. S. Remson, Liz Rosenzweig.

Documentation Projects Staff

Margaret de Popolo, Coordinator for Library Programs; Lisa M. Kamisher, Documentation Specialist; Lenis H. Williams, Documentation Projects Librarian; Phyllis S. Gott, Documentation Assistant; Heidi Ademiec, Staff Assistant; Leah H. Nass, Kim R. Ruoff, Indexers.

Arrangement

Images are arranged geographically in twelve regions, from west to east. For each region the arrangement is alphabetical, first by country, then by city or site within each country, as in the example.

North Africa
Libya
Morocco
Fes
Marrakech

Buildings of any one type are arranged alphabetically by name. Images within a site or area are sequenced in the following order:

Views of streets, neighborhoods, etc.
Marketplaces
Gates
Housing
Religious and funerary buildings
Baths and fountains
Governmental buildings
Educational buildings
Commercial buildings
Gardens

Frame Numbers	Contents
00001 - 00003	Title slides
00004 - 00010	Regions and countries of the Islamic world, maps and descriptions
00011 - 00014	Arrangement of the videodisc, description
00015 - 00405	Iberian Peninsula:
00016 - 00405	Spain
00406 - 05758	North Africa:
00407 - 00871	Algeria
00872 - 03325	Egypt
03326 - 03372	Libya
03373 - 04710	Morocco
04711 - 05758	Tunisia
05759 - 06710	West Africa:
05760 - 05783	Benin
05784 - 05863	Cameroon
05864 - 05963	Ghana
05964 - 06122	Guinea
06123 - 06138	Guinea-Bissau
06139 - 06225	Ivory Coast
06226 - 07050	Mali
07051 - 07171	Mauritania
07172 - 07458	Niger
07459 - 08215	Nigeria
08216 - 08471	Senegal
08476 - 08562	Sierra Leone
08563 - 08710	Upper Volta
06711 - 09657	East Africa:
06712 - 06962	Kenya
09963 - 09037	Sudan
09038 - 11258	Arabian Peninsula:
09039 - 09085	Bahrain
09086 - 09298	Kuwait
09299 - 09378	Oman
09379 - 09445	Qatar
09446 - 10167	Saudi Arabia
10168 - 10499	United Arab Emirates
10500 - 11239	Yemen
11240 - 11258	South Yemen
11259 - 12828	Fertile Crescent:
11261 - 11507	Iraq
11508 - 11852	Israel
11853 - 12029	Jordan
12030 - 12060	Lebanon
12061 - 12825	Syria
12826 - 18277	Balkans, Turkey, Cyprus:
12827 - 12922	Cyprus
12923 - 13416	Greece
13417 - 17748	Turkey
17749 - 18277	Yugoslavia
18278 - 22147	Iran, Afghanistan, Central Asia:
18279 - 18548	Afghanistan
18549 - 21918	Iran
21919 - 22147	U.S.S.R.
22148 - 22508	Far East:
22149 - 22509	China
22510 - 29158	Indian Subcontinent:
22511 - 23602	Bangladesh
23603 - 27029	India
29030 - 29158	Pakistan
29159 - 30886	Southeast Asia:
29160 - 30078	Indonesia
30079 - 30143	Malaysia
30144 - 30886	Philippines
30887 - 30958	Sites outside the Islamic world:
30888 - 30918	Buildings in Geneva, London, Vancouver
30919 - 30958	Credits

1998 HH Aga Khan Expresses expresses a desire for the work of AKPIA to have a greater impact in Muslim societies, both in academia and in practice.

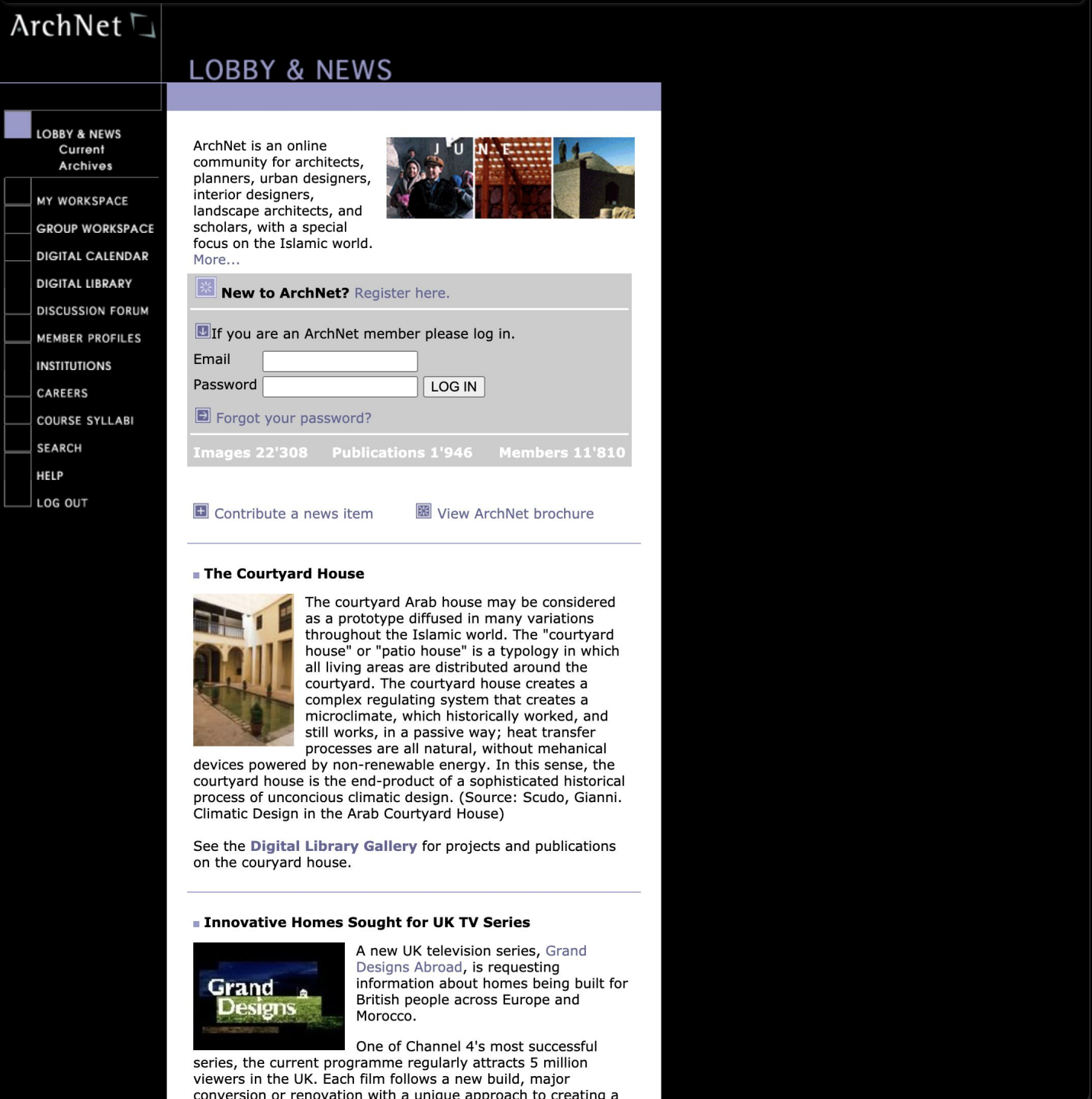
- SA+P Dean Bill Mitchell proposes to build an online tool that responds to those concerns.

1999 Work begins on ArchNet

2001 Beta Launch

2003 ArchNet made publicly accessible

- Virtual Community & Digital Library



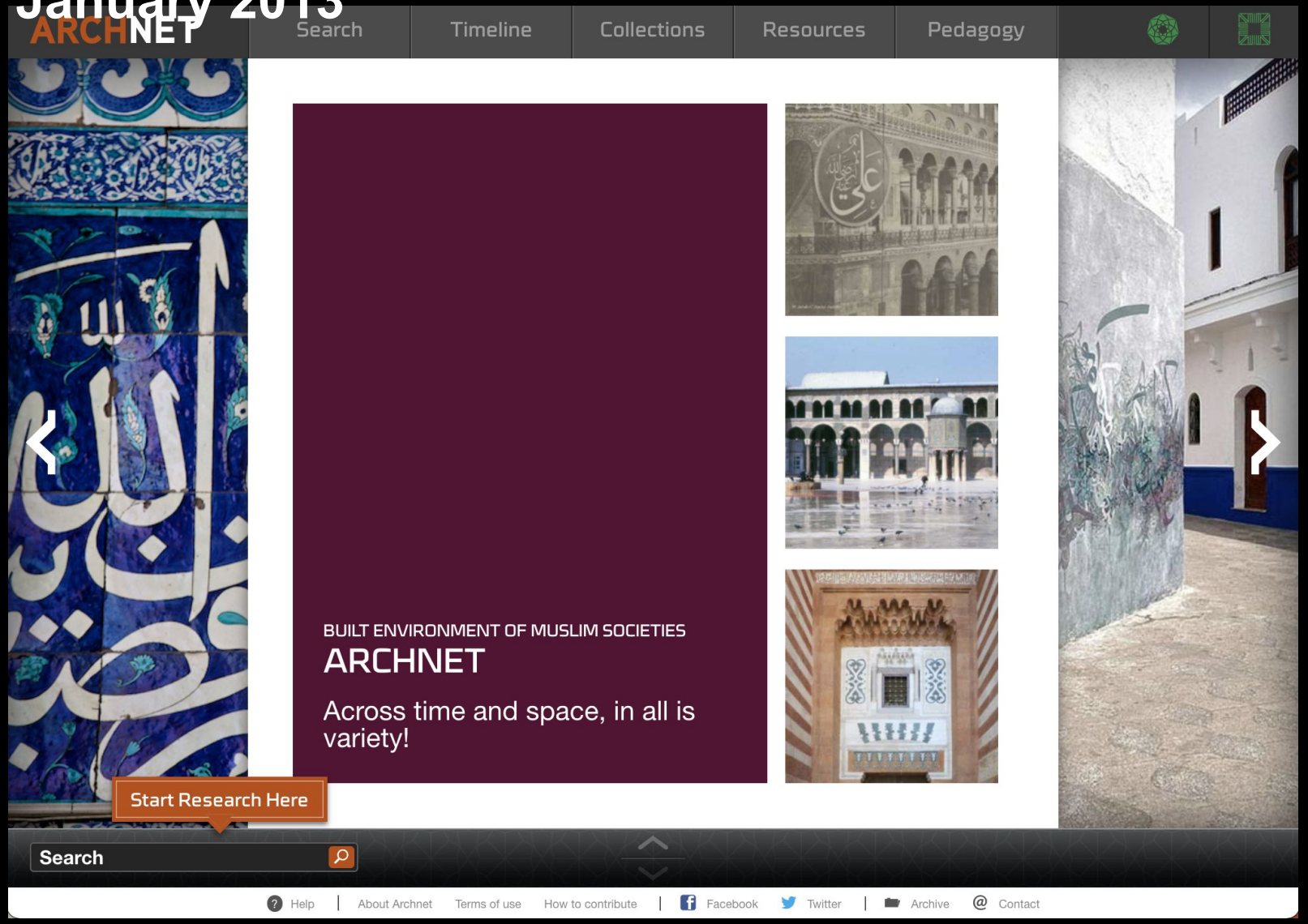
ArchNet serves the same ends as the AKPIA Program, the Documentation Centers, the Award for Architecture, and the Historic Cities Programme:

- To facilitate the advanced study of Islamic architectural history in all its diversity
- To encourage and enable the application of best practices in contemporary design and construction
- Dissemination of knowledge and resources to encourage excellence in scholarship, teaching, and professional practice

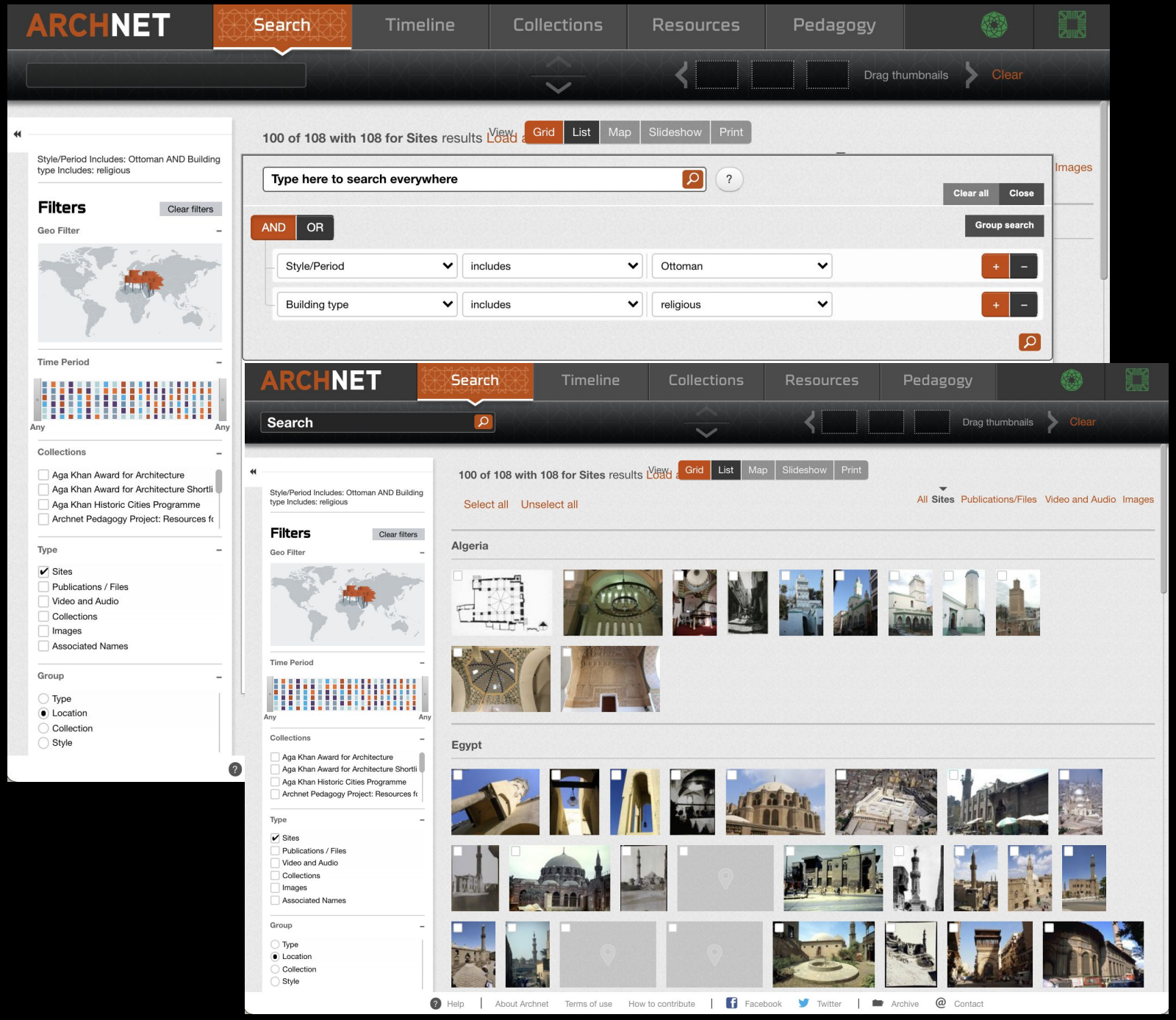
Archnet leverages the power of the WWW to do those things more effectively and on a broader scale.

One component of the site, ArchNet's Digital Library, could literally be a library for communities unable to develop their

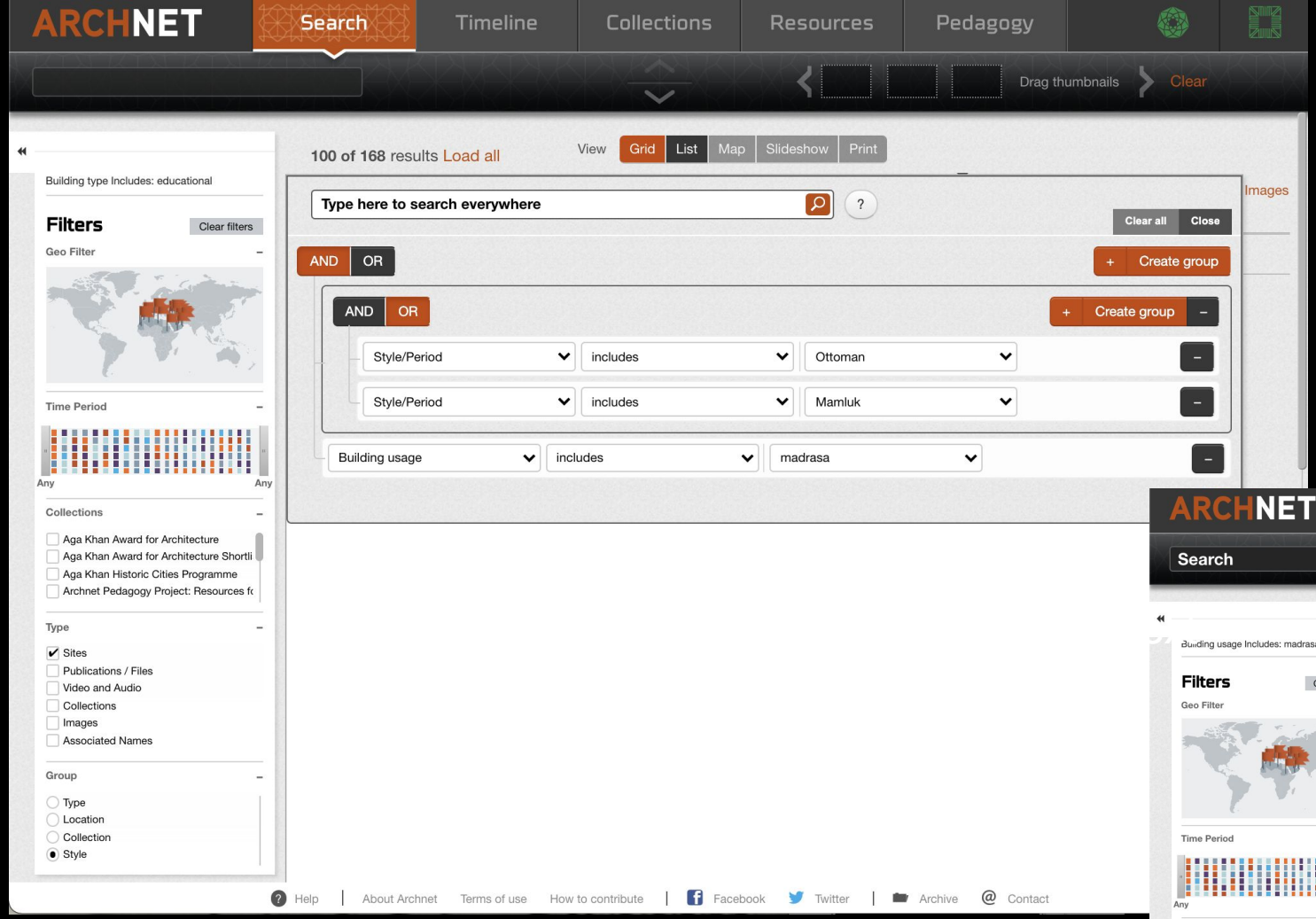
ARCHNET.ORG (v. 2.0) went live in January 2013

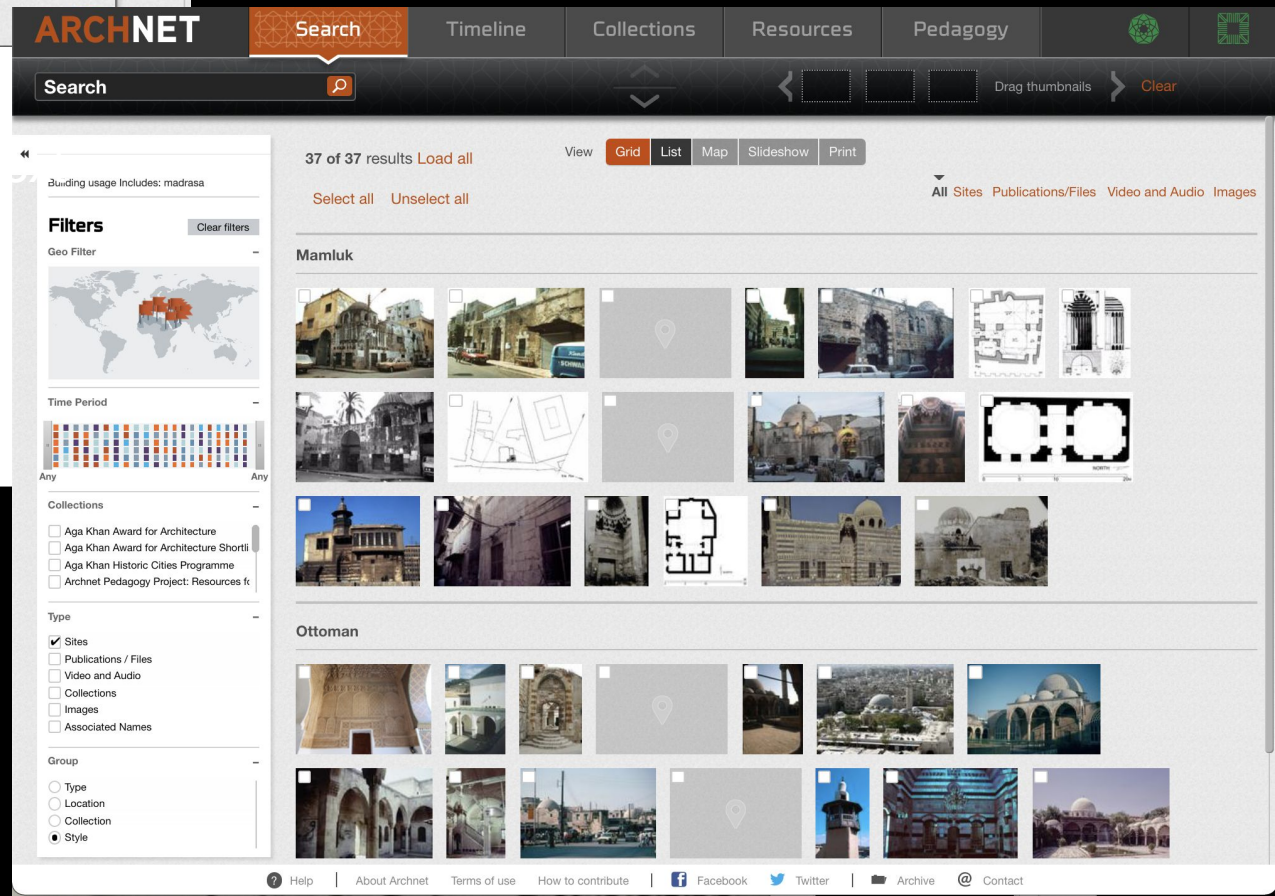


- A collaboration between the Aga Khan Trust for Culture and the Aga Khan Documentation Center at MIT (AKDC@MIT)
- Brings the technologies that power the ARCHNET up to date.
- AKDC@MIT becomes responsible for the curation/intellectual oversight, both in terms of subject matter and metadata standards.

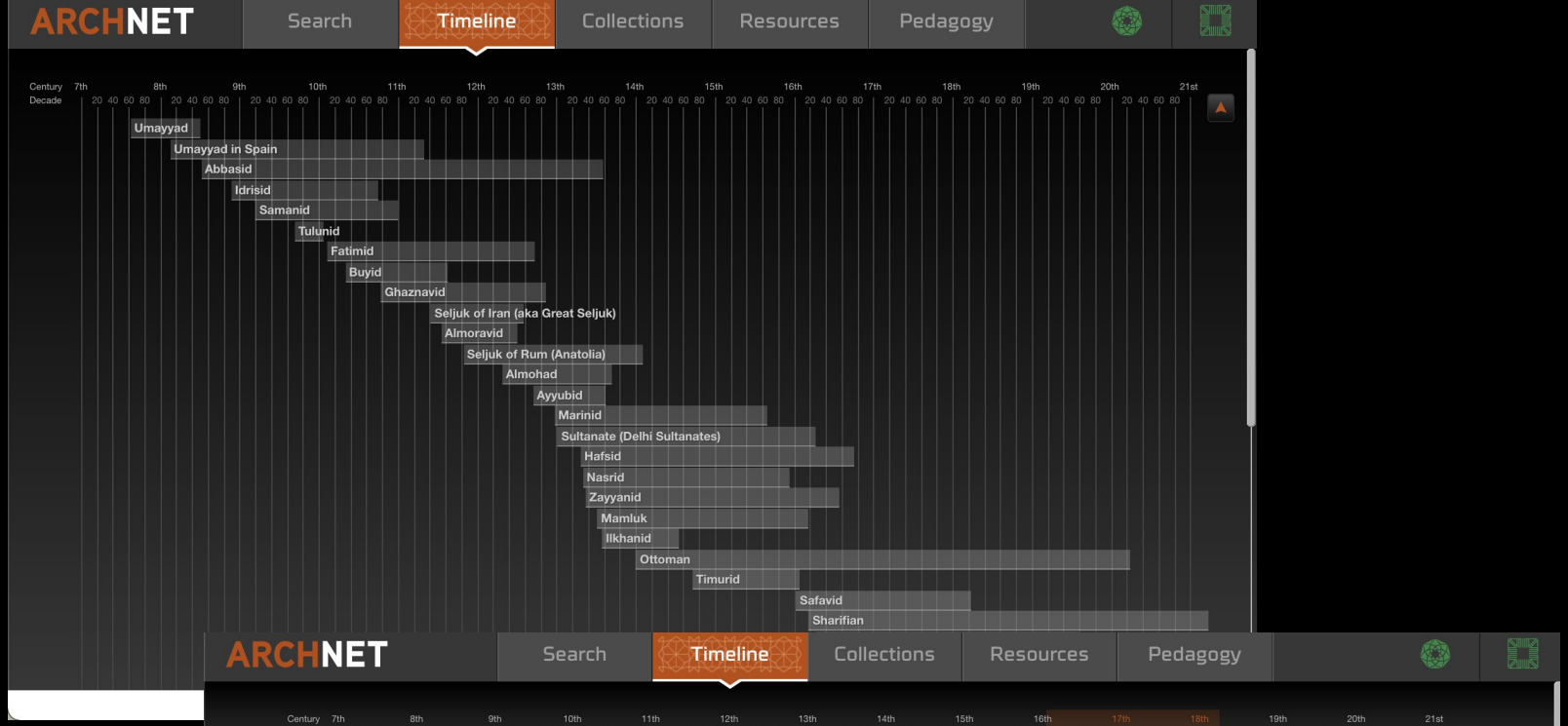


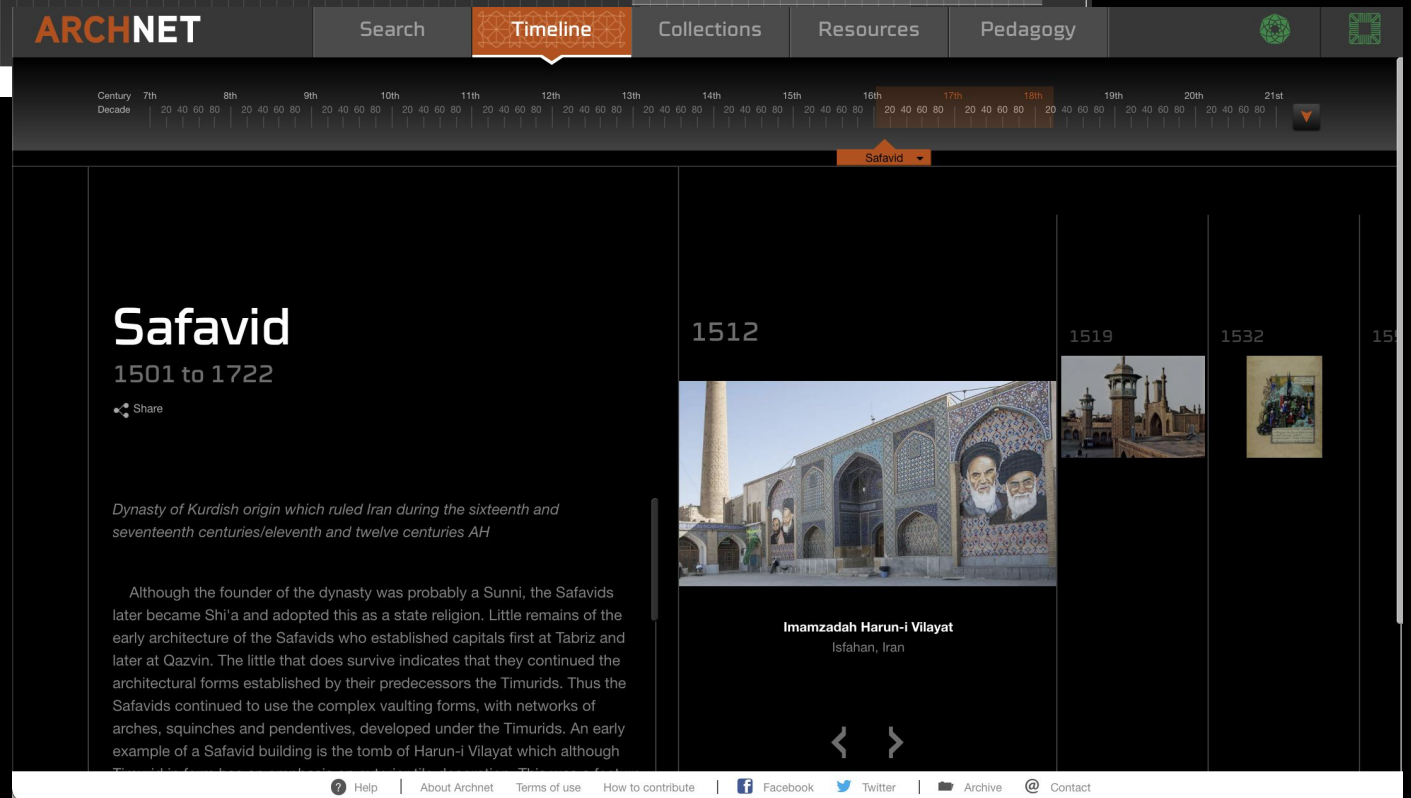
- Brings the technologies that power the ARCHNET up to date.
- AKDC@MIT becomes responsible for the curation/intellectual oversight, both in terms of subject matter and metadata standards.
- **All components beyond the digital library are removed.**
- **Replaces hyperlinked click through structure with a more powerful, precise search.**



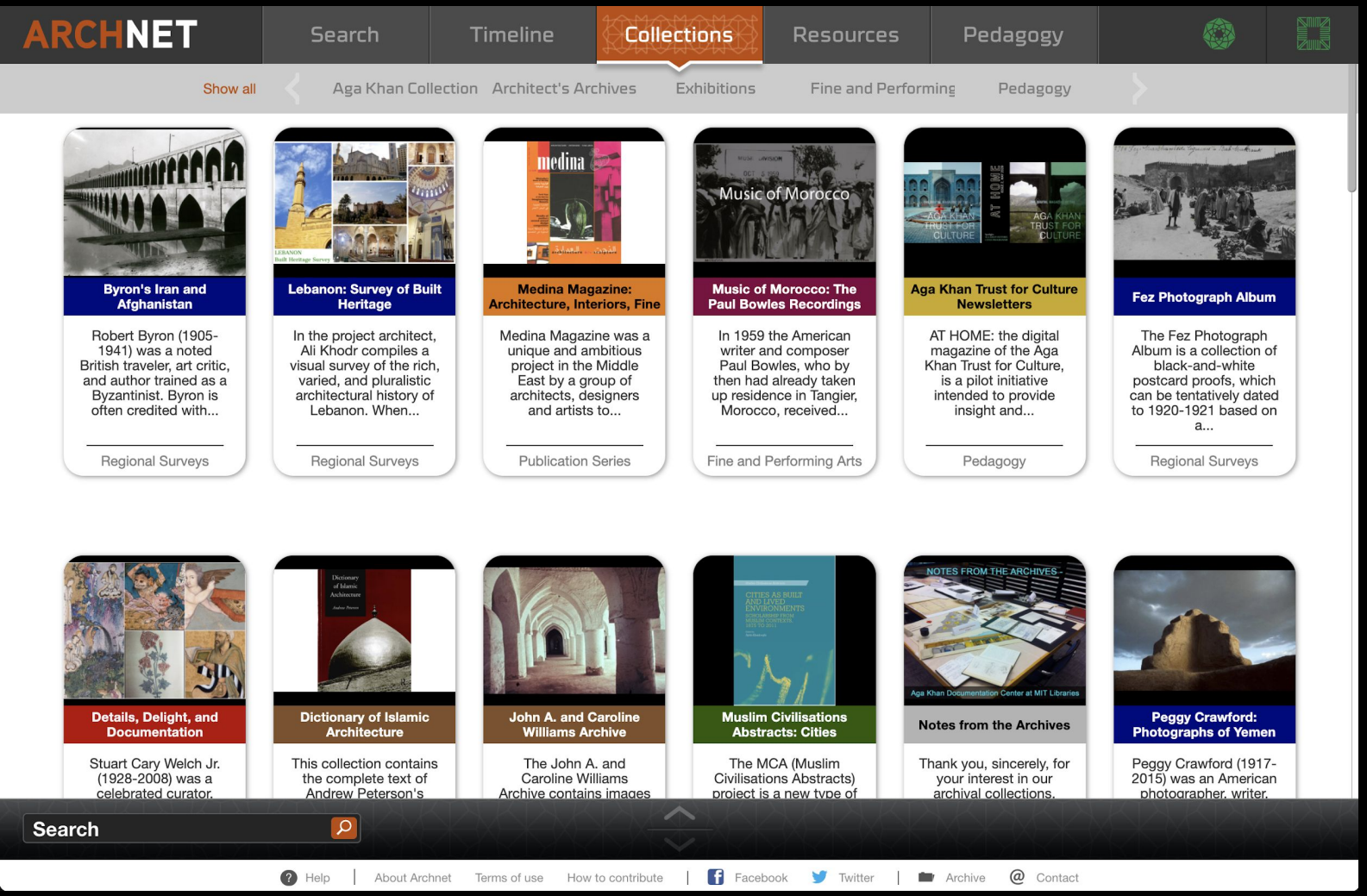


Full disclosure: Egypt and Turkey were removed from the search so I could fit both periods in the results screenshot





- Brings the technologies that power the ARCHNET up to date.
- AKDC@MIT becomes responsible for the curation/intellectual oversight, both in terms of subject matter and metadata standards.
- All components beyond the digtal library are removed.
- Replaces hyperlinked click through structure with a search.
- **Introduces new visual learning components.**



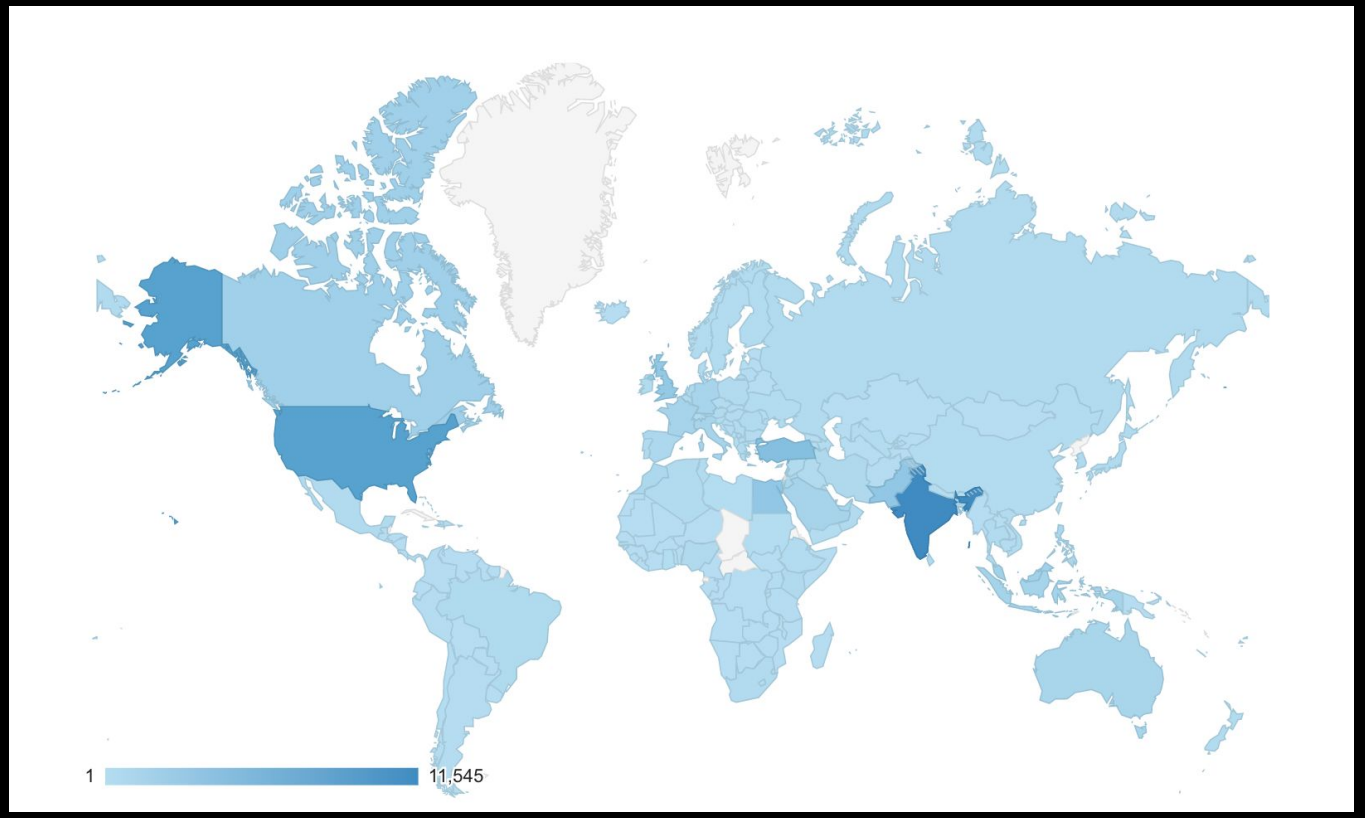
(By default, the collections page shows all major collections in random order. Clicking the category shows an alphabetized list for that category only.)

Published records (as of May 18, 2021)

- 8,510 Sites
- 9,561 Publications or Files (PDF, CAD, etc.)
- 1,115 Authorities (persons, companies, cities)
- 124,835 Images
- 594 Media (video and audio)
- Files in 22 languages
  - 7848 in English
  - 1585 in Arabic

Archnet is

- The largest freely accessible library of its kind
- Visited by users from virtually every country or territory in the world on a monthly basis



So why rebuild?

Why rebuild?

- Address a technology deficit. Some of backend software was reaching End of Life
- Database and its associated assets had become too large to be delivered efficiently by the current configuration of backend software and hosting servers
- Upgrades and changes to the design were becoming increasingly costly and time-consuming, due to factors above
- Most importantly….

ACCESSIBILITY

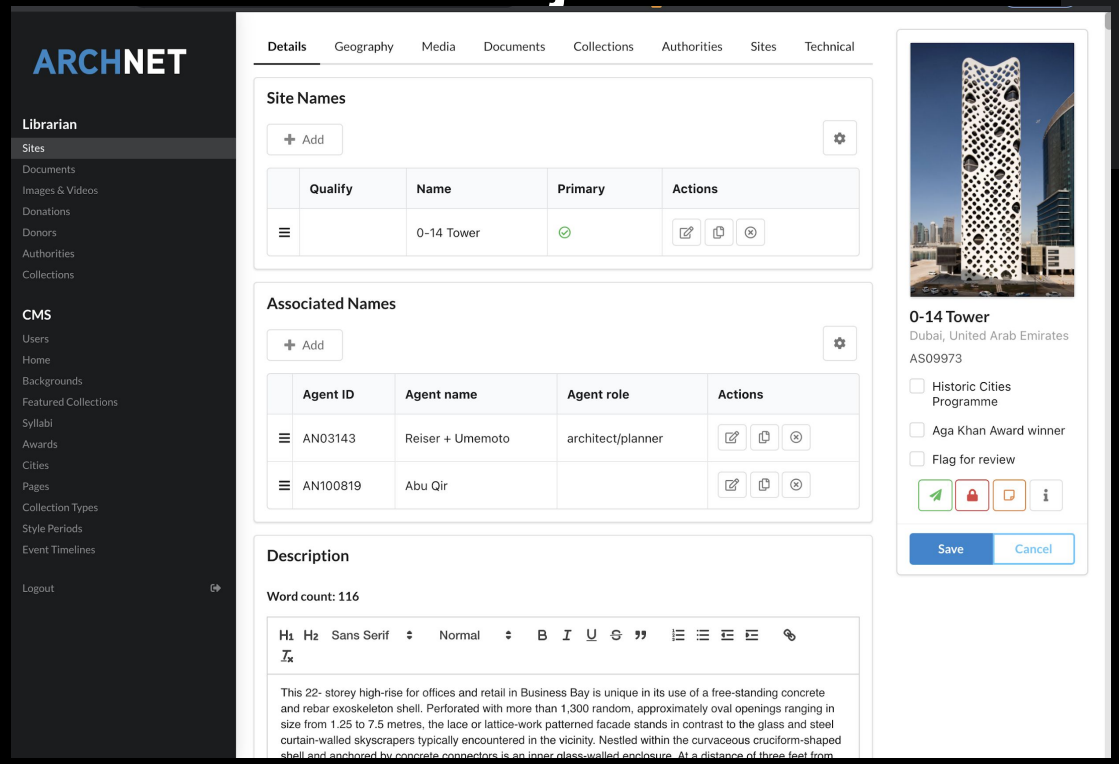
- Closer, if not total, compliance with W3C Accessibility Guidelines
- Friendlier to slower connections
- Friendlier to mobile devices
- Friendlier to users for whom English is not a first language

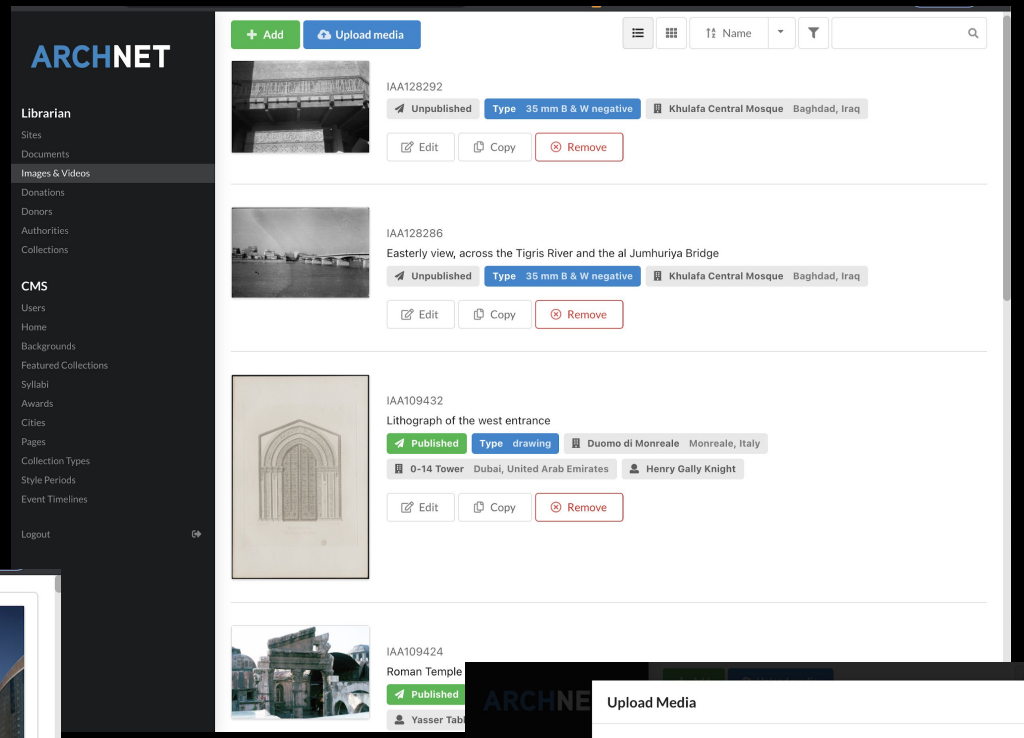
ARCHNET 3.0

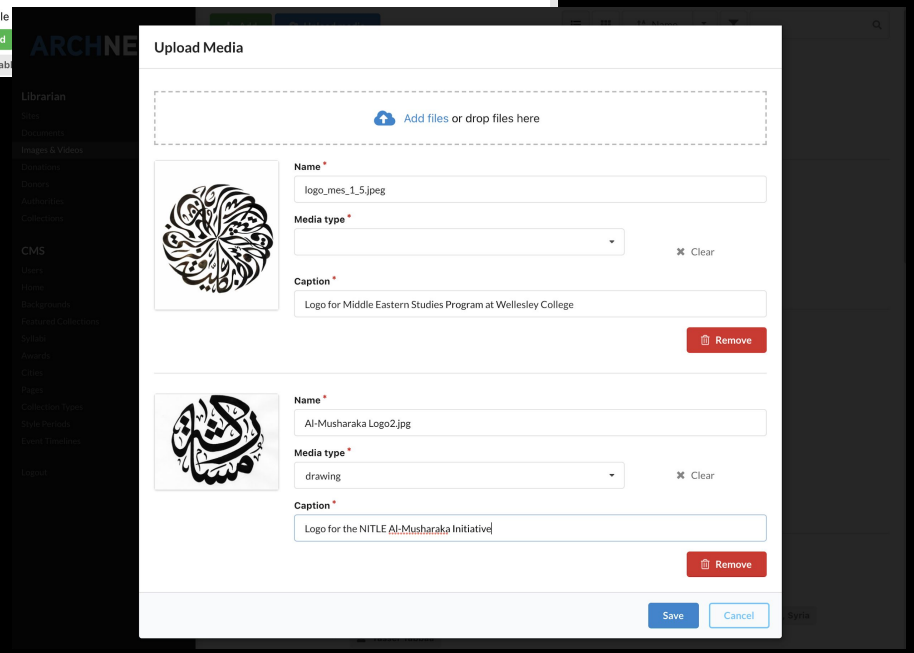
CATALOGING INTERFACE COMPLETE

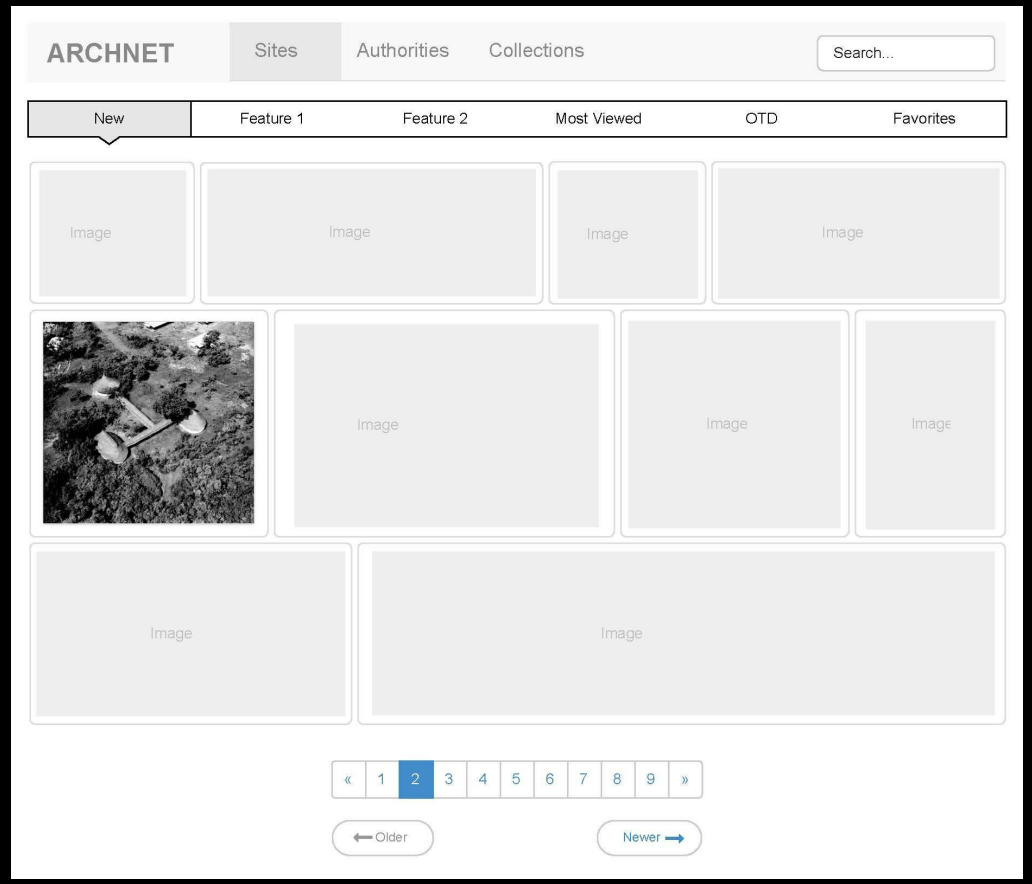
Except for

- **Minor tweaks**
- **Aesthetic adjustments**





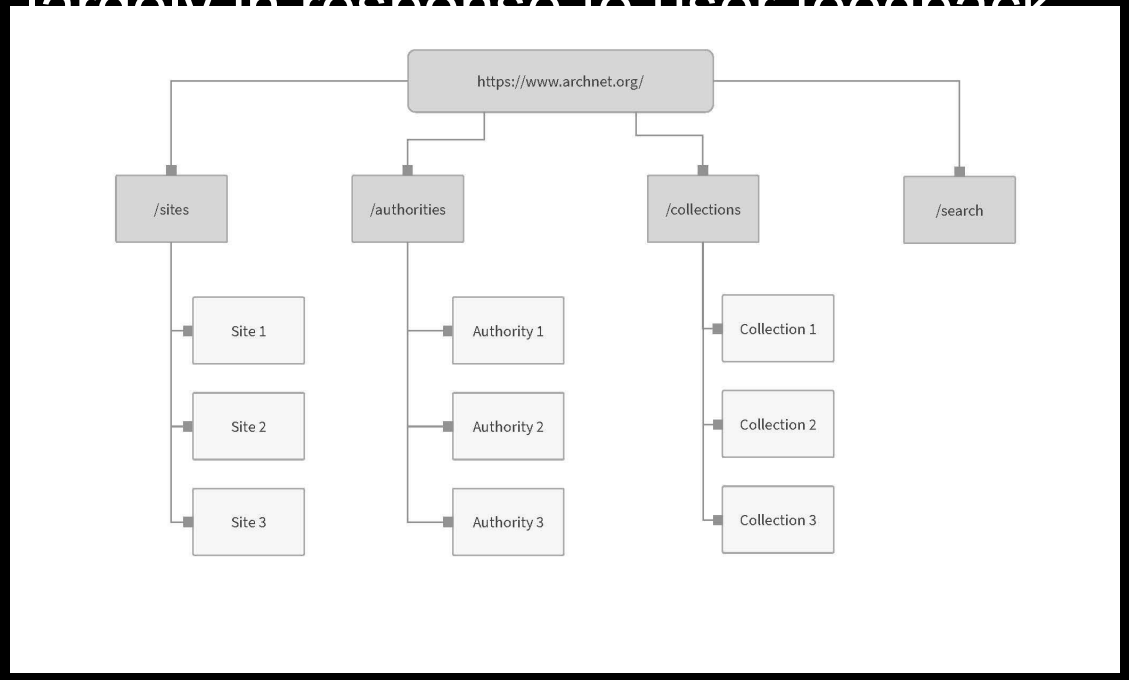




ARCHNET 3.0

ENHANCEMENTS (in no particular order)

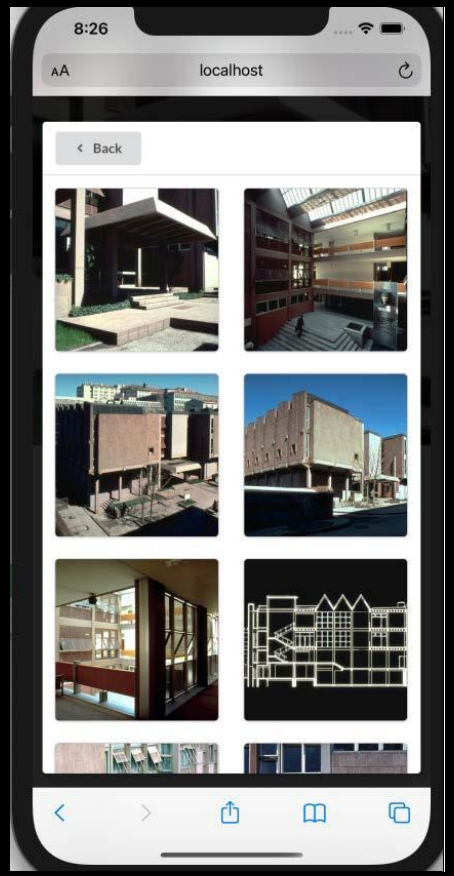
- Brings the platform up to date with latest technology
  - No significant changes to data structure
  - Significant changes to navigation, largely in response to user feedback

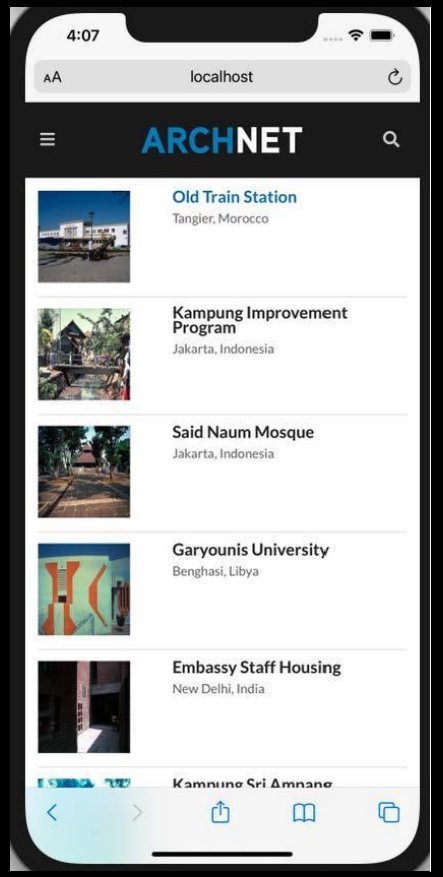


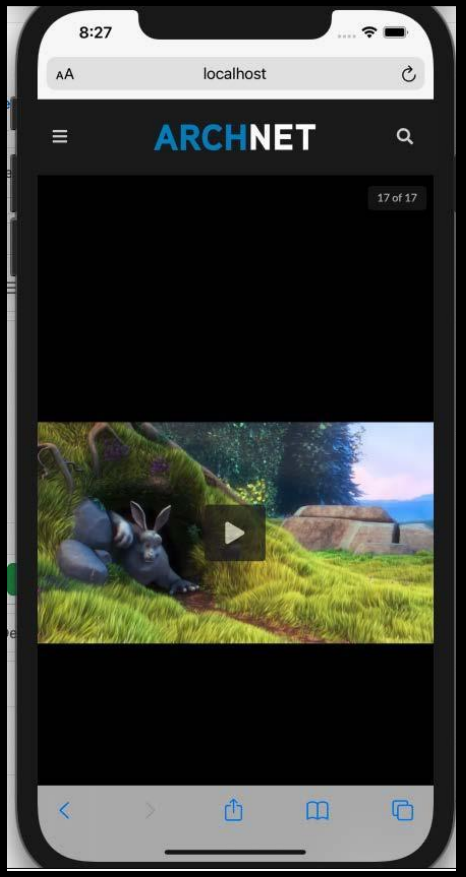
ARCHNET 3.0

ENHANCEMENTS (in no particular order)

- Mobile first development



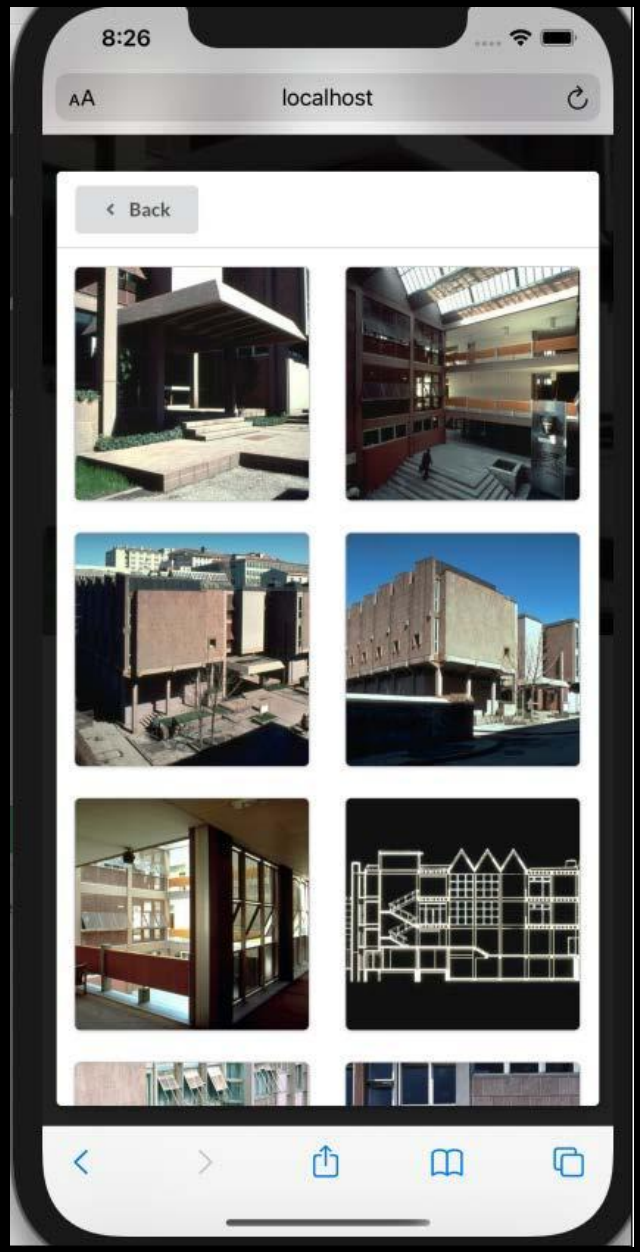




ARCHNET 3.0

ENHANCEMENTS (in no particular order)

- Faster response time
  - Less wait time
  - Fewer failed searches
  - Responsive even on slower connections
    - Important, because our largest user groups are in places with poor connections
- Easier to navigate, easier to search
- Multilingual search
- Mobile-friendly (location-based capabilities may launch with 3.0 or in 3.x)
- Closer compliance with W3C



ARCHNET 3.0

SCHEDULE

- **This summer**-Soft Launch. Testers needed!
- Two months during which both sites will be live, but new content added only to the new platform.
- 3.0 Live by the start of the academic year!
- No significant interruption in cataloging or content development!

Future Developments (Development of Phase 2 and beyond)

- Integration of APIs and capacity for Machine to Machine interaction
  - Vocabularies of existing authorities: Library of Congress, Getty Institute, VIAF, etc.
- A number of enhancements to the interface, including the possibility of multi-lingual interfaces, integration of authorities in other languages
- Automation of processes like image standardization, captioning of videos, etc.
- Various tools to facilitate cataloging with less training
- Enhanced ability to display 3D models, virtual reality representations, etc.
- Etc.

ARCHNET 3.0

HELP NEEDED!

- Sign up to be a Archnet 3.0 tester: https://akdc-mit.typeform.com/to/geLYpu6f
- Share syllabi or other teaching material for our Pedagogy Collection: archnet-submission@mit.edu
- Propose an exhibition of content development project: archnet-submission@mit.edu
  - NOTE: Exclusive permissions are **NOT** required for Archnet. Contributors can donate their material to AKDC, but they can also simply grant a content sharing agreement.
- Request an Archnet workshop for your class (online or in-person): archnet@mit.edu