

La Sierra Digs

Newsletter of the Center for Near Eastern Archaeology | HMS Richards Divinity School | La Sierra University | Vol 4:2 Fall 2016

8th Annual Archaeology Discovery Weekend

A Man's World?

Queens, Goddesses, and Mothers
in the Ancient Near East



November
12-13
2016

Find out more at
lasierra.edu/archaeology

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Lecture Topics

Women discovered through archaeology (ancient queens, goddesses, mothers, and more); women currently doing archaeology (Jodi Magness, Carol Meyers, Susan Ackerman, Tammi Schneider, Kara Cooney, Josephine Verduci, and more); women connected with archaeology in the past (Agatha Christie, Gertrude Bell, Kathleen Kenyon, Crystal Bennett, and more); and more, like William Dever and Kent Bramlett.

Schedule

Saturday, November 12

Illustrated presentations and discussions, Bedouin Hospitality Tent, Middle Eastern Banquet, and more!

Sunday, November 13

Illustrated presentations and discussions, Kids Dig, hands-on displays and activities, and more!

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Tall al-`Umayri 2016

Kent Bramlett

The 2016 season of excavations of the La Sierra dig in Jordan saw a number of answers emerge to our research questions. This is satisfying and is part of the excitement of doing archaeology. Sometimes the answers are surprises, and usually they contain unexpected elements.

Field H. Confirmed! The wall we exposed was the Iron Age perimeter wall as we thought it might be. The Field H team excavated through an Iron IA (late 12th–early 11th century BC) cobbled surface and began working down through the layers. Before long, they reached a marked transition to crumbly burned mudbrick in varying hues of reds, browns, and yellows. The walled town from about 1200 BC (transitional Late Bronze/Early Iron I) had met a fiery end, burning so hotly that pottery appeared to melt and limestone turned to lime powder.

Field L, also along the southern part of the acropolis, provided another opportunity to try to locate the southern extent of the perimeter wall. Two teams worked here, one excavating inside the settlement through several layers of occupational debris. The style of this pottery was still Iron IA and not the transitional Late Bronze/Early Iron I found over in H. Meanwhile, excavators in the other square in Field L found a very nice stone-lined bin. Also, a large store jar was excavated, still held upright in place by the debris which had fallen around it. Provisionally, it appears probable we have a date in the 10th century BC. This would be our first stratified occupational layer from the Iron IIA if confirmed through further study of the remains.

Field J. Work continued on finding and understanding the rampart layers and their extent. Our first surprise was when the square on the terrace shelf reached bedrock. There was no occupation layer, no Middle Bronze, just bedrock under the buildup of tumbled rock and earth. The next square up, soon also reached bedrock.



During the last week of excavation our team in the next square also reached bedrock, some 4.5 meters below the surface of the ground. We were surprised that there was only the transitional Late Bronze/Early Iron I

rampart all the way to the bottom. No Middle Bronze Age. Perhaps the settlement was smaller then and thus lies further to the north from where we were excavating.

Field P proceeded with the challenge of “ground-truthing” the GPR (ground penetrating radar) data in search of possible tombs. In one square, excavation produced a gap between bed-

rock outcrop and a large boulder, but no tomb. We now know to be cautious about these kinds in anomalies, since natural features can produce them. Not to be discouraged, the P team moved to another location of interest, only to find more bedrock. While the tombs remain elusive, the efforts of the Field P team have helped us understand the complexity of GPR data interpretation.



Site 84. The fine example of a wine press which we wished to document was covered with piles of dirt and boulders from recent land-clearing for agricultural activity. We were successful in liaising with the landowner to bring in a tractor to remove the bulk of the obscuring debris. In one day they had the feature nicely cleared and ready for photogrammetry. We now have a 3D model of one of the finest examples of a wine press in the region.

And so we closed the season appreciative of the answers achieved, but cognizant of the tremendous potential remaining at this site to illuminate the world of the Bible and Antiquity. From the careful work of students, volunteers, veterans, and other supporters, we bring the past to light again and the legacy of the nameless inhabitants of ancient `Umayri lives on.

For a complete set of blog reports on the excavations last summer at Tall al-`Umayri, visit: <http://www.madabaplains.org/umayri/weekly-reports.htm?y=2016>.

CNEA Recipients of American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR) Excavation Awards

—Kristina Reed, first graduate with La Sierra’s new MA: Near Eastern Archaeology (summer 2016), won one of 23 individual \$2,000 ASOR excavation awards out of 200+ applications, helping fund her participation at this summer’s excavations at Tall al-`Umayri, Jordan. Her illustrated blog report can be seen at: <http://asorblog.org/cause-view/have-patience-and-dig-on/>.

—Douglas Clark is co-director of a new international project to prepare for and ultimately construct a new archaeological museum in the city of Madaba, Jordan. Supported by an ASOR Harris Grant, the team is part of plans to preserve and present cultural remains from the Madaba region, home to excavations of the Madaba Plains Project and numerous other sites. The illustrated report of two American and two Italian co-directors and several students, can be found at: <http://asorblog.org/cause-view/different-sort-community-outreach-jordan-building-museum-mramp-project/>.

—Josephine Verduci, newly minted ancient jewelry and adornment specialist on the `Umayri excavation team, lives in Melbourne, Australia. She also received an ASOR grant, but her blog has not yet been posted.

Study/Research/Travel Opportunities—Summer 2017

Jesus & Judges Study Tour – July 2017

A brand new study tour to Jordan and Israel is set to take place this July, sponsored by the HMS Richards Divinity School and the Center for Near Eastern Archaeology. Scheduled for 2-25 July, it is headquartered first in Madaba, Jordan, then Jerusalem and Tiberias, then back to Jordan in Petra and Wadi Rum. Designed as an academic study tour for undergraduate and graduate students registering for 8 units of credit, the tour is also open to a few intrepid souls not pursuing academic credits, who would like to join us, keep up with the conversation, and be part of the experience of a lifetime. The study tour is inter-disciplinary in nature—archaeology, biblical studies, theology, literary analysis, feminist readings, anthropology, etc.—and will take us places important to understanding and appreciating the stories of the Judges and Jesus (according to Mark) where these stories were born. Priority deadline for applying and submitting tour deposit—15 December 2016.

Visit: <https://lasierra.edu/jesus&judges/>

[Awaiting final university approval]

Summer Excavations at Khirbat Balu`a, Jordan 2017

Drs. Freidbert Ninow and Kent Bramlett co-direct the ongoing excavations at the ancient Moabite site of Khirbat Balu`a in south-central Jordan. The summer expedition will take place throughout most of the month of August, 2017 and seeks a better understanding of the site during the time of the Moabite kingdom. An incredibly rich site and one of the largest sets of archaeological ruins in Jordan, the site promises to contribute significantly to La Sierra's Versacare-funded initiative: *On the Trail of Ancient Ammonites and Moabites*. For further information, contact Kent Bramlett at archaeology@lasierra.edu.



Display Case

By Kristina Reed

Judean Female Pillar Figurines

Judean female pillar figurines date to the Iron Age II (ca. 1000-586 BCE) and were first discovered more than 100 years ago during excavations in Israel. They are prevalent in contexts dating to First Temple period (800-586 BCE) and are not present in the archaeological record after the Babylonian conquest in 586 BCE. Thousands of pillar figurines have been found in temples, shrines, tombs, houses, and trash pits at Gezer, Megiddo, Qadesh, Tell es-Safi, and nearly every site in Palestine dating to the early Iron II.

The female pillar figurines have a mold-made stylized head with defined facial features and hair that resembled a curly Egyptian wig. The hand-made cylindrical pillar body has a bell-shaped base and large protruding breasts, usually supported by the hands or arms. Most figurines are found broken with only the head remaining due the junction of crude bodies and more substantial heads being a weak point.

Due to their popularity, these figurines must have had a prominent place in culture at the time. But what were they for? Worship? Protective amulets? Ancient Barbie dolls? Fertility was extremely important in ancient times and motherhood was difficult and dangerous for any women, so it widely accepted these pillar figurines represented the female diety Asherah (a.k.a. Ashtarte/Ishtar). Asherah, referred to as the "mother goddess" in the Canaanite pantheon, symbolized motherhood, fertility, and nourishment. Women would have used these figurines as amulets in all aspects of their lives: fertility, protection during pregnancy and childbirth, nursing, and nurturing children.

Often represented sans-figurine as a tree or pole, Asherah is referenced in the Old Testament forty times. In I Kings when Ahab erected an altar to Baal, he also included his consort Asherah. King Josiah, in II Kings, removed and burned the Asherahs when he cleansed the temple in Jerusalem. This existence of polytheism and folk religion in the Temple of Jerusalem during the time of early Israel is addressed in William Dever's book, "Did God Have a Wife?" and he will be presenting on this topic during Archaeology Discovery Weekend this coming November.



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Calendar of Events — 2016-2017

12-13 November—Archaeology Discovery Weekend at La Sierra

20-23 April—La Sierra Alumni Homecoming with archaeology lecture and CNEA open house

2-25 July—Jesus & Judges study tour to Israel/Palestine and Jordan

August—Excavations at Khirbat Balu'a

Recent Discoveries

Assembled by Monique Vincent

Toilet Tales

Archaeology has recently provided an excellent example of the shift from sacred to profane. Archaeologists turned up a stone altar, its horns removed and a hole cut into it for use as a toilet, while excavating an 8th-century shrine in the gate of Lachish. This desecration has been interpreted as the work of King Hezekiah, “cracking down” on the decentralized shrines and worship that plagued the country. For photos and more on the excavations, see <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-3811712/The-wrong-kind-throne-Toilet-discovered-2-800-year-old-shrine-reveals-Biblical-tale-desecration-religious-sites-King-Hezekiah.html>.

Virtual Scrolls

Many ancient scrolls are too charred or delicate to make it possible to unroll them physically for study. Technology has once again come to the rescue, however, as researchers have developed a way of “virtually unwrapping” the scrolls with scans and computer software. This technology, used successfully with burnt scrolls from Herculaneum, can now be used on scriptural scrolls as well. This was recently demonstrated on a charred “chunk” from a synagogue at En Gedi which, when scanned, turned out to contain a section from Leviticus. For more, see <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/22/science/ancient-sea-scrolls-bible.html>.

Priestly Weight

Excavations of a Second Temple Period area in Jerusalem provided excitement when a weight inscribed with the family name of the High Priest emerged. This small stone, carved with the Aramaic and Persian forms of the family name “Katros,” is only the second Hebrew-inscribed weight found from this time period. The stone was found with other objects, a ritual bath, and a storage area buried deep under the destruction layer that sealed the doom of Jerusalem. For more, see <http://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Rare-High-Priests-stone-weight-from-Second-Temple-period-found-in-Jerusalem-467832>.

SUPPORT CNEA!

If you would like to support the work of the Center for Near Eastern Archaeology — ongoing operations, student travel scholarships, the new Museum, etc. — contact the Office of University Advancement at 951 785-2500 or click on “Center for Near Eastern Archaeology” at <https://lasierra.edu/donate/>.



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