



CENTER FOR
NEAR EASTERN
ARCHAEOLOGY
LA SIERRA UNIVERSITY

La Sierra Digs

Newsletter of the Center for Near Eastern Archaeology | HMS Richards Divinity School | La Sierra University | Vol. 13:3 Fall 2025

17th Annual Archaeology Discovery Weekend

Alexander the Great & How He Changed the World

Nov 15–16, 2025

featuring:

ANDREA BERLIN
(Boston University)

KENT BRAMLETT
(La Sierra University)

CYNTHIA FINLAYSON
(LAPIS Foundation)

RACHEL KOUSSER
(City University of New York)

JESSICA NITSCHKE
(Stellenbosch University)

THERESA SHAW
(Independent Scholar)



In-person & online

Find out more at:

lasierra.edu/archaeology

Alexander Mosaic, Pompeii (Adobe Stock)

Archaeology Discovery Weekend 2025

Celebrity, influence, power, royalty, global domination – these are just a few of the themes that come to mind when one considers the brief but tremendous reign of Alexander the Great. And the Lawrence T. Geraty & Douglas R. Clark Center for Near Eastern Archaeology (CNEA) invites *you* to join us in considering the archaeological side of “Alexander the Great and How He Changed the World” this November for our 17th annual Archaeology Discovery Weekend! In-person or online, we hope you will join us for a weekend of amazing lectures presented by some of the top scholars on Alexander and his archaeological legacy, as well as a special Saturday night reception, Sunday family-friendly lab activities, Jordanian dancing and singing and snacks in our authentic goat-hair Bedouin tent, and more! Registration is now open – sign up for free at: <http://lasierra.edu/cnea/discovery-weekend/>.

Saturday, 15 Nov.

Presentations and panel discussion, Special evening reception, and more!

Sunday, 16 Nov.

Presentations and panel discussion, Kids Dig, displays, hands-on activities, and more!

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People in Transition

by Kent Bramlett

As I write this our Fall Quarter is underway, classes are in full swing, and the CNEA lab is bustling with activity. Transitions are in the air, and not just with the shortening days and crisp nights. As of this academic year, Doug Clark has retired as Director of the CNEA but maintains affiliation with the center as a Senior Research Scholar. His work will continue primarily with the ongoing publication of the 'Umayri seasonal volumes, directing the MRAMP project in Madaba, and authoring and editing a volume in the final publication series on 'Umayri. I feel a deep appreciation for Doug's years of tireless support he has given to building the CNEA into what it has become.

Raúl Zanatta continues as Administrative and Curatorial Assistant who keeps the doors open and coordinates a myriad of tasks and activities from hosting visitors to accessioning and inventorying artifacts. Shaun Eccles is Assistant Curator for the ELRAP (Edom Lowlands Regional Archaeological Project) collection and the Cohen Family Collection and facilitates cross-campus collaborations. Dawn Acevedo, now as an independent contractor, contributes so much to our online presence and media communications as Digital Media and Communications Consultant. We currently have about ten students actively in the MA in Near Eastern Archaeology, BA in Archaeology, or Archaeology Minor programs, plus more finishing up theses or comprehensive exams. I am in communication with several more who are in the process of applying for admission or are inquiring about our programs.

Collaboration continues with University of California and Cal State institutions. Bryan Kraemer from CSU San Bernardino is teaching a course in Middle Egyptian with us this fall as an adjunct professor. Conor Cooley at CSU Northridge is writing his master's thesis on work he is doing with the ELRAP collection. We also enjoyed a visit at the end of the summer by Zach Dunseth who is the new Kershaw Chair of the Archaeology of Ancient Israel and Neighboring Lands at UCSD, and Tel Aviv University Professor of Archaeology, Erez Ben-Yosef. We discussed avenues of collaboration in research and look forward to sharing future developments.

So, as this year begins, we are looking to continue the legacy of the past decade and advance archaeology into new technologies, expand our student opportunities, and share with our local and global communities. Thank you for continuing your interest and support in CNEA!



Douglas and Carmen Clark beside CNEA sign

Homecoming 2025

by Douglas Clark

The Center for Near Eastern Archaeology considers it an honor and privilege to welcome La Sierra alumni and friends to campus every spring for an archaeological presentation and related events to showcase CNEA, inform constituents about and display recent research, and welcome good friends to the hospitality of our authentic "Bayt Shair" (House of Goat Hair) Bedouin tent, made several years ago in Madaba, Jordan.

Along with an update on CNEA activities, the program included a special archaeological presentation and our annual CNEA Archaeology Awards. The presentation--Modern Tech Meets Biblical-era Artifacts in the Cohen Family Collection--was built around exquisite artifacts in the Cohen Family Collection at CNEA (from the Cohen family in La Mesa, CA) and provided an engaging show-and-tell format for in-person and online audiences, highlighting various non-invasive research technologies for analyzing biblical-era objects. What can we learn from x-ray fluorescence (XRF), color analysis, photogrammetry, reflectance transformation imaging (RTI), laser scanning, stipple drawing, etc., when applied to Near Eastern artifacts used in biblical times? Specialists included Dr. Kent Bramlett (CNEA), Dr. Jennifer Helbley (Chemistry), Mr. Raúl Zanatta (CNEA), and others.



Jennifer Helbley and Raúl Zanatta present during Homecoming



Archaeology awardees: Ronald Duerksen and Murray and Josiane Brandstater with Douglas Clark (Not pictured: Victor and Alina Tolan)

Distinguished award winners included Dr. Ronald Duerksen, Dr. and Mrs. Murray and Josiane Brandstater, and Mr. and Mrs. Victor and Alina Tolan. The Center is indebted to those whose multi-layered contributions enable it to maintain and expand its educational mission of research and outreach. Our sincere congratulations to them in joining the prestigious cohort of CNEA Archaeology Award recipients.

Skeletons in the Lab

by Douglas Clark

Two workshops reflect the importance of bones in the archaeological research of CNEA, both occurring at CNEA in August. Human bones from a 5,000-year-old dolmen tomb at Tall al-'Umayri, Jordan saw experts come to campus to complete the research begun years ago. Running concurrently, a study of animal bones from 'Umayri took place in the "Ammonite" Modular behind CNEA.

Thousands of megalithic dolmens dot the countryside from southern Jordan to Wales, of which the human skeletal remains from the 'Umayri dolmen represent one of only a handful of which contain skeletons; the vast majority are empty since they sit on top of the ground. That puts the 'Umayri dolmen in a class by itself and places a lot of responsibility on CNEA to get it right! And to publish it for the world to see! The team at work on these remains includes some of the best qualified researchers in osteology, anthropology, paleopathology, ¹⁴C dating, ancient DNA, isotope analyses, and a wide variety of archaeological disciplines. Of these from around the US and the Middle East, Megan Perry from East Carolina University, Keri Porter from Notre Dame University, and Karimah Richardson from UCR were on campus (Lee Greer in Montana and Matthew Williams at Walla Walla University were online) to complete this long-term process of analyzing and recording the basic data involved in best-practices skeletal research. The finished data set is now ready for use in a variety of ways.

The animal bones in storage behind the main CNEA building occupy 130 large red crates packed full of small brown paper sacks containing scores of bones each. There are hundreds of thousands of bones that we excavated at 'Umayri, and many still need analysis and recording. As reported in the spring 2025 issue of *La Sierra Digs*, Kara Larson of the University of Michigan has accepted the responsibility of cataloguing every bone we have and providing a report for publication.



Researchers Karimah Richardson, Megan Perry, and Keri Porter at work in the 'Umayri Lab

Distinguished Scholarship Awards

by Douglas Clark

We are pleased and proud to announce that two faculty members connected with CNEA received distinguished research and scholarship awards this past spring and were honored during their respective graduation ceremonies: Dr. Kent Bramlett, Director of CNEA at La Sierra and Dr. Monique Roddy, Publications Manager for CNEA and history professor at Walla Walla University.

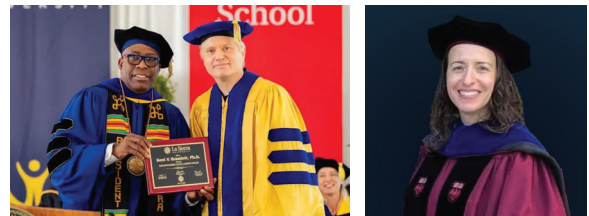
2025 Graduation

by Kent Bramlett

We had three archaeology graduates participate in Commencement on June 15. Brisa Hernandez graduated with a BA in archaeology. Kristy Swartz and Luke Poutre completed their MA degrees in Near Eastern Archaeology. Congratulations, graduates, on this monumental achievement!



Above: Kent Bramlett with MA graduates Kristy Swartz and Luke Poutre
Below: Scholarship award recipients Kent Bramlett and Monique Roddy



Giving Day 2025

by Dawn Acevedo

We at CNEA would like to take a moment to acknowledge all the many, many donors who have, over the past 13 years, made it possible for us to do all that we do. From housing, registering, organizing, curating, and restoring tens of thousands of ancient artifacts to creating learning-based, work-study opportunities for archaeology students to providing travel scholarships for students excavating with us on our overseas projects to providing high-quality, free events and outreach for local and global communities emphasizing the importance of studying, protecting, and preserving the past, we are humbled by the continual support that is poured out for us year after year. As a donations-dependent center, we rely significantly on the faithful generosity of you, our friends. Without financial donations from donors like you, CNEA would cease to exist.

That's why we would like to invite you to join us for the 6th annual La Sierra University Giving Day event on Wednesday, 10 December 2025. Funds generated during this special Giving Day event (and throughout the month of December) will help to support the ongoing research of students, faculty, and staff, as well as the continued care of our collections. Our goal for 2025 remains the same as that of past years: \$50,000. Please join us in our endeavor to continue to study, protect, and preserve the past for future generations!



The Madaba Plains Project at 50

by Douglas Clark

Of the five research projects connected with Jordan and sponsored by CNEA—Tall al-'Umayri, the Balu'a Regional Archaeological Project, the Khirbat 'Ataruz Project, the Madaba Regional Archaeological Museum Project, and the curation of the Edom Lowlands Regional Archaeology Project material culture—the first is part of a larger regional endeavor dating back to 1968, the Madaba Plains Project excavations at Tall Hisban (1968 to the present), Tall al-'Umayri (1984-2016), and Tall Jalul (1992-2017) in central Jordan.

In 2017, at the annual meeting of the American Society for Overseas Research (ASOR), directors and specialists delivered numerous presentations celebrating MPP's remarkable run of 50 years. This is unprecedented in the Middle East, especially with the same team of directors throughout, now affectionately called the "silver backs": Lawrence Geraty of La Sierra University, Larry Herr of Burman University, Øystein LaBianca of Andrews University, Douglas Clark of La Sierra University, and Randy Younker of Andrews University.

This November, once again at the annual meeting of ASOR (19-22 November in Boston), the MPP silver backs are hosting a special reception to celebrate the release of the 50th-anniversary volume growing out of those earlier presentations: *Narrating Archaeological Sites and Places: Fifty Years of the Madaba Plains Project at Tall Hisban, Tall al-'Umayri, and Tall Jalul*. We have invited friends from ASOR, the Adventist Society for Religious Studies, the Near Eastern Archaeology Society, the Society of Adventist Philosophers, and the Adventist Theological Society, who are all meeting around the same time in Boston, to join us for this historic reception and celebration—Thursday 20 November 2025 in the Hilton Boston Park Plaza Hotel. All are welcome.

Simi Valley DSS Seminar

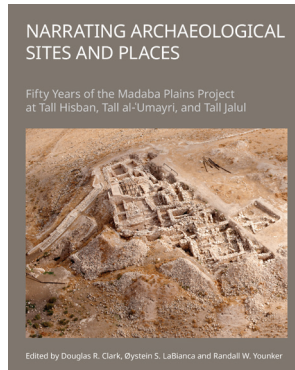
by Kent Bramlett

On 16 August, Drs. Lawrence Geraty and Kent Bramlett presented on the Dead Sea Scrolls as part of a two-day seminar hosted by the Simi Valley SDA church on the occasion of the nearby tour exhibit at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library of a selection of original scrolls from Israel. Geraty recounted personal stories connected to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and his interaction with the generation of scholars who translated them and excavated Qumran. He recounted his acquaintance with Roland de Vaux, the Dominican excavator of Qumran and his work with Frank Cross at Harvard on some of the Dead Sea Scroll texts. Bramlett gave a historical overview of the discovery of the scrolls, some observations on their content and significance, and discussion on the recent application of AI on the dating of some of the texts.

BRAP (2025) 2026

by Kent Bramlett

The Balu'a Regional Archaeological Project (BRAP) had planned to be in the field during June and July of 2025. We had a team of about 40 students, professors, and veteran participants ready and excited to get to Jordan to begin excavation and research. However, the conflict between Israel and Iran led to uncertainty and multiple flight cancellations by most airlines. We initially delayed our plans by a week, but, given the situation on the ground (multiple daily air raid alerts and the risk of falling debris from drones and rockets shot down), we made the difficult decision to postpone the dig until next year. With that said, we are moving full steam ahead and with high optimism that we will finally be able to field the team in 2026. Our field season dates are 18 June-30 July, and we will be posting information online about participation options and registration deadlines. Stay tuned and watch for updates at: <http://brapjordan.org/>.



Balu'a Team, 2022

Riverside Nights With the Museum

by Kent Bramlett

With the Museum of Riverside currently closed and undergoing renovation, the museum director initiated an occasional lecture series at the City of Riverside Library. As part of the series, Dr. Kent Bramlett was invited to present in early October on the Ancient Near Eastern collections at the CNEA and associated field work. Bramlett's lecture, "Preserving Ancient Artifacts: La Sierra University's Near Eastern Collections and Archaeological Research" shared how archaeology has progressed from the age of treasure hunters (aka Indiana Jones) to one where archaeologists are at the forefront of working to protect cultural heritage, both locally and in distant countries. He shared how the CNEA has been involved in helping put together a Memorandum of Understanding between the US State Department and the country of Jordan that helps reduce looting and illicit trade in antiquities. And he talked about the challenges of site preservation and the importance of preserving archaeological heritage for the benefit of all who are curious about humanity's shared past.



Drs. Kent Bramlett and Larry Geraty present on the Dead Sea Scrolls at Simi Valley SDA Church

Herr Library Comes to CNEA

by Kent Bramlett

Dr. Larry Herr, one of the five directors of the Madaba Plains Project, a longtime director of excavations at Tall al-'Umayri, Jordan, and retired professor at Burman University in Alberta, has donated his library of archaeology books, including an impressive array of site publications, critical for scholarly research and comparative studies, to the CNEA. The books were in storage at Burman, and we had been planning and trying for some time to get them to our campus. In August, CNEA director Kent Bramlett drove to Lacombe to meet Larry, and the two loaded a U-Haul trailer with his books and 'Umayri publication documents. It was a long, two-thousand-mile drive to Riverside with a heavily loaded trailer, but all went well, and the library cataloging team (Terri Shaw and Howard Bunte) are graciously adding the site reports to their priority to-do list!

Regional Student Visits to CNEA

by Douglas Clark and Kent Bramlett

Two student clubs recently found their way to CNEA. One, the Carson Spanish Pathfinder Club, carefully planned a visit on 18 May so that their Pathfinders could fulfill most of the requirements for the Pathfinder Biblical Archaeology Honor, a relatively new addition to the long list of honors available to them. They spent several hours at CNEA, hearing presentations and touring the Center, and then some time digging in our excavation unit. This event could signal a new CNEA initiative to collaborate with SoCal Pathfinder clubs in helping their members achieve this significant award.

For the other, CNEA hosted a Robotics Club from Corona in early October. This group of grade school students from the Olive Branch Church and School located in Corona toured the labs and viewed some of the technological methods of study we apply to artifacts and employ in field archaeology in Jordan. Topics discussed included photogrammetry and 3D modeling, scanning and 3D printing, and applications of the CAVE multi-panel viewing platform in the Geraty Library. They were an inquisitive and engaged group, and they greatly enjoyed their visit to our campus and Center.



Students from the Carson Spanish Pathfinder Club visited CNEA in May to help fulfill requirements for the Pathfinder Biblical Archaeology Honor

Madaba Museum Project Recognized in Jordan

by Douglas Clark

The Madaba Regional Archaeological Museum Project (MRAMP), co-sponsored by CNEA, along with Gannon University in Pennsylvania, Perugia University in Italy, Sapienza Uni-

versity of Rome, and the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, was recognized on the evening of 6 October during a special awards ceremony, sponsored by the Petra National Trust, at the famous Roman-period Odeon outdoor theater in downtown Amman, Jordan. MRAMP co-directors submitted an award application based on the project's efforts to help preserve the cultural heritage of Jordan. Numerous submissions were made in this category (along with many in other categories). While the MRAMP application made it to the top three in this category, it was another team that won the award. It was like being nominated for the Oscars but not quite earning the right to carry home the statue!

Two of the MRAMP co-directors were able to attend the awards ceremony in person, Douglas Clark from CNEA and Andrea Polcaro from Perugia University. As the photo below shows, the Odeon was full of dignitaries and others committed to caring for Jordan's past. It was an engaging evening in this 2,000-year-old theater intended for musical events. The ambience, at once enchanting and immersive, also enabled national endeavors to help ensure a future for the country's past.



Guests and award nominees filled the 2,000-year-old Odeon theater in Amman, Jordan

Display Case

Raúl Zanatta

One particular form of ceramic vessel from the Late Bronze Age onward is the pilgrim flask: a round, flat container designed to carry liquids. We call the shape "lentoid" for its resemblance to that important legume in the Near Eastern regions. They come in various sizes, with or without decoration – some featuring elaborate designs. They have two handles extending from the neck to the shoulder of the vessel where cords were attached to hang on the side of the traveler. CNEA is blessed to have several pilgrim flasks among our collections made of clay or glass and dating to different time periods.

Pictured top to bottom, left to right:

CNEA004305 (Greek)

CNEA003993 (Iron Age)

CNEA003633 (Iron Age)

CNEA004190 (Iron Age)

CNEA005110 (Islamic)



La Sierra Digs

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2025-2026 Calendar of Events

15-16 November	ADW 2025: Alexander the Great
10 December	Giving Day Event
10 February	Winter Lecture
18 April	Homecoming Lecture
18 June-30 July	BRAP (Balu'a Excavation)

THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING CNEA

As you can tell from this issue of La Sierra Digs, the Lawrence T. Geraty & Douglas R. Clark Center for Near Eastern Archaeology at La Sierra University is on the move, and we need your support for ongoing operations, students support, research, and more! Please go online to <https://lasierra.edu/donate> and click on "Center for Near Eastern Archaeology" to make your contribution, or contact the Office of University Advancement at (951) 785-2500.

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Recent Discoveries

Assembled by Dawn Acevedo

Lighthouse of Alexandria Returns to Dry Land

One of the original Seven Wonders of the World, the Lighthouse of Alexandria, is returning to dry land 30 years after its discovery thanks to a massive operation led by the French Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS). The project has lifted 22 of the 70- to 80-ton blocks out of the water for digitization and research which will ultimately result in a virtual replica of the lost Wonder.

<https://lafondation3ds.org/news/gates-alexandria-lighthouse-emerge-sea/>

Ancient Macedonian Gymnasium Reveals Possible Link to Alexander the Great

Excavation and research of a gymnasium at the ancient Macedonian site of Mieza, Greece has offered new insights into the lavish lives of elite athletes as well as the unearthing of four styli of the type used by Aristotle's students. It is believed that Aristotle "taught Alexander and his companions at Mieza." <https://greekcitytimes.com/?p=459075>

Missing Byzantine City Unearthed in Southern Jordan

Researchers from Mutah University have discovered the lost Byzantine city of Tharais, located "near the modern town of El-'Iraq in the Karak Governate." Potsherds, mosaic fragments, glass, tools, architectural fragments, inscriptions, and site layout contribute to the identification of the site as the Tharais shown on the famous 6th-century A.D. Madaba Mosaic Map. <https://tinyurl.com/losttharaisfound>

Roman Council Building Discovered in Ancient Laodicea

A 2,050-year-old, theater-style assembly hall has been discovered in ancient Laodicea in southwestern Türkiye. The civic building features "pentagonal outer walls and a hexagonal interior, a layout not previously recorded in ancient Anatolia." The council building continued in use until the 7th century A.D., and engraved names on the benches help to identify council roles. The structure is notably smaller than the theaters of Laodicea, accommodating approximately 600-800 people. <https://tinyurl.com/laodiceaassemblyhall>