



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. 13:2 Spring 2025

The Lawrence T. Geraty & Douglas R. Clark Center for Near Eastern Archaeology presents:



ANNUAL ARCHAEOLOGY HOMECOMING EVENT

“Modern Tech Meets Biblical-era Artifacts in the Cohen Family Collection”

with Dr. Kent Bramlett, Dr. Jennifer Helbley, Mr. Raúl Zanatta, and others

+ Archaeology Awards, Open House, Hospitality Tent, and more!



In-person and online (lasierra.edu/cnea), 26 April 2025, 3:30-5:00pm PT

This presentation, built around exquisite artifacts in the Cohen Family Collection at CNEA, will provide 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, ceramic profiling, stipple drawing, etc., when applied to Near Eastern artifacts used in biblical times? Specialists include Dr. Kent Bramlett (CNEA), Dr. Jennifer Helbley (Chemistry), Mr. Raúl Zanatta (CNEA), and others. This is all part of our ongoing themed Homecoming programs under the umbrella of “A Thousand Windows into the Past: The Cohen Family Collection.” To learn more about this event or to join us virtually, visit lasierra.edu/cnea/homecoming.

What to Watch for at CNEA during Homecoming

The Lawrence T. Geraty & Douglas R. Clark Center for Near Eastern Archaeology will showcase numerous archaeological treasures during Homecoming and invites you to enjoy them firsthand. These include biblical-era artifacts in the Cohen Family Collection housed at CNEA, which will be examined using some of the latest technologies available to us, without harming the objects. Through an agreement between CNEA and the Cohen Family of La Mesa, CA, these exquisite objects (nearly 1,000) are making their way to CNEA and form the basis of a series of

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ongoing Homecoming presentations.

In addition, the CNEA Homecoming event will feature archaeological exhibits; our celebrated, authentic Bedouin hospitality tent with appropriate refreshments; CNEA updates on activities and goals; and the awarding of CNEA Archaeology Awards to Ronald & Francene (deceased) Duerksen, Murray & Josiane Brandstater, and Alina & Victor Tolan.



Saturday 26 April 2025

3:00–5:00 PM CNEA Open House with exhibits and Bedouin Tent hospitality

3:30–5:00 PM CNEA Homecoming program

Remembering Dr. Audrey Shaffer (1929–2025)

by Douglas Clark

Audrey Shaffer was, to everyone who knew her, a gracious, generous, energetic, and elegant soul who touched the lives of thousands of people throughout her life, including hundreds of archaeology professionals, students, and volunteers. Never one to shy away from hard work while she was able, Audrey must hold the record for the number of archaeological excavations on which anyone has participated as a valued staff member: 44.

Her archaeology interests took her to excavations at Caesarea Maritima in Israel, to a project on Cyprus, one in Sicily, and several seasons at Tall Jalul, Jordan. More importantly from the perspective of CNEA, she excavated at Khirbat al-Balu'a and participated eight times in the CNEA excavations at Tall al-'Umayri, Jordan where she served as a square supervisor, responsible for a small team of volunteers and local laborers in the painstakingly slow, careful process of excavation; data-control officer in charge of ensuring accurate information recording; and pottery registrar who processes all of the ceramics excavated at the site during the season. In a short, written impression of dig life during the 2012 season at Tall al-'Umayri, she shared what intrigued her most about archaeological excavation: "One of my favorite activities at the excavation is to expose walls of ancient houses and try to imagine what the residents did in these houses." <https://madabaplains.org/umayri/weekly-reports.htm?y=2012&w=4.5>

Her curatorial work in CNEA's Collections Lab included one to two days per week of cataloging thousands of objects dating from the Early Bronze Age (beginning in 3,600 BC) through the Islamic Period (into modern times). She took the initiative to connect La Sierra archaeologists with the Getty Villa and its conservation program, a step that led to three workshops provided by the Getty Villa and several years of fruitful collaboration with the UCLA/Getty Conservation Institute, through

which dozens of CNEA artifacts have been analyzed and conserved by their students.

Audrey also served on the Board of Trustees of the American Society of Overseas Research (ASOR) and was the recipient in 2019 of one of the first CNEA Archaeology Awards for her service to La Sierra. In addition, the volume, *Madaba Plains Project: The 2002 Season at Tall al-'Umayri and Subsequent Studies* (volume 8 in the MPP seasonal reports), was dedicated to her (from which some lines in this remembrance were sourced).

Tributes from a former CNEA staff member and a CNEA volunteer:

Kaitlyn Satelmayer

During my time at CNEA, Audrey was someone I could always count on to see at our events and help in whatever way she could. She was kind and always stopped me in the hallway, asking how I was and what she could do when she noticed I was running around (a little more stressed than normal) setting up for meetings or events. After committee meetings ended, she would turn to me and say, "Well, I would say that was quite productive, wouldn't you? This is going to be a great event!"

Terri Shaw

I am grateful to her for so much because she was the one who introduced me—on my first visit to CNEA—to the work going on in the Collections Lab. I immediately observed that it looked like an activity that could use some volunteers. She agreed, of course. When I started coming to the lab, she walked me through how to fill in the form for each object being registered and showed me examples of her work to serve as models. When we were doing oil lamps, I consulted with her and she loaned the lab some of her books to help us with describing them. And on and on. I close my eyes, and I see her, I hug her, I thank her, and I will always hold her in my heart.

Although it might be hard to imagine, Audrey also had a family and professional life outside archaeology. A registered health information administrator and a certified professional in health care quality, she was highly respected for her work as a consultant to international health care organizations, developing a distinguished record of volunteer service in at least 14 countries, including Afghanistan, Argentina, Brazil, China, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malaysia, Philippines, Rwanda, Taiwan, Tanzania, and Uganda. She was also a licensed pilot (private, commercial, instrument), having



Audrey Shaffer in CNEA Collections Lab

flown on mission assignments for years. During her long and active life, Audrey traveled to 90 countries on all seven continents and celebrated her 90th birthday by going skydiving.

In addition, she received an honorary Doctor of Humanitarian Service degree from La Sierra University for her contributions to the well-being of humankind.

She and her husband, Dr. Frank Shaffer, had one daughter, Cindy who married Joe Wilkinson. They had two children, Brian and Gina. Gina married Keanan Fleck and their children are Taric, Illiana, and Arlo.

In an effort to keep the memory of Audrey and her life contributions alive, as well as those of others like her, CNEA is creating an In Memoriam page on its website (see the article in this issue of *La Sierra Digs*). She will be one of the first to occupy this place of honor, a place filled with additional tributes, photos, stories, memories, life achievements.

Archaeology Winter Lecture Series 2025

by Kent Bramlett

The fourth annual Winter Archaeology Lecture Series took place over two weeks in February. Cosponsored this year by the H.M.S. Richards Divinity School, the two lectures explored the ancient people or culture known as the Amorites.

The initial lecture on February 11 featured a presentation by Dr. Aaron Burke of UCLA titled: "Amorites: Their Origins and Their Legacy." Burke, who published a recent monograph on the Amorites, utilized references to Amorites in Mesopotamian texts to draw out clues to their origins and contemporary identity. He recognized the problem of essentializing identity through a selection of traits or characteristics and the complexity of detecting identity through the archaeological record. But Amorites identified their own origins in pastoralism, in the zone of uncertainty defined by Burke as one of subminimal rainfall for regular agriculture but one exploited successfully throughout history by pastoralists. These are the areas adjacent to the Fertile Crescent and beyond the irrigated river valleys. But in a process repeated through history, those on the periphery migrate to the center and the once-pastoral Amorites sedentarized and acculturated, finally becoming the rulers of cities and kingdoms. In the Middle Bronze Age (ca. 2000–1500 BC) self-identified Amorites ruled in Babylon (Ham-

murabi) and most of Syria (Mari, Aleppo). The "unwinding," as Burke put it, of the Amorite period saw the rise of the Hittite and Egyptian empires of the Late Bronze Age. Still, some fraction of the populace identified as Amorites and curated the identity and memories of the great Amorite kings such as Zimri-Lim and Hammurabi. In summary, Burke suggested the term Canaanite is more a geographic "net" and Amorite identifies who the people are.

The second lecture, presented by Dr. Øystein LaBianca from Andrews University on February 18, was titled: "The Legacy of Heshbon: Biblical Memory, Archaeology, and Narratives." LaBianca, a director of the renewed excavations at Tall Hisban, ancient Heshbon, continued the story of the Amorites, or at least the idea of the Amorites, into the Iron Age and the literature of the first millennium BC. The biblical text identifies the king of Heshbon, conquered by Moses and the Israelites, as an Amorite. LaBianca considered the archaeological history of the site and the cultural memories of ancient Israel as well as Moab as he suggested that memory could be adaptive and multi-valent. It incorporated traditions of Amorite ancestry and tribal conflict in the contested boundaries of territorial conquest. For LaBianca, the absence of architectural features at the site during the period of conquest is resolved in a pastoralist polity; for Burke, who provided a rejoinder with LaBianca, it could be the result of a rich cultural memory, constructed and telescoped from the legacies of the Bronze Age Amorites.

Watch the lectures at lasierra.edu/cnea/winter-lecture/

Archaeology Discovery Weekend 2025

Archaeology Discovery Weekend 2025 (15–16 November) will focus its lectures and exhibits on the archaeology of the Macedonian ruler who took the fourth-century BC world by storm: Alexander the Great. The schedule will include the normal Saturday and Sunday afternoon lectures on Alexander and his legacy by specialists from La Sierra University and other universities in the US and Europe. The working title for the weekend is "Alexander the Great and How He Changed the World."

While in power for only one decade, Alexander the Great conquered a massive swath of the Mediterranean world, the ancient Near East, and Central and South Asia, dying in Babylon on 10/11 June 323 BC at the age of 32. No one before or after him achieved what he accomplished. We know a lot about him from written sources, but the November event will draw attention to recent archaeological data that define his rapid rise to power and the astounding expansion of his conquests.



Winter Lecturers Aaron Burke (L) and Øystein LaBianca (R)



The 2025 event will also include a special Saturday evening reception in the Atrium of the Zapara School of Business so that attendees can enjoy sumptuous eastern Mediterranean refreshments and celebrate various ways of presenting Alexander the Great. In addition, the usual weekend features will include exhibitions (static and digital), the Kids Dig, and warm and welcoming Bedouin tent hospitality.

More information at lasierra.edu/cnea/discovery-weekend/

People in Transition — Raúl Zanatta

It is our pleasure to introduce to CNEA-connected friends and colleagues the newly appointed CNEA Curatorial and Office Assistant, who officially began work in mid-February—Mr. Raúl Zanatta. He is now filling the position previously held by Kaitlyn Satelmayer.



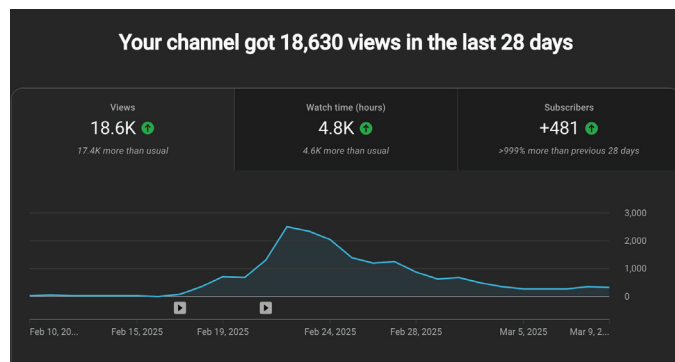
Hailing from Argentina, Raúl brings with him several years of teaching experience in the US, especially in Hawaii, and currently teaches Spanish at La Sierra. His interest in archaeology led to his enrollment in our MA in Near Eastern Archaeology program; he only has his thesis to finish to complete the degree.

A person concerned with details, Raúl pays careful attention to following best practices in the work we do at CNEA, but he also projects a warm, unassuming presence, committed to making things run smoothly at CNEA and inviting university and local communities into the environment and ethos of archaeology and archaeological research on campus.

Pardon our Progress – Website Updates, Part 2

by Dawn Acevedo

While several of our new webpages are still a work-in-progress, we are happy to report the completion of our new “Donor Honor Roll” page which can be found at lasierra.edu/cnea/donors. This page recognizes the hundreds of supporters who have backed CNEA over the years, providing more than \$2 million in funding since 2012! CNEA is honored and humbled to recog-



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nize everyone who has made possible our years of ongoing educational programming, research projects, artifact care, staffing, outreach, and more!

Additionally, this page will soon be accompanied by an “In Memoriam” page which will pay tribute to many of the friends and supporters of CNEA who have passed away. We recognize that this can be a sensitive topic for family members, so if you would prefer that CNEA not include your loved one on our “In Memoriam” page, please email us at archaeology@lasierra.edu to let us know.

Visitors to our website will also enjoy the recently published “About Us” page which features information on the history, naming, and mission of CNEA, as well as a listing of our staff (images coming soon). And be sure to check out our “Academic Programs” page to learn more about our undergraduate major and minor and graduate degree!

Finally, CNEA is excited to announce unprecedented growth on our YouTube channel following the posting of our 2025 Winter Lecture Series videos. Thank you to everyone who has subscribed to our channel (youtube.com/@lasierra_cnea), the count of which has more than doubled since mid-February, and, as of this newsletter, has passed 1,000 subscribers!

If you haven't yet, please consider subscribing to our YouTube channel and other social media accounts (Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn) to stay up to date on the latest goings on at the Center. And to join our listserv, send an email to archaeology@lasierra.edu or sign up via our website (lasierra.edu/archaeology).

2025 Archaeology Graduates

by Kent Bramlett

The following La Sierra archaeology students will graduate this spring. Watch for their Commencement photos in the Fall 2025 issue of *La Sierra Digs*.

Bachelor of Arts in Archaeology

Brisa Hernandez

Master of Arts: Near Eastern Archaeology

Luke Poutre's thesis is focused on the identification and analysis of the chipped-stone tools from a late Iron Age building at Tall al-'Umayri, Jordan. His research will contribute to understanding the function of the structure and the types of activities conducted there.

Jaime Bennett studied the loom weights found in a case-mate room in the fortifications of Khirbat al-Balu'a. Her thesis includes research into ancient textile production technologies



and traditions, as well as applying computer modeling to communicate her findings visually and interactively.

Kristy Swartz's thesis is titled, "The Synchronicity of Iron Age Judean Pillar Figurines among Cultures and Families in The Southern Levant and The Interpretation of the Presentation of Breasts." She investigated the meaning of this unique type of figurine using Near Eastern texts, archaeological contexts, and iconography.

CNEA Research Continues Apace

Those of us who inhabit CNEA believe our mission is well served with research based on best practices and with verifiable results, whether we are working with biblical-era materials or those from before or after. And since we emphasized research in our Giving Day fundraising drive last year, we are pleased to include the following research-related notes:

—Richard Pearson, PhD student from University College London, will return to CNEA this summer to continue his isotope analysis of Tall al-'Umayri sheep mandibles and teeth, building on the strontium isotope analysis he performed for his MA. Studying additional isotopes will further enrich our understanding of the flocks that surrounded 'Umayri during the Iron Age: where they came from, what they ate, their state of health, etc.

—Kara Larson, PhD student at the University of Michigan, has agreed to pull together all the collected data from the animal bones we excavated at 'Umayri into one giant database. Over the 32 years and 18 seasons of excavation at the site, several different specialists studied these faunal remains using various analytical and recording techniques, some in English and some in German, some records more complete than

others. This is to be expected, if inconvenient, when working with hundreds of thousands of animal bone fragments over such a long time span. Kara will also join us this summer, once her zooarchaeological responsibilities are completed, at the Balu'a Regional Archaeological Project (BRAP)'s excavations in June and July.

—The BRAP team, directed by Kent Bramlett, Monique Roddy (Walla Walla University), and Friedbert Ninow, will be in the field in south-central Jordan from 19 June through 31 July. These six weeks represent a serious commitment to archaeological research in the Near East, as many projects run excavations for five weeks or less, sometimes much less. The BRAP leadership is to be commended for their insistence on making the most of their time on site and providing the best educational experience possible to the 40 or so participants.

—The Center has identified three La Sierra archaeology students to receive CNEA travel scholarships to help support their participation in the Balu'a excavations this summer: Matthew (Hew) Murdoch, Sarah Watson, and Brisa Hernandez. We wish them well in their travels and excavation research at one of the largest sites in ancient Moab.

—Two new research technologies have recently been added to the CNEA toolbox: a small, book-sized digital projector for use in teaching and outreach activities at the Center and a highly sophisticated Laser Aided Profiler, made to order in Slovakia by a company founded recently by an archaeologist and an engineer and used by archaeologists in 30 institutions located in 14 countries. The latter will scan small artifacts like diagnostic pottery and process the scans for multiple purposes, especially to create publishable pottery plates which are utilized by everyone who studies these ubiquitous artifacts.

Display Case

Raúl Zanatta

Iron Age Chalice from the Cohen Family Collection. "Chalice" is a word commonly used in archaeology to designate a vessel that consists of an open bowl built on a pedestal or a tall foot. They were related to cultic activities in temples and palaces in the Southern Levant since the Neolithic period and beyond.

This particular chalice is 7.5 inches (19 cm) tall and 4.5 inches (11.5 cm) in diameter at the rim. It was made on a potter's wheel using white clay, and its decorations include a red-slipped wash with thick cream rings and narrow rings of black pigment on the neck and body of the vessel.



Laser Aided Profiler (top left), new Yaber digital projector (top right), and pottery plate from Laser Aided Profiler (bottom)



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Photographs: Adobe, Madaba Plains
Project, La Sierra University, Dawn Aceve-
do, Raúl Zanatta, Kaitlyn Satelmayer, Darla
Martin Tucker, Laser Aided Profiler

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2025 Calendar of Events

26 Apr	Homecoming Arch- aeology Presentations
16 Jun–30 Aug	CNEA closed for summer
19 Jun–31 Jul	Excavations at Balu'a
15–16 Nov	ADW 2025 – Alexander the Great

SUPPORT CNEA!

As this issue of *La Sierra Digs* makes clear, the Center for Near Eastern Archaeology at La Sierra University is on the move! And it needs your support for student travel scholarships, the new university museum, and ongoing operations. Please go online at <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. Thank you!

Recent Discoveries

Assembled by Dawn Acevedo

New Insights into the Alexander Mosaic from Pompeii

The incredibly detailed Alexander Mosaic from the House of Faun at Pompeii is sharing more of its secrets with researchers even 2,000 years later (see photo on page 3 of this issue). A large-scale restoration project launched by its housing museum, the National Archaeological Museum of Naples (MANN), provided researchers the opportunity to conduct noninvasive, multispectral imaging techniques to assess the composition of the more than two million tesserae used in the mosaic, and to venture a guess at the quarry origins for those tiny tiles. Read all about it here: www.livescience.com/archaeology/romans/secrets-of-alexander-the-great-mosaic-revealed-after-1st-of-its-kind-analysis

First Discovery of Pharaonic Tomb in Over 100 Years

A joint British-Egypt team of researchers revealed “the last undiscovered royal tomb of the 18th Egyptian dynasty” when they excavated a tomb “in an area associated with the resting places of royal women.” After much difficulty clearing collapsed debris, archaeologists were greeted by a ceiling painted blue with yellow stars, a clear sign that the tomb was actually the tomb of a pharaoh. Broken pieces of alabaster jars with the inscribed names of Thutmose II and Hatshepsut revealed the original owner, though any remaining artifacts or mummies had been removed to a second location in antiquity due to flooding. Read about the discovery at: www.bbc.com/news/articles/c5ym30v356po

Scientists Offer Scent-sational Insights into Mummy Smells

A team of international researchers investigated the smell of nine mummies using non-destructive methods including gas chromatography, mass spectrometry, and olfactometry analyses in conjunction with “historical and conservation research.” The study has provided new insights into the burial practices used in ancient Egypt, including separating out which compounds were original to the mummification process from those used in subsequent conservation methods. In addition to these insights, the study creates important scientific vocabularies “which enable new interpretations of the sensory past.” Find the article here: pubs.acs.org/doi/10.1021/jacs.4c15769