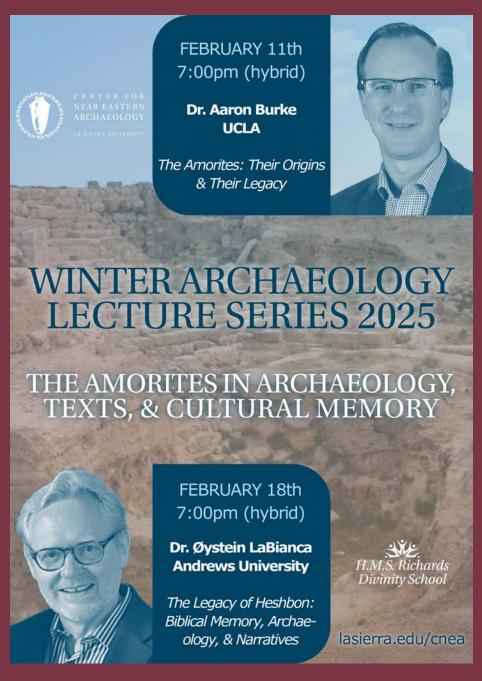


## La Sierra Digs

Newsletter of the Center for Near Eastern Archaeology | HMS Richards Divinity School | La Sierra University | Vol. 13:1 Winter 2025



# Winter Archaeology Lectures

For the first time, CNEA and the HMS Richards Divinity School are joining forces to provide not one but two related winter lectures. Both are focused to one degree or another on the famous (infamous?) ancient Amorites who dominated much of the Middle East during the first half of the third millennium BC. Disciplines employed in the research and presentations include archaeology, cultural anthropology, history, languages, biblical studies, and cultural memory and identity. For more information, visit here and check out the lecture abstracts inside this issue of La Sierra Digs. Both presentations will be in person and online.

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## The Two Winter Archaeology Lectures: The Amorites in Archaeology, Texts, and Cultural Memory

Connected winter lectures on archaeology and biblical studies

#### **Amorites: Their Origins and Their Legacy**

Dr. Aaron Burke, UCLA

Tuesday 11 February 2025 @ 7:00 PM in ZSB 244

Sponsored by the Lawrence T. Geraty and Douglas R. Clark Center for Near Eastern Archaeology

The Amorites, an ancient Near Eastern group, are infamous for their appearance in the Bible, where they are remembered among Canaan's diverse inhabitants at the time of its conquest by Israel. Yet, this collective identity is perhaps better known for its famous rulers during the first half of the second millennium BCE. During this period, called the Middle Bronze Age, Amorite rulers like Hammurabi of Babylon reigned across the Near East, from Bahrain to the Egyptian Delta. Competition, emulation, and their pursuit of legitimation inspired their patronage of long-distance trade, temple construction and religious orders, the arts, warfare and fortification building, and standardizations of law. The extensive nature of their efforts has led some to even refer to this as "the age of the Amorites." This lecture explores the emergence of this Amorite legacy, how it spread, and why it was commemorated so widely in later Near Eastern history.

## The Legacy of Heshbon: Biblical Memory, Archaeology, and Contemporary Narratives

Dr. Øystein LaBianca, Andrews University
Tuesday 18 February 2025 @ 7:00 PM in ZSB 244
Sponsored by the HMS Richards Divinity School

The biblical narrative of Heshbon, linked to the conquest of Sihon, King of the Amorites, is referenced 38 times in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. This persistent memory contrasts with the absence of available archaeological evidence at Tall Hisban, identified with ancient Heshbon. The presentation explores the dynamic interplay between textual traditions and archaeological findings, focusing on how such narratives are remembered, reinterpreted, and instrumentalized over time. Drawing on findings from the Hisban excavations and related regional surveys, it assesses the construction of Heshbon's historical significance through literary, cultural, and geopolitical lenses. Particular attention is given to how these narratives have been co-opted in contemporary settler colonialist ideologies to assert territorial claims, amplifying their relevance beyond the biblical text. By situating Heshbon within the broader contexts of cultural memory studies and political archaeology, this presentation underscores the nuanced relationship between ancient history and modern socio-political realities.

For yet more information, as well as videos of previous Winter Archaeology Lecture presentations, visit here.

#### **Archaeology Discovery Weekend 2024 Highlights**

by Douglas Clark and Dawn Acevedo

The 16th annual Archaeology Discovery Weekend (16–17-November) on the "rose-red city" of Petra, Jordan was a smashing success by any measure. With sincere gratitude, the CNEA staff would like to express our deepest appreciation to everyone who contributed time, energy, attendance, sponsorship, and/or funds to the 2024 edition of this long-standing yearly event. If you missed the lectures by widely respected scholars, no need to despair! Just visit our website here for links to video recordings. You will also find here an announcement about the focus for Archaeology Discovery Weekend 2025 (15–16 November): Alexander the Great.

The subject of Petra: Ancient World of Wonder, one of the modern Seven Wonders of the World, appealed to a wide and diverse audience and drew hundreds:

- around 200 attendees in person
- 80+ online via Zoom and Livestream
- 100+ for the Saturday evening reception (see reception article below)
- several children and their parents for the Kids Dig
- 40+ at hands-on activities and displays (static and digital) Enjoy the following captioned photos:



ADW lecturers Kent Bramlett and Larry Her



ADW Attendees in conversaton





ADW lecturer Cynthia Finlayson



ADW lecturer Leigh-Ann Bedal



**ADW lecturer Glenn Corbett** 



**ADW lecturer Megan Perry** 



Welcomes by President Christon Arthur and Doug Clark; gifting of mosaic to president by Mr. Mohammad Al-Breizat



Celebrating CNEA as "Little Jordan" by Kaitlyn Satelmayer

As part of Archaeology Discovery Weekend, CNEA hosted a memorable reception on Saturday evening, themed "Little Jordan." This event celebrated Jordan's rich cultural heritage, highlighting five extraordinary projects in Jordan sponsored by CNEA: Tall al-'Umayri, Balu'a, Ataruz, the Madaba Regional Archaeological Museum Project (MRAMP), and the Edom Lowlands Regional Archaeological Project (ELRAP). Attendees explored tall retractable banners and artifact displays for each project and talked with site directors about their projects. This opportunity brought these sites to life, creating a sense of curiosity regarding Jordan's archaeological significance.

Our dedicated volunteers made the evening's success possible, with special thanks to Suha Huffaker for her stunning decorations. Her creative designs captured the beauty of Jordan, transforming the venue into a space that reflected the wonder of Jordan's rich culture and history.

The event also provided an occasion for Mr. Mohammad Al-Breizat, Chair of the Finance Council of the Madaba regional governorate, to represent Jordan at the reception. He brought with him several small mosaics from Madaba, the "City of Mosaics," as gifts for La Sierra's President, the CNEA Director, and four selected CNEA volunteers.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this unforgettable celebration of archaeology in Jordan!



#### **Recent Presentations by CNEA Scholars**

One of the marks of a vibrant university institute is the active participation of its faculty and students in ongoing research and the publication and presentation of results in both scholarly and popular venues. For archaeologists connected to CNEA, research is a daily and dynamic engagement, publications are released regularly (both *Madaba Plains Project—'Umayri 11* [2008 excavation season] and *Narrating Archaeological Sites and Places: Fifty Years of the Madaba Plains Project at Tall Hisban, Tall al-'Umayri, and Tall Jalul* are scheduled for publication in 2025), and presentations are made at conferences around the world.

During the 2024 annual meeting of the American Society of Overseas Research (ASOR), held in Boston last November, several CNEA types made presentations. While three of CNEA's associate directors (Larry Geraty, Friedbert Ninow, and Chang Ho Ji) were unable to attend for the first time in many years, here are the presentations CNEA-connected personnel (some current, some recent) made:



- Dawn Acevedo, with Douglas Clark—"Preserving the Past for the Future: Lessons from the Archaeological Data Management of the Madaba Plains Project – Tall al 'Umayri"
- Jaime Bennett—"A Look at Past Research on Loom and Loom Weight Digitization and 3D Scanning for the Virtual Reality Setting and a Proposal for Future Research within This Area of Study"
- Kent Bramlett and Monique Roddy—"Was Balu'a a Royal City of the Moabite Kingdom?"
- Douglas Clark, with MRAMP (Madaba Regional Archaeological Museum Project) co-directors Suzanne Richard of Gannon University, Andrea Polcaro of Perugia University, Marta D'Andrea of Sapienza University of Rome, and Basem Mahamid of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan—"Progress and Projections: The Madaba Regional Archaeological Museum Project (MRAMP)"
- Ian Jones—"The Elusive 11th Century: New Perspectives on the Early-Middle Islamic Transition at al-Humayma, Southern Jordan"
- Matthew Vincent, with Jehad Haron and others—"Preserving the Past, Enriching the Future: Establishing Jordan's National Cultural Heritage Database"

Finally, in a church-related series, Douglas Clark presented "What Archaeology Can (and Can't) Tell Us about the Bible" in his hometown at the Port Townsend, Washington Seventh-day Adventist Church on 24–25 January. Presentations included:

"What Archaeology Can (and Can't) Do"

"Name That Thing! Quiz on Biblical Artifacts and What They Were Used for"

"Mr. Roger's Neighborhood—3,200 Years Ago"

"Is My Name Written There? Ancient Inscriptions Related to the Bible"

For 2025, the calendar indicates conferences where CNEA-related presentations are scheduled: June—the 14th International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East (ICAANE) in Lyon, France; September—the 16th International Conference on the History and Archaeology of Jordan (ICHAJ) in Athens, Greece; and, as happens every year in late November—the annual meeting of ASOR, again in Boston.

#### Fred Cornforth Plaque Now in situ at CNEA

Readers of La Sierra Digs will recall from the spring and autumn 2024 articles about C. Fred Cornforth—his interest in archaeology, his support of CNEA, and his strategy for renaming CNEA after Larry Geraty and Doug Clark when they had hoped to name it after him (see spring and autumn issues). In this photo the newly mounted plaque celebrating Fred Cornforth's engagement with CNEA, flanked by Director Doug Clark and former Curatorial Assistant Kaitlyn Satelmayer, hangs at the main entrance to the building, just outside the Director's office.



#### **Dolmen Workshop—Progress Updates**

In mid-November, CNEA was privileged to host scholars from around the world—in person and online—to participate in a workshop on the five-thousand-year-old dolmen burial excavated at Tall al-'Umayri, Jordan (see the explanatory article from the autumn issue of *La Sierra Digs* here). Quoting from that article, "CNEA has invited ... specialists in ceramics, physical anthropology, ancient DNA, 14C dating, ancient pathologies and mortuary practices, various types of isotope analysis, facial reconstruction, even evidence of violence, etc."

Over two days—13–14 November—participants from the UK, Israel, Jordan, Italy, Canada, and the US met together and then divided into two groups to accomplish varied research activities and plan for the final publication of the 'Umayri dolmen, unique among thousands of dolmens in that the skeletal remains of more than 20 individuals had been preserved inside.



One group, the anthropologists, then headed into the 'U-mayri Lab at CNEA and laid out all the bones from the dolmen on lab counters. They had been there before, but now Megan Perry, Kristina Reed, Keri Porter, and (remotely) Matthew Williams analyzed them with precision instruments; Hew Murdoch, on staff at La Sierra, came by and arranged a visit for specific bones to Loma Linda University for scanning. Two days later they replaced the bones back into their archival-foam-box caskets to await another visit by the anthropologists, hopefully later this year.

The other group, the archaeologists (primarily Larry Herr, James Fraser, and Kent Bramlett), spent most of a day barricaded in the far reaches of the 'Umayri modular behind CNEA, painstakingly making their way through diagnostic pieces of pottery from around the dolmen in order to fine-tune our understanding of the nature and history of the burial and, in particular, to see the connection between the dolmen and the earliest phase of occupation at 'Umayri. The latter is important to the debate about whether dolmens were isolated in the rural hinterlands or associated with a living village. In most cases, including 'Umayri, the village connection has been established.

The major outcomes of the workshop included a rare research experience shared by scholars from varied disciplines, focused research on the human remains and the pottery, and a concluding agreement among the editors of this significant volume regarding its contents and publication deadlines. All in all, a remarkable success!



Dolmen Researchers (above) & Remains (below)



#### Archaeology Special Lecture by James Fraser

by Kent Bramlett

As part of the multidisciplinary group researching the Tall al-'Umayri dolmen, a megalithic burial structure from the Early Bronze Age, Dr. James Fraser from Jerusalem was on campus and gave an in-person lecture November 13, 2024. Fraser, currently the director of the Albright Institute of Archaeological Research in Jerusalem, and formerly with the British Museum, wrote his PhD dissertation at University College London on dolmens in the Levant.

His unique contribution to the discourse led to new insights and proposals for understanding dolmen fields and the ancient communities that produced them. In the lecture, attended by archaeology students, faculty, and community members, Fraser outlined his arguments that the European dolmen phenomenon was separate, or at least distinct, from dolmen construction and use in the Levant. In the Levant, including Jordan, the region of focus for his study, dolmens are rarely single or isolated, but usually occur in groups traditionally called dolmen fields. This contrasts with their occurrence in Europe, where the megalithic tradition includes additional structural forms, and dolmens often occur in isolation.

Fraser's research showed that dolmen fields in Jordan were constructed adjacent to contemporary settlements for whom the dolmens served as probable family tombs, sometimes covering many generations. He additionally argued, based on GIS view-shed analysis, that dolmen orientation simply corresponded to the topography of the hillsides near the settlements that produced them.

Fraser also examined the evidence for dolmen construction, showing that quarry marks near some of the dolmens he investigated corresponded with the size and shape of the dolmen side-stones or lintel capstones. He further discussed the problem of moving and erecting the multi-ton stones, illustrating possible ways the stones were moved and elevated.

In summary, the lecture was stimulating and engendered many questions from the audience. The forthcoming publication of a final volume on the 'Umayri dolmen will be edited by James Fraser along with Kristina Reed, with contributions from others in the dolmen research group.



#### **People in Transition**

by Douglas Clark

#### Kaitlyn Satelmayer

Some of you may already know that Kaitlyn Satelmayer has accepted another position on campus and has left the CNEA office of Curatorial Assistant to become the Executive Coordinator in the university Provost's office. Her final day at CNEA was 10 January 2025.

Given Kaitlyn's many contributions to CNEA over the past nearly two years, the skills she has brought and developed, her exceptional academic success, her warm people-oriented approach, the organizational gifts she demonstrated (and the list goes on and on!), we will all miss seeing her in the front office on a full-time basis.

However, there are some silver linings in all of this. The position which Kaitlyn has been invited to fill is a prestigious one, carrying important responsibilities for the university. Not only will she be employed in the Provost's office coordinating major campus events, she will be living and working at the heart of campus planning and academic activity.

Another silver lining comes in the fact that we will continue to work together, Kaitlyn fulfilling CNEA roles we are still discussing with the appropriate people. Her heart resides in archaeology for the long term, and with continued connections to CNEA, both she and CNEA will benefit. The Center is near and dear to her, and we don't want to lose this important relationship.





#### "Mystery" Curatorial Assistant

The process for hiring a new Curatorial Assistant at CNEA, begun in December, is still ongoing at the time of this writing. The long holiday break and changing and complicated committee schedules conspired to slow progress. But we will prevail, and when we do, we will let you know the identity of this person so pivotal to CNEA's success.

#### Darla Martin Tucker

While not employed directly by CNEA, Darla Martin Tucker has been an integral part of CNEA's ethos, vision, mission, activity, and especially publicity since the Center's inception in 2012. When we organized the structure of CNEA at the beginning, we wanted Darla on the Archaeology Advisory Council and the Archaeology Planning Committee for her ideas, for her skills in public relations, and for the warm and welcoming ways she helped us think beyond ourselves.

She and her supervisor at the time were happy to agree, and from that time Darla has been an essential part of the planning and preparation for most of the events CNEA sponsors. In my email to her just as the announcement was released to the campus, I said to her: "You have been an integral part of CNEA since it opened 12 years ago. This will be a HUGE loss! I am

already working on mourning practices from antiquity!"

She is now employed in the Communications Office of the Pacific Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. However, we have not let her escape entirely, as she has consented to continue sitting on our committees and advising us on publicity and outreach.





**Thinking Ancient during Homecoming 2025** 

Alumni Homecoming at La Sierra University takes place this year on 25–27 April. A standard feature of these annual celebrations, CNEA's Homecoming program will be held on Saturday 26 April at some point in the afternoon. Please watch for more details as the time approaches about the presentation, CNEA updates, and the honoring of this year's CNEA Archaeology Award winners.

Visit here for Homecoming information.

#### **Display Case**

Kaitlyn Satelmayer

Alexander the Great, born in 356 BC, forged an empire that stretched from Greece to Egypt and into Persia and beyond,

remaking the ancient world. Renowned for his military genius, Alexander, through his conquests, united and laid the foundations for the Hellenistic era.

By means of his campaigns, Alexander introduced Greek culture to vast areas. This merging influenced advancements in art, science, architecture, and philosophy, profoundly impacting the ancient world. Cities he founded, such as Alexandria in Egypt, became massive centers of learning and commerce, ensuring the spread of Greek ideals throughout the empire.

Artifacts from Alexander's era, including coins, will be showcased

#### **CNEA Patio Enclosure Complete**

With the arrival at CNEA more than three years ago of 35 tons of research material from the Edom Lowland Regional Archaeology Project (ELRAP), sponsored by the University of California San Diego under the directorship of Tom Levy and Mohammad Najjar, the scramble began to find storage space for hundreds of crates and boxes of material from 20 years of excavation at 20 archaeological sites in the Wadi Faynan of southern Jordan. It has been a gargantuan task, requiring time and thousands of dollars to manage and migrate these archaeological remains into appropriate storage spaces. Some ended up squeezed into CNEA rooms, some stored in metal shipping containers, all in need of further curation.

At this point, everything is now safely stored at CNEA either inside the building, in the two back modulars, or on the back patio. November saw completion of a strong fabric covering surrounding the patio to protect research materials from the elements. The artifacts have now been partially curated by lan Jones and Shaun Eccles but still await months and months of ongoing systematic organization.



at the 2025 Archaeology Discovery Weekend. These objects connect to his achievements and the world he transformed. Join us this November as we delve into the history of a man who reshaped the ancient world.





CNEA008428, silver didrachm, obverse featuring head of Heracles wearing lion skin headdress, reverse featuring seated Zeus with eagle and scepter with Greek "ALEXANDROU" at right.



### Pardon our Progress – Website Updates Dawn Acevedo

Updates and improvements to CNEA's website are underway! To better serve our online visitors, we at CNEA are working hard alongside La Sierra's web editors to provide users with a more intuitive experience as well as more information about CNEA and all that we do. In the upcoming months, be on the lookout for new pages to include: "About CNEA," "Academic Programs," "Calendar," and "Donor Hall of Fame." Other improvements will include easier-to-navigate Video pages and links, a designated page for 3D models, a designated page for the virtual tour of CNEA, and updated program and project information.

If you haven't done so yet, be sure to sign up for our mailing list to receive occasional emails about all that is happening at CNEA – events, projects, newsletters, changes, acquisitions, and more! And be sure to follow us on our social media pages, including Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and LinkedIn. Email archaeology@lasierra.edu to join our listserv and not miss any events.

## **Giving Day – Presentation and Video** by Dawn Acevedo

In 2020, La Sierra University's Office of Advancement undertook the task of implementing an annual Giving Day event. CNEA has been honored to take part in this special year-end initiative which aims to raise funds for various departments

and centers at the university.

Moreover, the original idea of Giving Day included special online events presented by these departments for the enjoyment of our current and potential donors — something that CNEA has continued to do over these last five years. In case you missed the 2024 event on 11 December, you will want to watch it by visiting our website (lasierra.edu/cnea/galleries/videos) or on our YouTube channel (youtube.com/@lasierra\_cnea).

The 2024 program featured Dr. Bryan Kraemer of the Robert and Francis Fullerton Museum of Art presenting on "Egypt in Miniature: 3D Renderings and Research of Small Artifacts in CNEA's Collections." Dr. Kraemer also collaborated with CNEA in November during Archaeology Discovery Weekend's family-friendly lab activities to share with attendees the processes of 3D-scanning, 3D-printing, and utilizing 3D objects in augmented and virtual reality.

To all of you who donated to CNEA in 2024, thank you so much for helping us sustain and improve all that we do here at the Center. Our continued research, conservation, outreach, education, and employment opportunities rely on your support – we can't do it without you!

#### Giving Day 2024—THANK YOU!

A HUGE thank you to the many donors who contributed to CNEA during Giving Day 2024 and the weeks following. The Center is entirely dependent on contributions to survive and thrive, to carry on the research associated with our excavations and collections, to fulfill our mission of outreach to the community.

The figures shown in the photo demonstrate that we exceeded our goal for Giving Day, contributing significantly to our



CENTER FOR NEAR EASTERN ARCHAEOLOGY



ongoing work for the year. Sincere appreciation from the faculty, staff, students, and volunteers associated with CNEA. In order to maintain your trust, we continue to improve and work to follow the mantra: "Do well what we do!"

#### Balu'a Regional Archaeological Project (BRAP) 2025 by Monique Roddy, Kent Bramlett, & Friedbert Ninow

The BRAP plans to excavate at Khirbat al-Balu'a this summer from June 19 to July 31, 2025. We are accepting applications from students and volunteers for this field school opportunity. More information at www.BRAPJordan.org.

Students may register for undergraduate or graduate academic credit through La Sierra University for the following courses: Fieldwork in Near Eastern/Middle Eastern Archaeology, New Testament Archaeology, and Archaeology of Iron Age Jordan. The BRAP team has had students and volunteers from the Americas, Europe, and the Middle East in the past, and we look forward to another great season working together to learn more about the history and culture of central Jordan.

Work will focus this summer in three areas at Baluʻa. We will continue work in the Iron Age Moabite domestic structure that we have been excavating since 2012. We will be opening a new area of excavation north of the Qasr where it is possible another large Iron Age monumental structure stands. We will also be returning to work in the medieval Islamic inn that we began excavating in 2022. Each of these areas provides exciting opportunities to learn more about this large site throughout the ages.

If you're not able to join us but want to stay in touch throughout the dig season, make sure to keep up with the *BRAP Beat* newsletters on our website, or follow us on Instagram and Facebook.









#### La Sierra Digs

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CENTER FOR NEAR EASTERN ARCHAEOLOGY

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#### 2025 Calendar of Events

11 & 18 Feb Winter Archaeolog

Lectures

Mar Balu'a Security Forms

Due

6 Apr Homecoming Arch-

aeology Presentations

19 Jun-31 Jul

15-16 Nov

Excavations at Baluʿa ADW 2025 – Alexander

the Great

#### **Recent Discoveries**

Assembled by Dawn Acevedo

#### **ELRAP Increases Accessibility for Arabic-Speaking Communities**

Matt Howland of Wichita State University in Kansas, who has been involved with the Edom Lowlands Re'gional Archaeology Project (ELRAP) since 2012, encourages Arabic-speaking communities to engage with 3D data from excavations in the Wadi Faynan (the ELRAP material was donated to CNEA four years ago). The ELRAP team, with the help of co-director Mohammad Najjar, American Center of Research librarian Samya Kafafi, and Wichita State student Omar Khalil, has uploaded 3D models with Arabic descriptions to their page on Sketchfab.com. Read the article here.

#### Ammonite, Roman, and Islamic Occupations at Khirbat as-Sar, Jordan

The site of Khirbat as-Sar, located on the western end of the Amman plateau, has been the subject of archaeological research throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, including survey work in 2000 by La Sierra's own Chang Ho Ji. Nineteenth-century researchers proposed "that the site should be identified with biblical Jazer," though other ancient texts offer other possibilities. Recent excavations by the University of Warsaw provide a clearer picture of this important site's chronological sequence. Learn more here.

#### A Tale of Two Shrines in Ancient Nimrud

Archaeologists with Penn Museum's Nimrud Project recently conducted research and excavations in the 9th century B.C. Ninurta Temple, dedicated to the Assyrian god of war and agriculture. Within the temple, which is believed to have been destroyed by fire ca. 614–612 B.C., the team discovered two shrines. The larger shrine included a low platform, or dais, with a cuneiform inscription, while the smaller shrine, also with a dais, appears to have been "intentionally damaged by the Babylonians and Medes before [the temple was] set ablaze." Learn more about these finds here.

#### 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 <a href="https://lasierra.edu/donate">https://lasierra.edu/donate</a> 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!