



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. 14:1 Winter 2026

WINTER ARCHAEOLOGY LECTURE 2026

TEMPLE, CONQUEST, & CULT AT KHIRBAT ATARUZ WITH DR. CHANG-HO JI



02.25

7:00pm PT

ZSB 201 & online



5th Annual Winter Archaeology Lecture

The Lawrence T. Geraty & Douglas R. Clark Center for Near Eastern Archaeology (CNEA) is honored to invite you to the 5th annual Winter Archaeology Lecture happening in-person and online on Wednesday, 25 February at 7:00pm PST. This year's lecture will be presented by La Sierra's own Dr. Chang-ho Ji, Dean of the School of Education and Director of the Khirbat Ataruz Project.

Dr. Ji will be presenting on "Between Israel and Moab: Temple, Conquest, and Cult at Khirbat Ataruz." This lecture will focus on the Iron Age temple complex excavated at Khirbat Ataruz, a notable archaeological site in central Jordan spanning many centuries of occupation and mentioned among the conquests of the Moabite King Mesha in the famous Mesha Stele. The Ataruz temple complex is one of the largest and best-preserved cultic centers from the biblical period in the Levant, having been built during the Omride dynasty.

Don't miss this rare glimpse into the interregional religious traditions and conquests of the Israelites and Moabites during a keenly formational time in history.

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Learn more at: <https://lasierra.edu/cnea/winter-lecture>.

A LOOK BACK — THE END OF 2025

Archaeology Discovery Weekend 2025 Report

by Dawn Acevedo

With as many as 230 people in combined attendance for CNEA's 17th annual Archaeology Discovery Weekend on 15-16 November 2025, we feel that Alexander the Great, who served as the topic for the weekend conference, would have been proud. The event focused on "Alexander the Great and How He Changed the World" and included six lectures and two discussion panels led by experts and specialists from around the United States and abroad. In addition to the guest speakers, CNEA was also honored to host a group of officials and community leaders from Madaba, Jordan, who participated in the weekend's events as well as a special MOU-signing between CNEA and the Madaba Institute for Mosaic Art and Restoration (MIMAR).

We at CNEA wish to express our sincere gratitude to everyone who made this event possible, including our sponsor, Versacare, and co-sponsors, public relations and marketing, technology teams, event planning staff, speakers, special guests, and all those in attendance in person or online. If you were not able to attend the 2025 event, you can find all of the lectures and discussion panels available on our website (<https://lasierra.edu/cnea/discovery-weekend>) or on our YouTube channel (https://youtube.com/@lasierra_cnea).

Save the date for our 18th annual Archaeology Discovery Weekend happening 14-15 November 2026 with a focus on *the Phoenicians*.



Guest lecturers on the Saturday discussion panel at ADW 2025 (L to R: Rachel Kousser, Jessica Nitschke, Kent Bramlett, Andrea Berlin, Cynthia Finlayson, Theresa Shaw, and Larry Geraty, presiding)

Welcoming Jordanian Guests at ADW 2025

by Douglas Clark

As part of the ongoing collaboration between CNEA and the city of Madaba, Jordan, several Jordanians, mostly from Madaba, participated in several events during Archaeology Discovery Weekend 2025. The seven Jordanian visitors included the principal and COO of the Madaba Institute for Mosaic Art and Restoration (MIMAR--Dr. Ahmad Almaireh and Mr. Amjad Awad, respectively), the mayor of nearby (and UNESCO Heritage Site) Umm ar-Rasas (Mr. Adil Al-Janadba), the development officer for the city of Madaba (Mr. Mohammad Abu Qaoud), a member of the regional council of the Madaba governorate (Mr. Mohammad Albreizat), an advocate for the women and children of Madaba and education (Mrs. Hiba Hadadeen), and a city investment director in the US (from Madaba--Mr. Mohammad Alhawawsha).

It was my privilege and pleasure to host the "Madabawis" gracing our campus and the weekend with their enthusiastic and lively presence and with their engaging participation in the Saturday evening reception as they shared Jordanian culture with attendees. The reception also incorporated an official signing ceremony, during which Dr. Ahmad Almaireh and Dr. Kent Bramlett signed an MOU between MIMAR and CNEA, encouraging exchange and collaboration between these two entities.

But the Jordanians were not finished quite yet. There were still Sunday activities to share. While we had to consider various venues due to the heavy rainfall over the weekend, we stayed inside the CNEA Collections Lab for our traditional hands-on, family-friendly lab activities which, this year, included mosaic-making that involved attendees putting their names on small mosaic stones which were then added to a mosaic of the Madaba Tree, brought by MIMAR. They also led traditional Bedouin singing and dancing, unfortunately not in the authentic Bedouin Tent because of the weather, but inside CNEA which was festively decorated to incorporate at least some elements of a tent.



Douglas Clark introduces Jordanian guests at ADW 2025



Drs. Ahmad Almaireh (MIMAR) and Kent Bramlett (CNEA) sign MOU with Mr. Amjad Awad as witness during ADW 2025 reception

Giving Day 2025 Report and Presentation

by Kent Bramlett

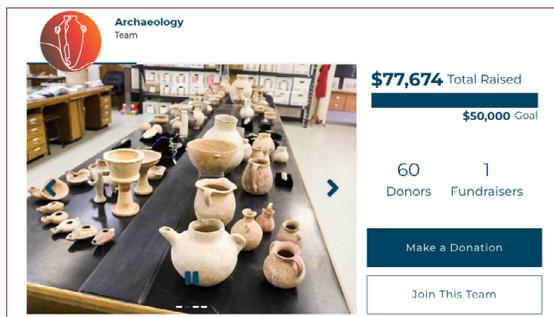
CNEA participated in the annual Giving Day event at La Sierra University which occurred on 10 December 2025. This has been our tradition for several years now, and we continue to depend on the contributions made at this time to carry on the research associated with our excavations and collections, and to fulfill our mission of outreach to the community.

We are so grateful for all our donors for generously supporting our work for another year and helping us meet – and exceed! – our set goal. Together we raised \$77,674 as you can see in the screenshot image on page 3. The archaeology center

operates through your generosity and gifts. Sincere appreciation from the faculty, staff, students, and volunteers associated with CNEA.

As the special live feature for this year's Giving Day event, we hosted Dr. Erez Ben-Yosef from Tel Aviv University who presented an illustrated lecture in person that was also streamed online, followed by a conversation with Dr. Kent Bramlett. Ben-Yosef, an expert in ancient metallurgy and mining, discussed the excavations he directs at Timna Valley in Israel, with reference also to the Edom Lowlands ancient mining region in the Wadi Faynan of Jordan, excavated by the University of California, San Diego in a series of projects that are now part of the CNEA research collections. In the lecture titled, "Invisible Kingdoms: Nomads, Copper, and the Real Story of Ancient Israel," Dr. Ben-Yosef emphasized the role played in ancient societies including the development of states like ancient Israel, by invisible people (archaeologically speaking) who were pastoralists and nomads and didn't leave architectural remains indicating their presence. Ben-Yosef argued that these peoples, mentioned in ancient texts, must be taken into consideration in any model that attempts to comprehensively explain the rise of the Iron Age states in Edom, Moab, and Israel. Near the end of the program, we showcased some of the copper mining and smelting artifacts that CNEA holds from the Edom Lowlands Regional Archaeology Project (ELRAP) excavations in Wadi Faynan.

In case you missed the 2025 event on 10 December, you will want to watch it by visiting our website (<https://lasierra.edu/cnea/galleries/videos/events/>) or on our YouTube channel (https://youtube.com/@lasierra_cnea).



Archaeology Team

\$77,674 Total Raised

\$50,000 Goal

60 Donors 1 Fundraisers

Make a Donation

Join This Team

EXCAVATION PROJECTS 2026

BRAP — Summer 2026

by Kent Bramlett

This summer from 18 June-30 July, the Balu'a Regional Archaeological Project (BRAP) will be in the field. This major project, sponsored by La Sierra University and directed by Drs. Kent Bramlett, Friedbert Ninow (both of La Sierra University), and Monique Roddy (Walla Walla University), is excavating the largest Iron Age site on the Karak Plateau of central Jordan. Other participating institutions include Walla Walla University, the University of Washington, New York University, and Theologische Hochschule Friedensau in Germany. Together, faculty, students, and volunteers will excavate Iron Age and Islamic era remains that reveal life in formative periods of religious history and regional development. This season we will continue excavation of a large Iron Age (c. 9th-8th century BC) domestic res-

idence, uncover more of the Middle Islamic (c. AD 1300) caravanserai, and open a new area in the administrative quarter.

If you are interested in participating, please fill out a security form no later than 1 March. Learn more and submit forms at: <https://lasierra.edu/cnea/projects/balua-regional-archaeological-project-brap/>.



Balu'a Team, 2022

Khirbat Ataruz Project — Summer 2026

by Chang-ho Ji

The Khirbat Ataruz Project team will be in the field this summer for excavation and conservation work, scheduled 21 June-15 July 2026. During this season, the team will excavate in Fields A, E, and F, and will also open a new field to investigate the site's dry moat. Learn more at <https://ataruz.org/>.

BETWEEN THE LIBRARY AND THE LABS

Anne Kilmer Assyriology Library Acquisition

by Kent Bramlett

The CNEA is privileged to receive an important scholar's library relating to the archaeology and languages of ancient Babylonia and Assyria. On 14-15 December 2025, Kent Bramlett drove to the campus of the University of Arizona at Tucson and, with a U-haul trailer, brought back the 500-volume Assyriological library of the late Dr. Anne Kilmer of University of California, Berkeley, a renowned scholar of ancient Mesopotamian cultures. Kilmer's daughter, Mary Kilmer, along with University of Arizona professors, Anne Betteridge and Beth Alpert-Nakhai, facilitated the transfer, which will expand the research library housed in the CNEA to another important region that we teach in our undergraduate and graduate academic programs in archaeology. This quarter we have classes in the archaeology of Mesopotamia and the Old Babylonian dialect of Akkadian. Lexical and site reference works from the Kilmer library are already finding use in the classes' research and translation projects.

A Cypriot Traditional Threshing Sledge Comes to CNEA

by Kent Bramlett

Professors John Whittaker and Kathryn Kamp, recently retired from Grinnell College in Iowa and in the process of relocating to northern California, visited CNEA on 14 January to deliver a donation of ethnographic and research materials, most notably a traditional Cypriot threshing sledge called a "dhoukani" that is embedded with chipped stone blades to thresh the grain as the sledge is pulled around the threshing floor with a draft



animal. These implements are largely unchanged from biblical times. Threshing was a family affair, and children often rode the sledge to provide additional weight to more effectively separate the wheat kernels from the husks, or chaff, and stalks.

Whittaker is a world-renowned flintknapper and champion atlatl thrower who authored the book, *Flintknapping: Making and Understanding Stone Tools*. We are planning on hosting a flintknapping workshop in the future in which Whittaker can teach some of the techniques of recreating stone handaxes, arrow points, and blades. Kamp donated her ethnographic research materials on households in traditional Syrian villages which will be a valuable resource for the study of household archaeology at CNEA.



(L) Beth Alpert-Nakhai and Kent Bramlett with boxes of books from Anne Kilmer's Assyriology library loaded into trailer. (R) John Whittaker and Kathryn Kamp pose with Cypriot threshing sledge at CNEA.

Homecoming Weekend 2026 — Archaeology Event

by Kent Bramlett and Dawn Acevedo

La Sierra's annual Homecoming Alumni Weekend is coming soon, and CNEA is gearing up to host its special Archaeology open house and lecture on Saturday, 18 April. Join us for the fourth installment of our Homecoming series, "A Thousand Windows into the Past: The Cohen Family Collection," this year highlighting a variety of Mesopotamian cylinder seals.

These artifacts are small, intricately carved stone cylinders (approximately one inch tall) used for personal signatures, administrative stamps, and protective amulets. When rolled onto wet clay tablets, jars, or doors, these seals created unique, continuous, detailed relief images which identified the owner and secured the property. Many of the seals contain Akkadian inscriptions, and students in our Akkadian class are currently working on translating some of the texts, the results of which will be presented at the Homecoming lecture, along with discussion on the role of cylinder seals in the ancient Near East in general. As always, the Archaeology lecture and open house are open to the public, will be presented both in-person and online (lecture only), and are free to attend. Be sure to check our website in the coming month for the most up-to-date information: <https://lasierra.edu/cnea/homecoming/>.

CNEA IN THE USA AND AROUND THE WORLD

CNEA Visit to the Getty Villa

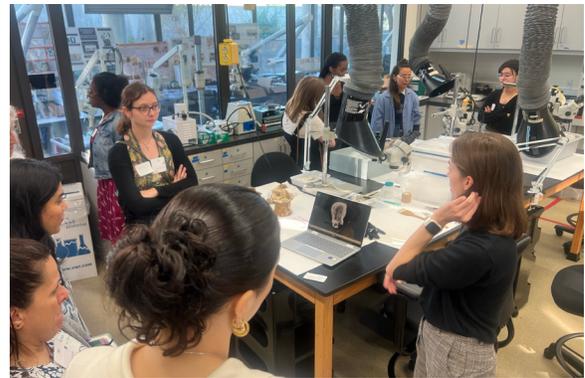
by Kent Bramlett

On 23 October 2025, CNEA staff and some graduate students attended by special invitation an open house at the Getty Vil-

la showcasing the UCLA/Getty Conservation Labs. The UCLA/Getty Program in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage trains specialist conservators at the master's and Ph.D. levels. Metals, glass, textiles like leather and fabrics, and ceramics are some of the artifact types that are taught. The students become some of the best conservators in the world, able to study the elemental and chemical composition of an artifact, ascertain through precise technical analysis the degradation exhibited and the minimal intervention needed to stop the decay and preserve the artifact, and implement the restoration of the artifact to the extent determined by "best practices," that is, not overly restoring the artifact to an artificial extent but presenting it in the most authentic manner.

CNEA values its ongoing relationship with the UCLA/Getty Conservation Program by which we loan artifacts from our donated collections in need of conservation for use in the program which are then studied, conserved, and restored by the students and returned to us in archival housing. It is a win-win arrangement whereby they get to study and train advanced students with real artifacts in need of care, and we get intervention for some of our most at-risk artifacts.

The reception was followed by a tour and open lab session with the graduate students discussing with us their current research and conservation work on various artifacts, including several ceramic pieces from the CNEA currently undergoing restoration.



Guests look on as Getty Conservation student Melina Edic presents on CNEA's Phoenician statue at the Getty Villa lab open house.

CNEA at ASOR's Annual Meeting in Boston

by Douglas Clark

During its 125th anniversary annual meeting this past November in Boston, the American Society of Overseas Research (ASOR) provided a venue for three CNEA-related presentations. The first one, titled "Redating the Lidded Clay Coffin from Dhiban, Jordan" by Craig Tyson (former Madaba Plains Project Tall al-'Umayri and Balu'a Regional Archaeological Project staff member) and Kent Bramlett, proposed a later date than previously thought for these somewhat enigmatic clay coffins, with the Dhiban coffin dating possibly into the Nabatean or Roman period based on newer evidence found in Egypt and elsewhere. In the second, Ian Jones, a field director at Balu'a, presented on the "Islamic Village" he has been excavating at the site: "Placing the Balu'a Regional Archaeology Project (BRAP)

Islamic Village Excavations in their Wider Context: Revisiting the Archaeological Survey of the Kerak Plateau.”

The third presentation involved a book and not a lecture. The “Madaba Plains Project Reception Celebrating the Release of its 50th Anniversary Volume” was hosted by the editors, Douglas Clark, Øystein LaBianca, and Randy Younker, and the event launched the volume with Middle Eastern refreshments and a few very short but enthusiastic speeches. Following an introduction regarding the volume, *Narrating Archaeological Sites and Places: Fifty Years of the Madaba Plains Project at Tall Hisban, Tall al-'Umayri, and Tall Jalul*, by Clark, LaBianca then talked about the vision behind the book and was followed by Younker who provided a bit of MPP history. Larry Geraty and Larry Herr then reflected on what these unprecedented 50 years of personal and professional collaboration have meant to us, known as the five Madaba Plains Project “Silverbacks,” and to the archaeology of Jordan. Although the hard copies of the book did not arrive in time for the reception, they are now available at: <https://equinoxpub.com/projects/narrating-archaeological-sites-and-places/>.



The five co-directors of the Madaba Plains Project at ASOR (L to R): Randy Younker, Larry Geraty, Doug Clark, Larry Herr, Øystein LaBianca

CNEA at the ICAANE Conference in Lyon, France

by Douglas Clark

Every other year hundreds of primarily European as well as international scholars and students of Middle Eastern archaeology gather for the International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East (ICAANE). The 2025 conference (the 14th ICAANE version) found the event and its participants in Lyon, France 2-7 June. Not a bad venue, given its status as the UNESCO-designated gastronomic capital of France (and therefore the world?!). The conference was held on the campus of the Université Lumière Lyon 2, located not far from the picturesque confluence of the Saône and Rhône rivers.

Two CNEA-related presentations found their way into the program: one on Tall al-'Umayri, sponsored by CNEA, and the other on Bronze Age dolmen burials, one of the best preserved out of thousands dotting the landscape between southern Jordan and the British Isles having been excavated at 'Umayri. The former, authored by Larry Herr and Douglas Clark and titled “Tall al-'Umayri in the Iron IIB to Early Persian Periods,” was part of a workshop exploring the transition from the Late Iron Age in Jordan to other periods in the 5th-4th centuries BC. It will be published at some point in the future. References to dolmen tombs, including the 'Umayri one, occurred in more than one session, demonstrating the growing interest in these specialized burial structures represented so well at 'Umayri.

CNEA at ICHAJ 2025 Athens

by Monique Roddy and Chang-ho Ji

The International Conference on the History and Archaeology of Jordan (ICHAJ) takes place every three years, bringing together archaeologists, historians, and cultural heritage specialists from around the world. The focus of ICHAJ 16 was “Archaeology and Sustainability Learning from the Past for Safe Resilient Future” and met 22-26 September on the campus of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece. The session opened with speeches from key figures in the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, representatives of Jordan, Athens, and the university, and a warm welcome and lecture by HRH Prince El-Hassan Bin Talal. Then followed a whirlwind of sessions over the succeeding days of the conference, featuring updates on archaeological excavations and cultural heritage management of sites, as well as dives into the archives of Jordan’s history (one talk focused on the “Colonial-Industrial Heritage in Jordan: The Case of the As-Safawi H5 Pumping Station” – a fascinating archaeological study of more recent history).

The CNEA was well represented at the conference. Douglas Clark moderated a session on the first day with Aktham Oweidi and then presented a paper by the MRAMP team on “Sustainable Practices for Preserving the Past: The Madaba Regional Archaeological Museum Project (MRAMP) in Retrospect and Prospect.” Monique Roddy presented a paper by the BRAP team on “The Balu'a Regional Archaeological Project: Excavation and Conservation.” Both papers focused on summarizing over a decade of contributions to archaeological research in Jordan.

Chang-ho Ji presented a paper at ICHAJ on the Islamic period in Ataruz and its surrounding region. The paper titled, “The Islamic period at Khirbat Ataruz and its Surroundings,” combined excavation and survey data to reconstruct the Islamic settlement history of the site and the broader area. The evidence shows that Ataruz and its surroundings were occupied during both the Early and Middle Islamic periods, although the Early Islamic presence appears limited and likely represents a temporary settlement. In contrast, the Mamluk period saw the establishment of a significant rural village at Ataruz, thriving from the late thirteenth to the late fifteenth century AD. Despite this development, the regional center during the Middle Islamic period appears to have been located at Ad-Dayr, approximately 2 miles west.



(L) Monique Roddy presenting on BRAP at ICHAJ 2025.

(R) Douglas Clark presenting on MRAMP at ICHAJ 2025.



La Sierra Digs

Editors: Kent Bramlett and Dawn Acevedo
Photo Credit: Dawn Acevedo, Anne Betteridge, Kent Bramlett, Douglas Clark, La Sierra University, Monique Roddy, Bruno Soltic, Glenn Wharton, Raúl Zanatta

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Display Case

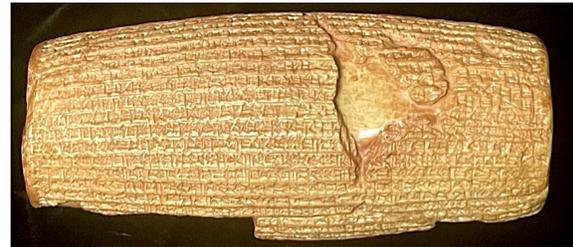
by Raúl Zanatta

Many people get to know famous works of art or archaeology only through film or a photograph, depriving them of the thrill that is seeing the piece in person. Not everyone gets to stand in front of the Code of Hammurabi at the Louvre Museum or examine the Rosetta Stone housed at the British Museum.

That is where replicas come in. A replica gives us hands-on, interactive learning through the opportunity to touch it, read it up close, or examine the size of the piece. Replicas have immense value in education that a photograph alone cannot offer. By using a replica in the classroom, we avoid the handling of real, fragile artifacts while simultaneously promoting their preservation.

At CNEA, we are fortunate to have several replicas that enhance our understanding of the past. One such reproduction is an exact replica of the famous Cyrus Cylinder, donated to us by Michael Blaine along with many other artifacts and reproductions.

The cylinder, considered to be one of the earliest declarations of human rights, was made of clay during the 6th century BC by orders of Cyrus the Great, king of the Persian Empire. It is written in Akkadian cuneiform script, one of the ancient languages taught at CNEA, affording our students the opportunity to study this remarkable artifact in person.



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2026 Calendar of Events

25 February	Winter Lecture
1 March	BRAP security forms due
1 April	BRAP deposits due
18 April	Homecoming Lecture
18 June-30 July	BRAP (Balu'a Excavation)
21 June-15 July	Khirbat Ataruz Project

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.

Recent Discoveries

Assembled by Dawn Acevedo

Sailing in Style Near Egypt

The European Institute for Underwater Archaeology has discovered a submerged "pleasure boat" off the coast of Alexandria. The vessel, which matches a typological description by Greek historian Strabo, measures 115 feet in length and would have supported a lavish cabin at its center. Excavation director Frank Goddio "believes the boat could have been sunk during the catastrophic destruction of [the Temple of Isis] around AD 50."

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/dec/08/ancient-egyptian-pleasure-boat-found-archaeologists-alexandria-coast>

Strange Symbolism Among an Archaic Burial

A noblewoman's grave, dating to the Archaic period in Greece, revealed that she was buried with an upside-down diadem on her head. Archaeologists think that this may have been a symbolic gesture indicating the end of her reign "during a time of social and political upheaval in the mid-seventh century BC." The bronze crown includes a large rosette on the front with "a scene of facing pairs of male and female lions on the back."

<https://www.livescience.com/archaeology/elaborate-2-700-year-old-tomb-in-greece-contains-burial-of-a-woman-with-an-upside-down-crown>

Bronze Age Discoveries Near Megiddo

Israeli archaeologists excavating near Megiddo have uncovered a Late Bronze Age "tea set," including a zoomorphic teapot "shaped like a ram" along with three small bowls or cups. Additionally, they discovered a small, ceramic model shrine dating to the same period, and both artifacts seem to have been buried in small pits, perhaps as Canaanite votive offerings. An Early Bronze Age find was also discovered — a 5,000-year-old wine press deemed "one of the oldest of its kind known in the world."

<https://www.livescience.com/archaeology/ram-shaped-teapot-from-ancient-canaanite-cult-discovered-near-ancient-city-of-armageddon>