



CENTER FOR
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LA SIERRA UNIVERSITY

La Sierra Digs

Newsletter of the Center for Near Eastern Archaeology | HMS Richards Divinity School | La Sierra University | Vol. 7:3 Autumn 2019

11th Annual Archaeology Discovery Weekend

November 16-17 2019

Ancient Synagogues and Churches in the Galilee

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Excavating Ancient Ammonites and Moabites

By Douglas Clark

In fulfillment of the mission of CNEA to explore the ancient Near East for scientific reasons and to illustrate and illuminate the Bible, La Sierra archaeologists are working overtime! The autumn 2019 and winter 2020 issues of *La Sierra Digs* will feature, to one extent or another, the four projects in Jordan which CNEA sponsors or co-sponsors – (1) the Madaba Plains Project-Tall al-'Umayri (MPPU), (2) the Ataruz project, (3) the Balu'a Regional Archaeological Project (BRAP), and (4) the Madaba Regional Archaeological Museum Project (MRAMP).

(1) Excavation activities at MPPU, a site in Ammonite territory just south of the capital of Amman, are on hold at present, due to ongoing land-owner disputes with the Jordanian government. However, publication of seasonal reports continues apace. June 2019 saw the release of *Madaba Plains Project – 'Umayri 8* (the 2002 season); volume 9 is set to appear in 2020 and MPP 10 in 2021. The accompanying photo shows our donation of this volume to the library of the American Center of Oriental Research in Amman, our home away from home in Jordan.

(2) From 21 June through 7 July, Chang Ho Ji led a team excavating at the Moabite site of Khirbat Ataruz, south of Madaba, as well as tracing ancient roadways. The winter issue of *La Sierra Digs* will carry a report on his work in south-central Jordan.

(3) Further to the south, across the Wadi Mujib (biblical River Arnon), Kent Bramlett, Friedbert Ninow, and Monique Vincent directed the six-week excavation season with 35 participants at the massive Moabite site of Khirbat al-Balu'a (20 June–2 August). We include here only a brief report, a more complete version coming in the winter issue of the newsletter. In the words of Monique Vincent: "The 2019 season of excavation at Khirbat al-Balu'a was focused on three areas of excavation. Excavation in Area Q (for Qasr or fortress) continued examining the context of the Qasr and reached the foundations of the structure. This provided new insight into the dating of its construction and use. Excavation in Area H (for House) reopened and expanded excavation of the Iron Age house, clearing three new rooms to the latest phase of Iron Age occupation, including standing doorways and lintels. Excavation in Area W (for Wall) continued investigating the fortification line dividing the upper city from the later, eastern expansion. This revealed several phases of construction that took a single wall and turned it into a large, double-walled system with interior rooms, known as a casemate wall. This season also included a new project,



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the Pathways to Presentation, which cleared 1.5 kilometers of paths on site to make the excavation areas more accessible for excavators and visitors. Looting was also officially documented so that future disturbances can be tracked as a serious problem at this remote site. Finally, proposals for future paleoenvironmental research were formed."

(4) Two visits to Madaba, Jordan (a border city between Ammon and Moab during part of its history) by Doug Clark and his American, Italian, and Jordanian co-directors in the MRAMP museum project led to several important milestones. (a) First, on 25 June, Doug Clark, on behalf of his co-directors, signed a Memorandum of Understanding between MRAMP and the Department of Antiquities of Jordan (see photo), an essential step in continuing this project. (b) The next day, Clark also signed an agreement sealing the second cycle of funding support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)/the American Center of Oriental Research (ACOR)/the Sustainable Cultural Heritage through the Engagement of Local Communities Project (SCHEP), providing ca. \$150,000 over a three-year period. The 30th of September saw two more important steps toward a new museum in Madaba: (c) the signing of an award from the Cultural Affairs Task Force/US Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Protection (US Department of State) for \$189,000 (Dr. Suzanne Richard of Gannon University is the Principal Investigator and Clark the Co-PI) and (d) the announcement of the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation's funding of part of the project in an amount over \$100,000, this accomplished through Dr. Andrea Polcaro of Perugia University in Italy. While the MRAMP project has more work to do and more funds to raise, we are headed in the right direction.



URGENT – Meeting a \$35,000 Matching Donation!

Donations to CNEA for 2019 have not kept pace with expenses, unlike any year in the center's history. This may be due in part to our successful ongoing campaign to fund the proposed new campus museum, with some donors transitioning to this major campus project which will transform archaeology's footprint on campus and in the community. However, the center will continue operating and while the budget remains around \$100,000 per year, this year we had to write off two significant pledges for \$25,000 each which were not fulfilled and we lost a \$20,000 donation which had been misplaced. That means a shortfall of \$70,000 for the year. Thus, the need to focus on CNEA operating funds this year.

To help us meet this daunting challenge, one of the museum's board members and a veteran of the Madaba Plains Project excavations, Mr. Fred Cornforth, generously stepped forward with a \$35,000 matching grant, the matching funds to be donated before the end of December 2019. We are more than grateful for this level of generosity and have committed ourselves to raising the matching \$35,000 in the time allowed.

Here is where you come in!

Could you please make a generous donation to CNEA as soon as possible, but certainly before the end of the year to help us meet the matching grant? Here are two options for making your donation:

1. Give online! Visit <https://lasierra.edu/givenow/> and read down a few lines to Center for Near Eastern Archaeology. Type in the amount you would like to donate (don't be limited by the numbers in the drop-down menu!).
2. Use the enclosed envelope to send a check, made out in the name of "La Sierra University/CNEA." If you would like to send credit card information via this envelope, make sure to include a piece of paper with the following details on it: Name as it appears on your card | Type of card | Card number | Expiration date | three-digit Security number on the back of the card.

Thank you sincerely for what you can do to support the important work of the Center for Near Eastern Archaeology. We are totally donation-dependent and look to you for your encouragement and support so that we can continue to accomplish our mission as documented and demonstrated in the pages of this newsletter.

Campus Museum Board Meeting

By Larry Geraty

The latest board meeting for the anticipated University Museum & Visitor Center at La Sierra met on September 24, 2019. The most exciting news was the promise of a gift of approximately a thousand spectacular archaeological artifacts that have been collected over a lifetime by Dr. Harvey Cohen of San Diego. He has been "surreptitiously" watching CNEA's website over the last few years with the result that he decided La Sierra would be the place he would like to place his collection valued at considerably more than a million dollars. It very nicely complements the current collection which is made up mostly of objects used in everyday life. Dr. Cohen liked the idea that his treasures would not only be displayed but would become a subject of research and study in the university's graduate program in archaeology. The board heard reports on organization, fundraising, and membership. And a committee was appointed to plan for the museum's ongoing program of support once the building is in place.

Archaeology Comes to Portland

By Larry Geraty

Dr. Erik and Alice Nielsen (La Sierra alumni) hosted a gathering of thirty-some Portland-area alumni and friends of the university's archaeology endeavors at their Italian villa in Gresham on the evening of September 28, 2019. Featured speakers included Kent Bramlett on ancient Moabites at Balu'a, Jordan; Doug Clark on ancient Ammonites at 'Umayri and the proposed new Madaba Museum (encompassing both Ammonite and Moabite territory); and Larry Geraty on the prospects of La Sierra's new University Museum & Visitor Center. There was enthusiastic support for the latter, including a six-figure gift, a couple more substantial checks, and promise of more to come. The Middle Eastern cuisine was a real hit, and over dessert our Oregon friends viewed some of the archaeological treasures from CNEA.

Display Case

Dawn Acevedo

Byzantine ceramic oil lamps are known for their slipper-shaped bodies and varied decorative styles. With the reign of Constantine I in the early fourth century AD, Christian iconography became increasingly popular and widespread, particularly the use of the Chi-Rho and the *crux quadrata*, or Greek cross. Thus, it comes as no surprise that many lamps from this period contain such symbols. Pictured here are five such Byzantine lamps from the La Sierra Collection (LSU001352, LSU001372, LSU001358, LSU001367, LSU001353) each of which depicts a Greek cross on the nozzle with lines emanating from the pour hole.



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Photographs: Douglas Clark, BRAP 2019,
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2019 Calendar of Events

16 – 17 November 2019

Archaeology Discovery Weekend – Ancient
Synagogues and Churches in the Region of
the Galilee

17 – 19 April 2020

La Sierra Alumni Homecoming Weekend

May 2020

Possible 3-week excavations in Madaba,
Jordan

14 – 15 November 2020

Archaeology Discovery Weekend 2020

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 Evidence for the Fish and Loaves Miracle?

A recent article in *The Times of Israel* discusses a newly excavated mosaic carpet in the Burnt Church at Hippos-Sussita on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee. This mosaic portrays birds, fish, and twelve baskets with debated contents – fruit, flowers, or bread. Could this mark the site of the feeding of the 5000? Or perhaps the feeding of the 4000? And what are the implications for Tabgha, the traditional site of the fish and loaves miracle? <https://www.timesofisrael.com/mosaic-near-sea-of-galilee-may-mark-new-site-for-jesus-loaves-and-fishes-miracle/>

“Church of the Apostles” Found

Archaeologists Mordecai Aviam (Kinneret College) and Steven Notley (Nyack College) excavating at el-Araj northwest of the Sea of Galilee claim to have found the “Church of the Apostles” mentioned by the Bavarian bishop Willibald in AD 725. The 5th-century church is said to have been built over the house of the apostles Peter and Andrew and is located in what they believe is the true site of Bethsaida/Julias. <https://www.foxnews.com/science/church-of-the-apostles-discovered-archaeologists-say>

An Exodus Oasis and Daniel’s Four Beasts

Dr. Jodi Magness of UNC-Chapel Hill has been directing excavations at the Galilean site of Huqoq for the past nine years where a 5th-century synagogue has produced incredible and unique mosaics. This year, the team uncovered two new panels of the mosaic floor: one depicting the Israelites camping at the Elim oasis from Exodus 15:27 and another depicting the four beasts from Daniel 7. <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-sites-places/biblical-archaeology-sites/huqoq-2019-newly-discovered-1600-year-old-mosaic-exodus/>