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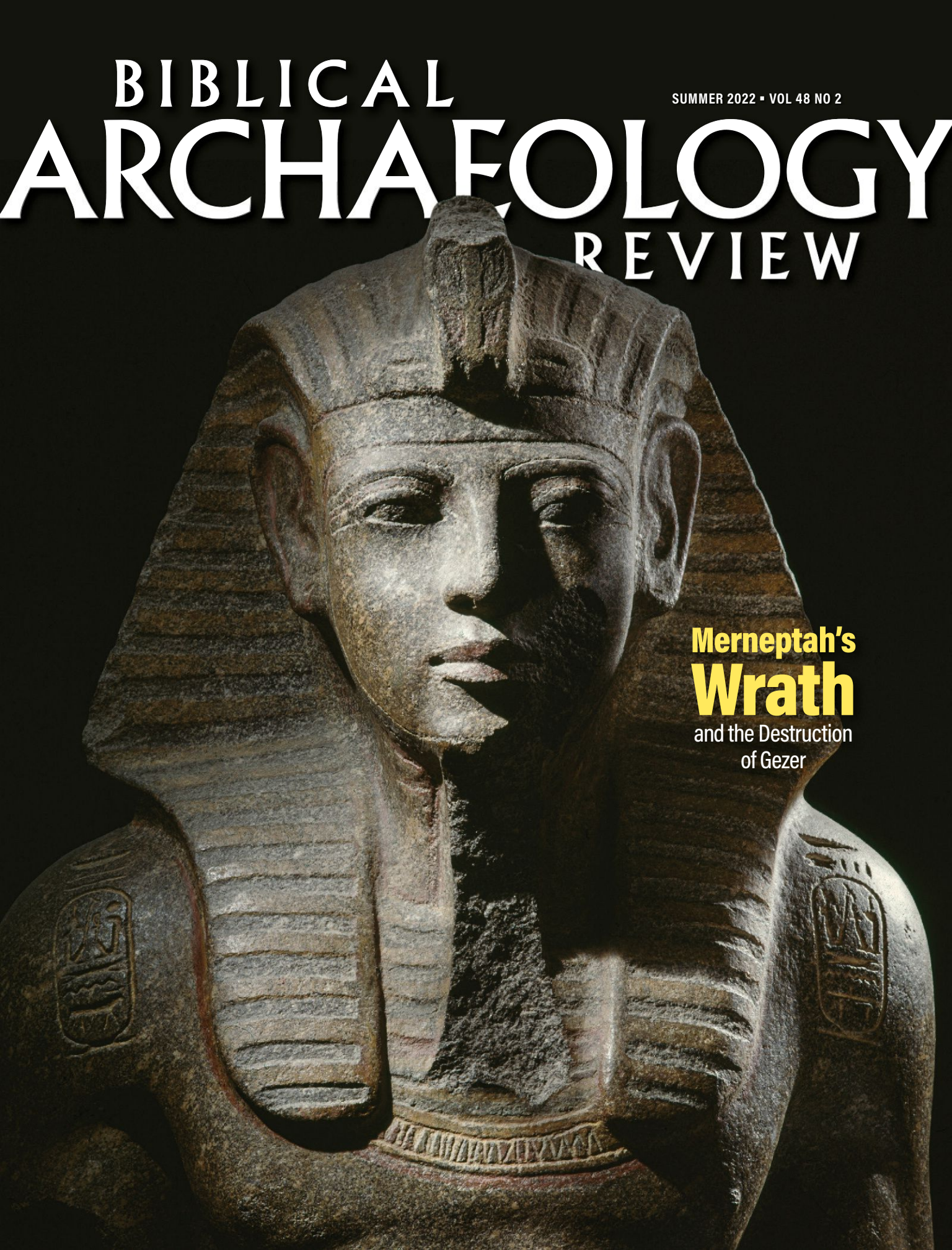
SUMMER 2022 ▪ VOL 48 NO 2



Merneptah's Wrath
and the Destruction of Gezer

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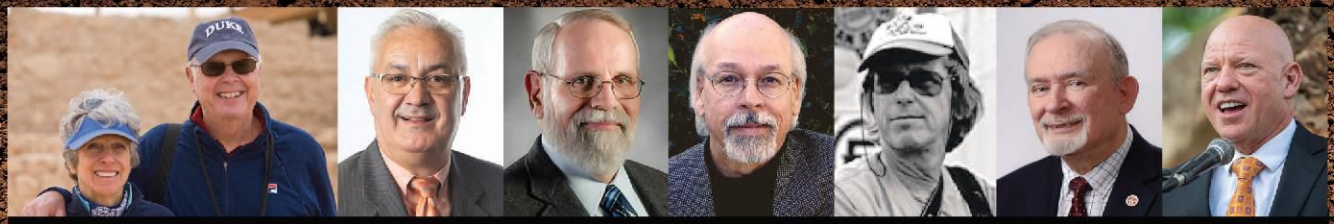

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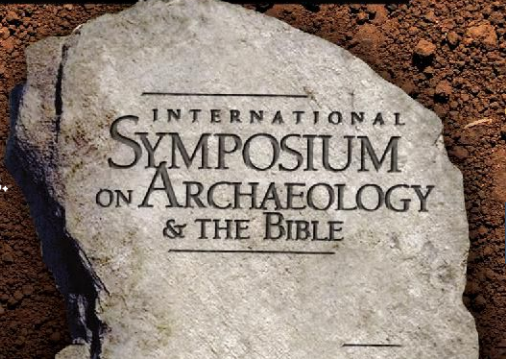

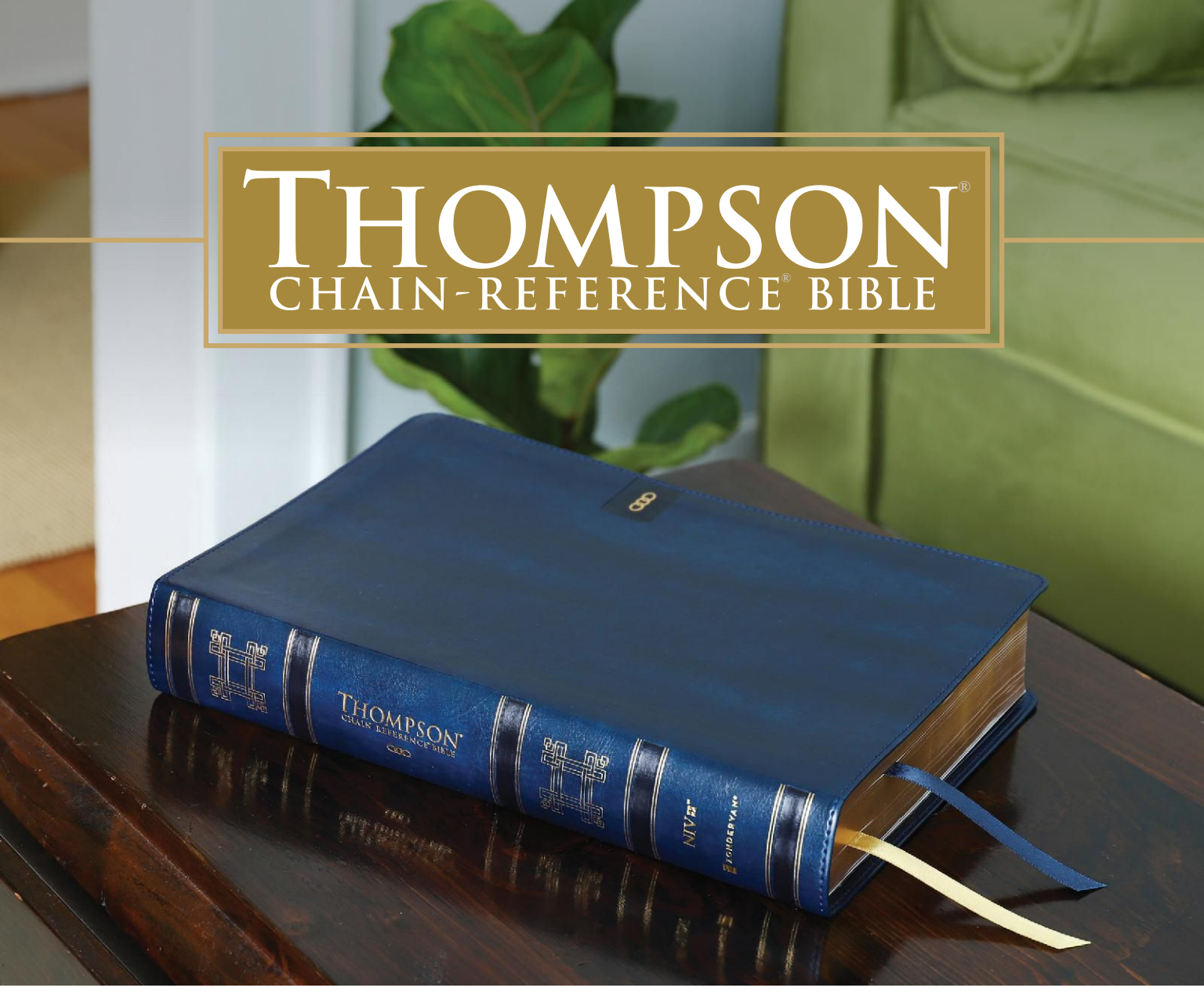

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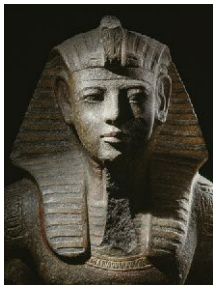
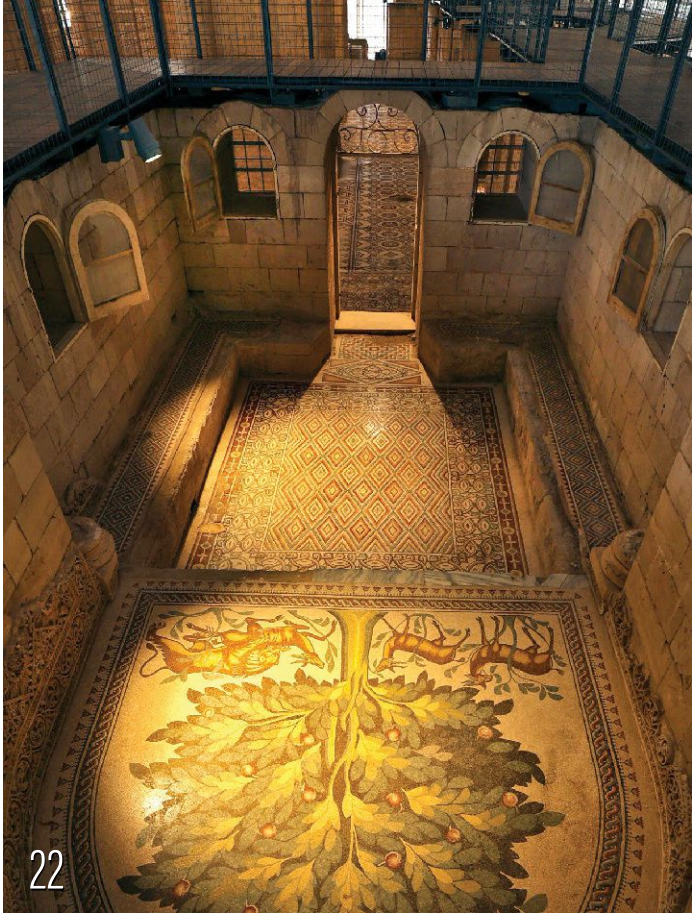
FEATURES



ON THE COVER: Merneptah (r. 1213–1203 B.C.E.) mounted a military campaign to Canaan around 1210 B.C.E. This stone statue fragment of the pharaoh comes from his mortuary temple in Thebes, Egypt.

PHOTO: AKG-IMAGES / CDA / GUILLEMOT

EDITOR'S NOTE: Images of human skeletal remains appear on pages 37, 46, and 53 of this issue.



STRATA

EPISTLES

PLUS

WEB EXCLUSIVE

The Mosaics of Nebo

biblicalarchaeology.org/nebo

Archaeologist Debra Foran highlights the beautiful but little-known mosaic floors that decorate the Byzantine churches and monasteries of the Mt. Nebo region in Jordan. Explore the artistry and rich designs of the Nebo mosaics and learn how their vivid imagery informs our understanding of rural and monastic life in early Christian Jordan.

DAVID STANLEY / CC BY 2.0

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I Have to Say, This Is Pretty Fun!

IT IS HARD TO BELIEVE a whole year has passed since I became editor of **BAR**, and what a fun year it has been! Every day, I wake up excited to be part of this magazine, always searching for new and interesting content or thinking through new ways to make **BAR** more engaging and accessible. It is an incredibly creative and rewarding experience that fosters not only a tremendous pride in the magazine but also a firm commitment to ensuring **BAR** remains enjoyable for its readers.

I hope that creative passion comes through in the fun and exciting Summer 2022 issue. Of course, this year marks the 75th anniversary of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and we begin our coverage of this momentous event with Charlotte Hempel's article "Ezra and the Dead Sea Scrolls," in which she explores the virtual absence of one of early Judaism's most important figures, Ezra, from the scrolls found at Qumran. In "Moses and the Monks of Nebo," by archaeologist Debra Foran, we jump ahead several centuries to discover the fascinating Byzantine churches and monasteries that commemorate the mountain in Moab from which Moses viewed the Promised Land right before his death.

We also get two views on the dramatic events that led to the demise of the Bronze Age world of the biblical Canaanites. In "1177 B.C.—The Collapse of Bronze Age Civilization," archaeologist Eric Cline examines the various human and natural forces that brought about the end of one of the most interconnected and globalized periods in human history. And in "Pharaoh's Fury," Gezer excavators Steven Ortiz and Samuel Wolff present dramatic new evidence of the city's violent destruction in the late 13th century B.C.E., presumably at the hands of Pharaoh Merneptah, who famously claimed to have laid waste to "Israel" during the same campaign.

As always, Strata is filled with the fun and informative. Two leading archaeologists highlight critical developments in Israel's archaeology: First, Gideon Avni, head of the Israel Antiquities Authority's archaeology division, answers our questions about the growing importance of salvage excavation amid the rapid growth of Israel's cities. Second, Shay Bar, excavator at Tel Esur in northern Israel, highlights his project to engage Israel's diverse youth in the country's archaeology. Our latest Classical Corner, by Mercedes Aguirre and Richard Buxton, looks at the enduring myth of the cyclops and the various and often paradoxical ways that ancient authors understood this fantastic character of Greek mythology. We also offer news, trivia, tributes, and even a recipe for Samaritan hummus.

In Epistles, Dimitrios Papanikolaou examines the resurgence of the Psalms in Greek Byzantine inscriptions and these texts' revelations about early Greek translations of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament). Patricia Ahearne-Kroll then introduces us to Aseneth, the little-known Egyptian wife of the Israelite patriarch Joseph who fascinated later writers and became a symbol of Jewish independence from Greek and Roman domination.

So enjoy your excavation of the fun facts, incredible insights, and dramatic discoveries that fill the pages of our summer issue. In the meantime, we'll be working with passion and creativity to bring you the next issue of **BAR**.

—GLENN J. CORBETT

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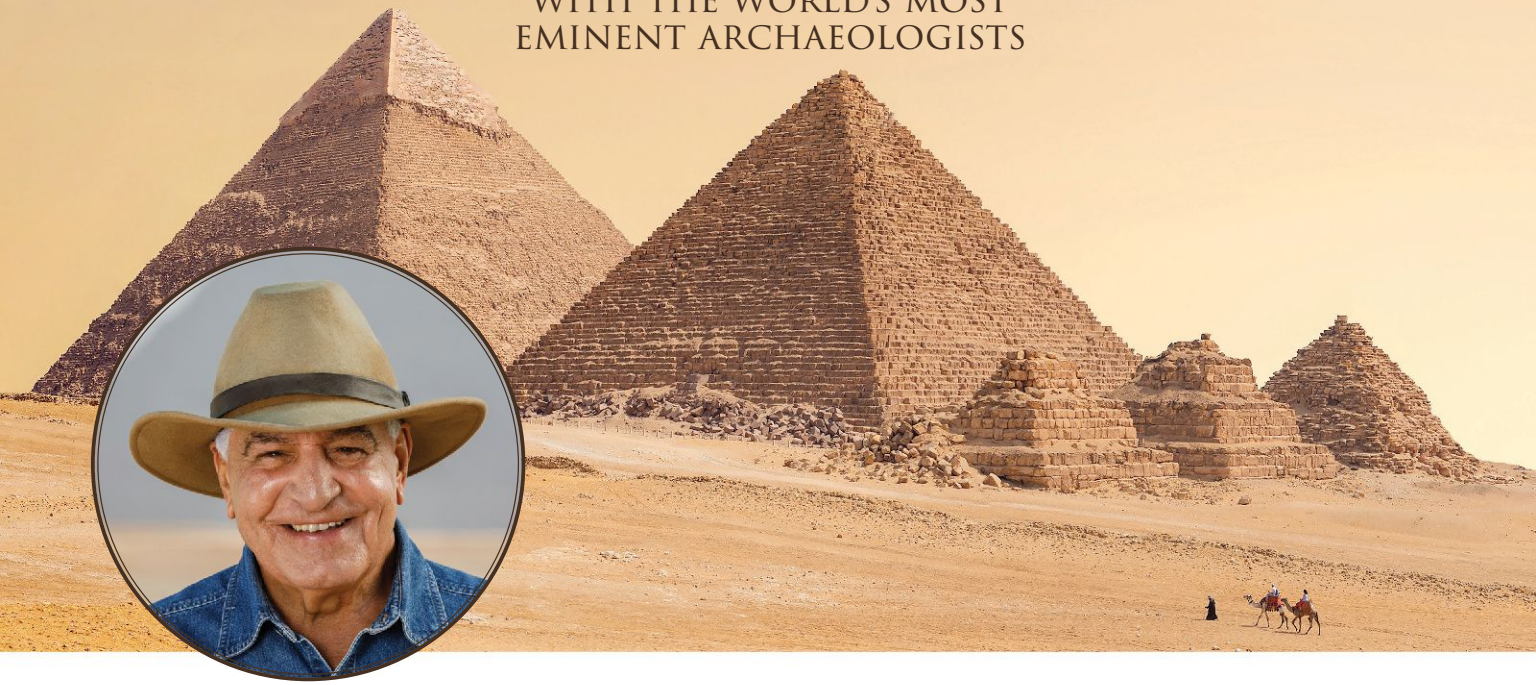

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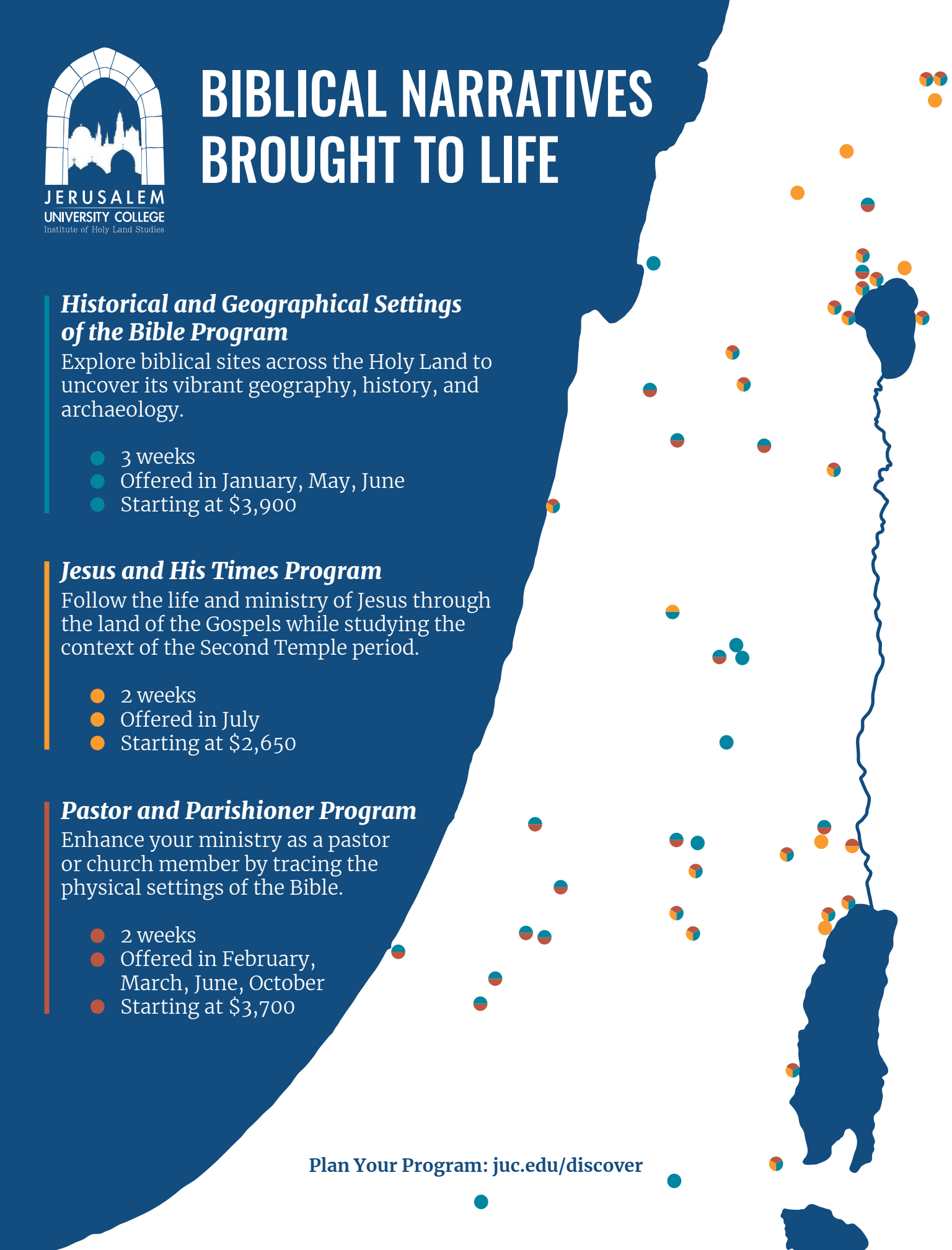

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Thank you for sharing your thoughts and comments about our Winter 2021 issue. We appreciate your feedback. Here are a few of the letters we received. Find more online at **biblicalarchaeology.org/letters**.

Timely Content

I WAS READING Herman Melville's epic poem "Clarel," which describes a 19th-century journey through the Holy Land, when the Winter 2021 issue of **BAR** arrived. I was pleasantly surprised to find two places Melville describes featured: the Tomb of the Kings in Jerusalem (Andrew Lawler, "Who Built the Tomb of the Kings?") and the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem ("Where Is It?"). Reading the **BAR** descriptions and seeing the photographs added to my enjoyment of Melville's challenging poem.

JIM MOYERS
OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA

Shapira Scrolls

IN YOUR WINTER 2021 ISSUE, the two articles on "The Shapira Scrolls" were fantastic! I enjoyed the way both sides were presented, along with corresponding pictures (exhibits). In a time when people cannot seem to agree on anything, it was refreshing to have a debate presented that allowed for both sides to present their arguments. I found it not only educational but also engaging and fascinating! It allows the readers to think and consider while drawing their own conclusions.

STEVE PHILLIPS
OAK CREEK, WISCONSIN

THANK YOU for the wonderful debate about the authenticity (or not) of the Shapira Scrolls. Informative, well argued, with no personal attacks. Decades-long familiar **BAR** authors Ronald Hendel and James Tabor on opposite sides, paired with reputable scholars new to us, Matthieu Richelle and Idan Dershowitz, added to the seriousness of the discussion.

LES BERGEN
ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA

I REALLY ENJOYED the pro/con pieces on the Shapira Scrolls and am challenged to decide which one I find most compelling! The forgery camp seems to base its case on very detailed specifics of paleography, Moses Shapira's tainted history, and their depiction of the era as one rife with forgeries. The authenticity camp dismisses the paleographic critique by stating that the documents used by the forgery camp to support their claims are patently inaccurate. The literary analysis and the alignment of the scrolls with modern critical theory is fascinating.

My heart wants the authenticity camp to be right, which biases my ability to reach a conclusion, but how exciting would it be if they were authentic?

JIM HAMMOND
KENMORE, WASHINGTON

IN THE ARGUMENT over the Shapira Scrolls, it seems that "The Case for Forgery" relies only on paleographic analysis. I, for one, am not convinced. It seems the authors think that ancient scribes created their texts with some sort of ancient typewriter, and that all the letters from the scrolls must conform *exactly* to standard forms. Graphologists will tell you that nobody writes even their signature the same way twice. It may also be the case that a certain scribe liked the way a letter from another script looked and substituted it for the "official" letter. Then there is the matter of the age of the scribe; young and old scribes no doubt wrote their letters differently. And we must not forget that even an experienced scribe could make errors. I grant that paleography is useful for many cases, but when an argument relies solely or mainly on paleographic analysis, no matter how long or well developed the argument, I tend to ignore it. My "vote," therefore, is for the authenticity of the Shapira Scrolls.

JOHN MAJKA
LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

WHAT I FIND AMAZING in the antiquities world is how easily experts allow

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themselves to be fooled by questionable artifacts. I guess the extreme desire to find that one awesome artifact that would change a huge chunk of history is too hard to resist, even when you know the seller (in this case, Moses Shapira) has a long history of selling fraudulent articles. While I actually found the argument for the scrolls' authenticity compelling, antiquities dealers should be reminded of the fable "The Boy Who Cried Wolf": Sell enough fakes and even when you have the real thing, you won't be believed.

JOANN MCFARLAND
STANFIELD, OREGON

IN MAKING THEIR CASE for authenticity, Idan Dershowitz and James Tabor state, in reference to the Book of Deuteronomy, that certain elements have "an odd literary structure, to put it mildly," and refer to the book's "disjointed structure." This structure may be uncommon in written history but is essential to many types of modern fiction, as well as oral literature, such as folktale, myth, and epic, including Homer's *Iliad*. Since this architecture suggests that the Bible's version is based on oral tradition, it weakens Dershowitz and Tabor's argument for the precedence and extreme antiquity of the "Valediction of Moses," which has a linear structure more typical of a later literate tradition.

BEN KROUP
WATERFORD, NEW YORK

Not Lost in Translation

KUDOS TO ELIZABETH BACKFISH for her excellent article "Not Lost in Translation: Hebrew Wordplay in Greek" (Winter 2021). This was a most interesting and insightful article. It brings to mind many fond memories of an evening class I once took with biblical scholar David Noel Freedman (see *Bible Review*, December 1993). For three hours, at his house, we would read the Hebrew Bible in the original Hebrew. Freedman pointed out wordplay after wordplay, often evoking much laughter from the group. It seemed to me that if any of us had simply written down all the humor he detected in the Bible, we would have had a bestseller. Backfish's excellent article continues this tradition of bringing out humor in the Bible.

ROBERT MACDONALD
ST. PETERSBURG, FLORIDA

I APPRECIATED Elizabeth Backfish's article. However, one sentence is in error: "The Hebrew poet's choice of *'esoh* for 'I hate' is a *hapax legomenon*, meaning that it occurs only this one time in the entire Hebrew Bible." First of all, *'esoh* is the infinitive construct of the verb meaning "to do"; second, it is not a *hapax legomenon*. There is a *hapax legomenon* in the sentence; it is the next word, *setim*. The word for "I hate" is the following word, *saneti*.

ALICE OGDEN BELLIS
PROFESSOR OF HEBREW BIBLE
HOWARD UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ELIZABETH BACKFISH REPLIES:
I am grateful to Dr. Bellis for the correction. The infinitive construct originally identified as the hapax legomenon *is actually quite common (occurring about 269 times by my count). The* hapax legomenon *is the plural noun for transgressors,* setim*, that follows. The case for wordplay is still strong, since* setim *is part of the wordplay under consideration, and since many other words in the semantic field of* setim *are more common (such as* khatta't*,* 'aon*, and* pesha' *) and do not contain the "s" sound that makes this example of wordplay so pronounced.*

Paul of Arabia

BEN WITHERINGTON, in his very interesting article "Paul of Arabia?" (Winter 2021), points out that Paul's Arabia was the kingdom of the Nabateans, located south and east of the Dead Sea. But a little research shows that Nabatea's borders extended to and overlapped with Idumea, in the regions of southern Judah and the Negev. In fact, Herod the Great's father, Antipater, was Idumean, and his mother, Cypros, was Nabatean. I point this out because Paul was born a Roman citizen in the wealthy town of Tarsus, the playground of Antony and Cleopatra, with Antony being Herod's sponsor at the time. All this begs the question, who were Paul's highborn and ostensibly wealthy parents? If they and he were indeed Herodian, that might explain why Paul would have spent so much time in Arabia after his conversion.

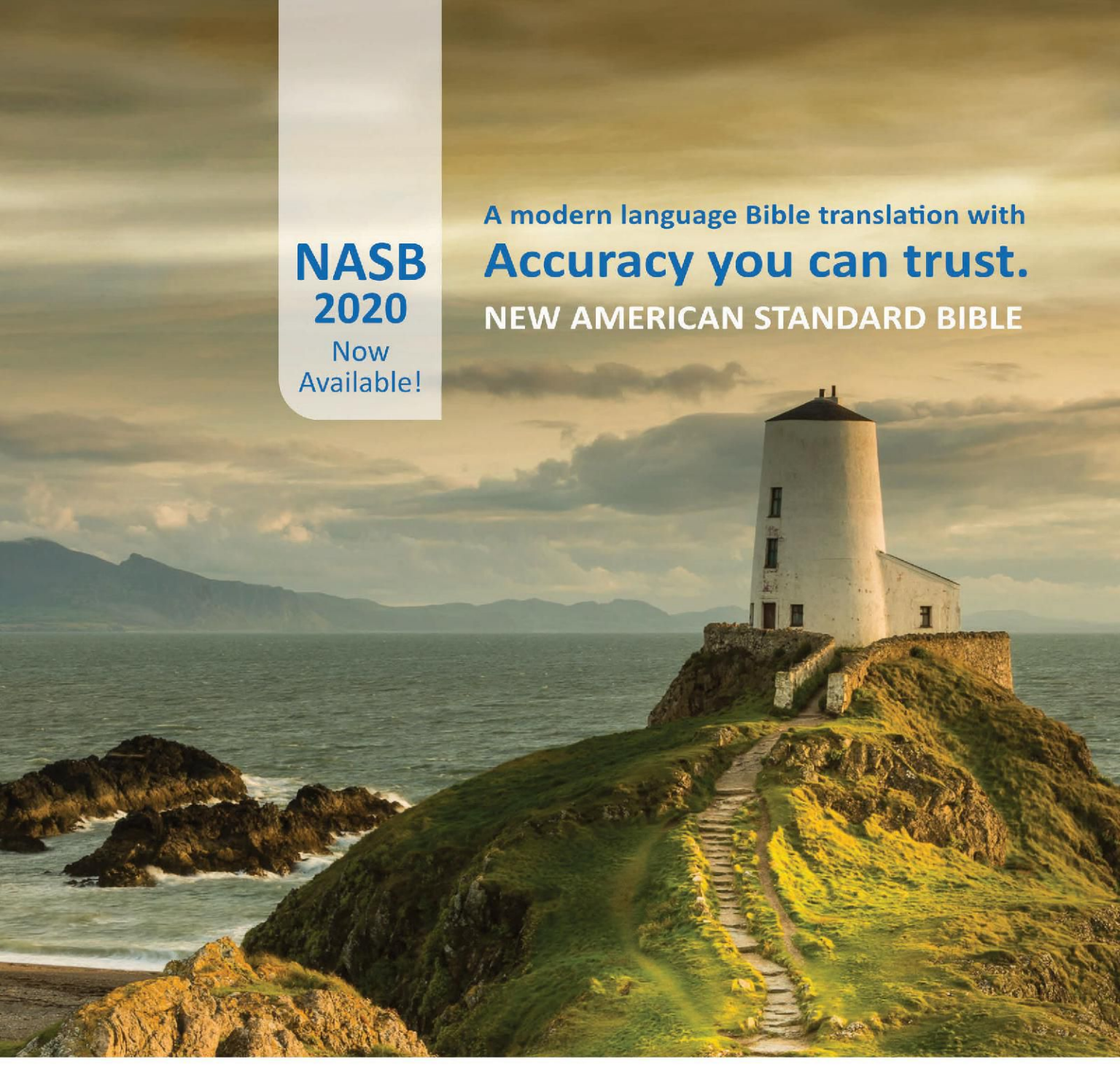
MAHLON MARR
PEORIA, ARIZONA

BEN WITHERINGTON RESPONDS:
I don't think there is any reason to connect Paul with the Idumeans or the Herods. Paul's family in Tarsus were leather workers. It is likely they obtained their Roman citizenship and wealth from service to the empire, namely the making of tents and other leather products for the Roman troops in Cilicia.

IN THE ARTICLE "Paul of Arabia?" Ben Witherington describes the "Paul the basket case" scene as occurring after Paul's time in Arabia, whereas the referenced Acts 9:25, read in context, clearly states this happened shortly after Paul's conversion, due to his enthusiastically preaching the gospel for which he had been persecuting believers. Yes, I understand that the author of Acts edited events to smooth over the apparent conflict between Paul and the other apostles, hence some disconnects between Acts and Paul's epistle to the Galatians. However, there is no evidence of that here.

N. TABER
GERMANTOWN, MARYLAND

BEN WITHERINGTON RESPONDS:
In the Acts account of the basket story, Luke does, indeed, compress things and doesn't know about the trip to Arabia. The basket story, which Paul himself recounts in 2 Corinthians 11:32–33 and for which he is the primary source and Luke a secondary one, refers to King Aretas being after Paul through his agent in Damascus. This surely has to have happened after Paul did or tried to do something in Nabatean Arabia. What is not clear is whether Aretas already had control over Damascus when Paul was lowered in a basket down the wall.



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STRATA

UNIVERSITY OF HAIFA

Archaeologists Dina Avshalom-Gorni (right) and Yahuda Govrin (left) excavating Magdala's second synagogue.

Second Synagogue Found in Magdala

THE UNIVERSITY OF HAIFA recently announced the discovery of a first-century C.E. synagogue in Magdala, Israel. Located on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee, Magdala is thought by some to be the birthplace of Mary Magdalene, as well as the main base of operations for the Jewish historian Josephus when he was a rebel leader during the First Jewish Revolt (66–70 C.E.). Although this is one of only a handful of synagogues from the first century excavated in the Galilee, it is remarkably not the first uncovered at Magdala. Another was discovered in the ancient city in 2009.* Together, these two synagogues shed light on the religious life of Jews in the Galilee during the Second Temple period.

The newly excavated synagogue was a simple, square-shaped building. It consisted of a central hall with a bench along one side and two small rooms, one possibly used to store scrolls. The rooms and bench were coated with plaster. By contrast, the first Magdala synagogue was more elaborate—with several *mikva'ot* (ritual baths) and colorful frescoes. A possible explanation for the difference in the synagogues is their location within the city: The first synagogue was located in a commercial area, while the new synagogue was found in a residential neighborhood.

*Marcela Zapata-Meza and Rosaura Sanz-Rincón, "Excavating Mary Magdalene's Hometown," **BAR** May/June 2017.

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WHO DID IT?

Who discovered the Merneptah Stele, which contains the earliest reference to "Israel"?

ANSWER ON P. 26

Largest Winery of the Byzantine World

BORDEAUX, BURGUNDY, CHAMPAGNE. Today, southern France is synonymous with excellent wine. But during the Byzantine period (fourth–seventh centuries C.E.), great wine came from the Holy Land. Recent excavations at Tel Yavneh, located along Israel's southern coast, revealed one of the largest wineries in the ancient world. The winery, excavated by the Israel Antiquities Authority, covered 2.5 acres and produced as much as 2 million liters of wine a year. The wine was a high-quality white wine, famous throughout the Byzantine world as Gaza wine, since it was shipped from nearby Gaza to major Mediterranean port cities.

Wine press at Yavneh.

ANASTASIA SHAPIRO, ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY

Yavneh was likely the main production center for Gaza wine. The site features installations for all stages of wine production, including five large-capacity wine presses, each measuring nearly 2,500 square feet. It also had four large warehouses and kilns for the mass production of uniform wine jars, known as Gaza jars, each holding about 3 gallons.

Yavneh's winery operated for some 200 years, in the fifth and sixth centuries, when much of the area was Christian. But even before this period, the region was already well known for producing wine, with wineries and vineyards dating back to at least the Persian period (c. 539–332 B.C.E.).

Wrecked Ships and a Remarkable Ring

DAFNA GAZIT, ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY

THE ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY (IAA) recently announced an incredible find—the discovery of not one but two ancient shipwrecks off the coast of the ancient port city of Caesarea Maritima. The earlier shipwreck dates to the Roman period (c. 300 C.E.), while the other vessel comes from the Mamluk period (c. 1400 C.E.). The ships sank at the same place in Caesarea's harbor more than a millennium apart. Within the wrecks, the IAA discovered a treasure trove of ancient artifacts, including coins, statues, pottery, and jewelry. Most remarkable of all, however, was an octagonal gold ring set with a green gemstone. The gem depicts a young shepherd wearing a tunic and holding a lamb on his shoulder—possibly the Good Shepherd (John 10:11–16), one of the earliest known Christian symbols for Jesus. This hints that the ring's owner may have been a wealthy Christian living in Caesarea, the same city where the apostle Peter baptized the first gentile Christian (Acts 10) and where the apostle Paul was put on trial (Acts 23–24).

WHAT IS IT?

1. Byzantine cross
2. Canaanite idol
3. Crusader sword
4. Egyptian royal pendant
5. Israelite staff

ANSWER ON P. 22

YANIV BERMAN, ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY

Persia and the Classical World

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Limestone relief (fourth century B.C.E.) from ancient Persia showing a lion and bull in combat.

FOR MORE THAN A millennium, from around 550 B.C.E. to 650 C.E., ancient Greece and later also Rome had a tumultuous relationship with their neighbors to the east: the Medes, Persians, Parthians, and Sasanians of ancient Iran. Although they were sometimes at peace or even united against common enemies, more often than not these major powers were in conflict with each other. The Getty exhibit *Persia: Ancient Iran and the Classical World* explores the artistic and cultural connections between these rival powers through artifacts and documents.

With Iran as its heartland, the Persian empire once stretched from the Aegean Sea to the Indus River and from the Caucasus Mountains to Egypt. The Persians did not originally view Greece as a serious threat, but a series of defeats—and loss of territory—changed their opinion. Ultimately, their empire fell to Alexander the Great in the fourth century B.C.E. The following centuries saw the Parthians and, later, Sasanians rise to power in ancient Iran—and fight with Rome for control of the eastern Mediterranean, Syria, and Mesopotamia.

DANIEL STEIGER

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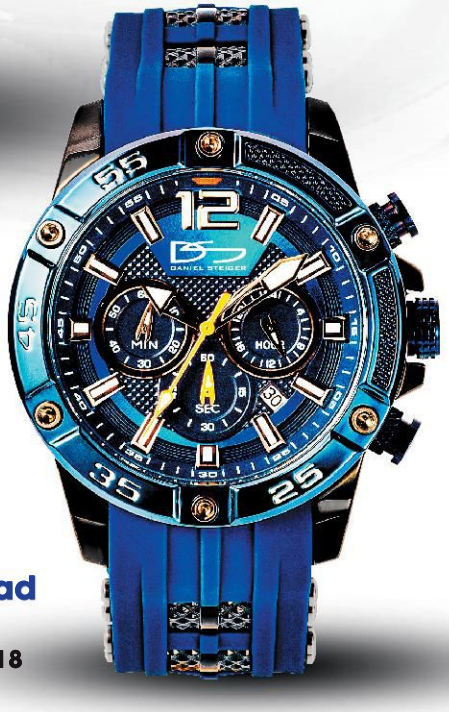

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The Cyclops

Portrait of an Ogre

MERCEDES AGUIRRE AND **RICHARD BUXTON**

FEW CHARACTERS from Greek mythology echo in the mind as resonantly as Polyphemus, the one-eyed, cave-dwelling, human-eating, sheep-and-goat-herding ogre outwitted by the hero Odysseus on his voyage homewards from Troy to Ithaca. As unforgettably recorded in Homer's epic poem the *Odyssey*, this episode involves a succession of key moments: Polyphemus's imprisoning of the Greek intruders by blocking the entrance to his cavern with a massive boulder; Odysseus's ruse of getting Polyphemus intoxicated with a gift of potent wine, enabling the hero and his crewmen to blind the ogre with a sharpened wooden stake; the Greeks' escape from the ogre's clutches by hanging onto the fleece beneath his sheep, the trick by which Odysseus falsely gives his name as "Nobody"—so that, when Polyphemus calls out to his fellow ogres for help, his cry of "Nobody is killing me" leaves them shaking their heads in puzzlement.

But who was Polyphemus? And who were those fellow ogres? They were known collectively as cyclopes (singular: cyclops), one of the most fascinating monsters to inhabit Greek myths. There were, broadly speaking, three kinds, distinguished by the different sorts of activity that they practised.

First, there were the master masons, who reputedly built mighty (cyclopean) city walls—such as those at Mycenae and Tiryns in the Greek Argolid—out of blocks of rough-hewn stone. Indeed, one interpretation of the name cyclops traces it back to the circular wall or *kuklos* constructed around a city. But we aren't told much about the mason cyclopes, nor does any ancient visual image show them in the act of building. What we do know, though, is that they were said to have lived in primordial time: not exactly a time *before* culture, but a time when culture was in the process of establishing itself.

Equally primordial were the cyclopes of the second type: the mighty blacksmiths, said to have been the offspring of Ouranos (Sky) and Gaia (Earth), and famous, among other achievements, for fabricating the thunderbolts hurled by Zeus. As the poet Hesiod described them—adopting an alternative etymology—"they were surnamed cyclopes (circle-eyed) because one round eye was set in their foreheads." Not all their commissions were as formidable as making thunderbolts, though. Another Greek poet, Callimachus, described a visit by the goddess Artemis to the cyclopes' forge on Mount Etna, where they made a bow and arrows for her. Many other writers located the cyclopes either near, inside, or beneath Etna. Foremost is the Roman poet Virgil, who, in his *Aeneid*, wonderfully evokes the continuity between the technologically applied fire of the blacksmith's forge and the natural, volcanic fire which fuels it from below.

Last and certainly not least among the cyclopes come the pastoral ogres, such as Polyphemus, whose parents are said to have been the sea god Poseidon and a nymph. The canonical account of them is in Homer's *Odyssey*, but the Polyphemus and Odysseus episode was also reimagined by numerous later authors and artists. A memorable example is the satyr play *Cyclops* by the Athenian dramatist Euripides (a satyr play was a mythological burlesque featuring the bouncy and rambunctious satyrs). In this case, Polyphemus is portrayed as a cannibal who not only eats his human victims but cooks them first (unlike in the *Odyssey*, where he eats them raw). Visual artists, too, loved to imagine the hero-versus-ogre encounter. The most popular scenes are the blinding and the under-sheep escape; less common are evocations of Polyphemus's cannibalism.

Polyphemus's meeting with Odysseus is not the only aspect of his career that myth-tellers enjoyed recalling. He is also portrayed as a (usually) frustrated lover, the object of his affections being the sea-nymph Galatea. Their relationship is explored most notably in two idylls composed by the Greek pastoral poet Theocritus, where Polyphemus neglects his duties to his flock because he is besotted with the unresponsive Galatea. The Roman writer Ovid would add the figure of Galatea's lover, the handsome but doomed young shepherd Acis. The jealous Polyphemus obliterated him in typically cyclopean style, by hurling a rock at him.

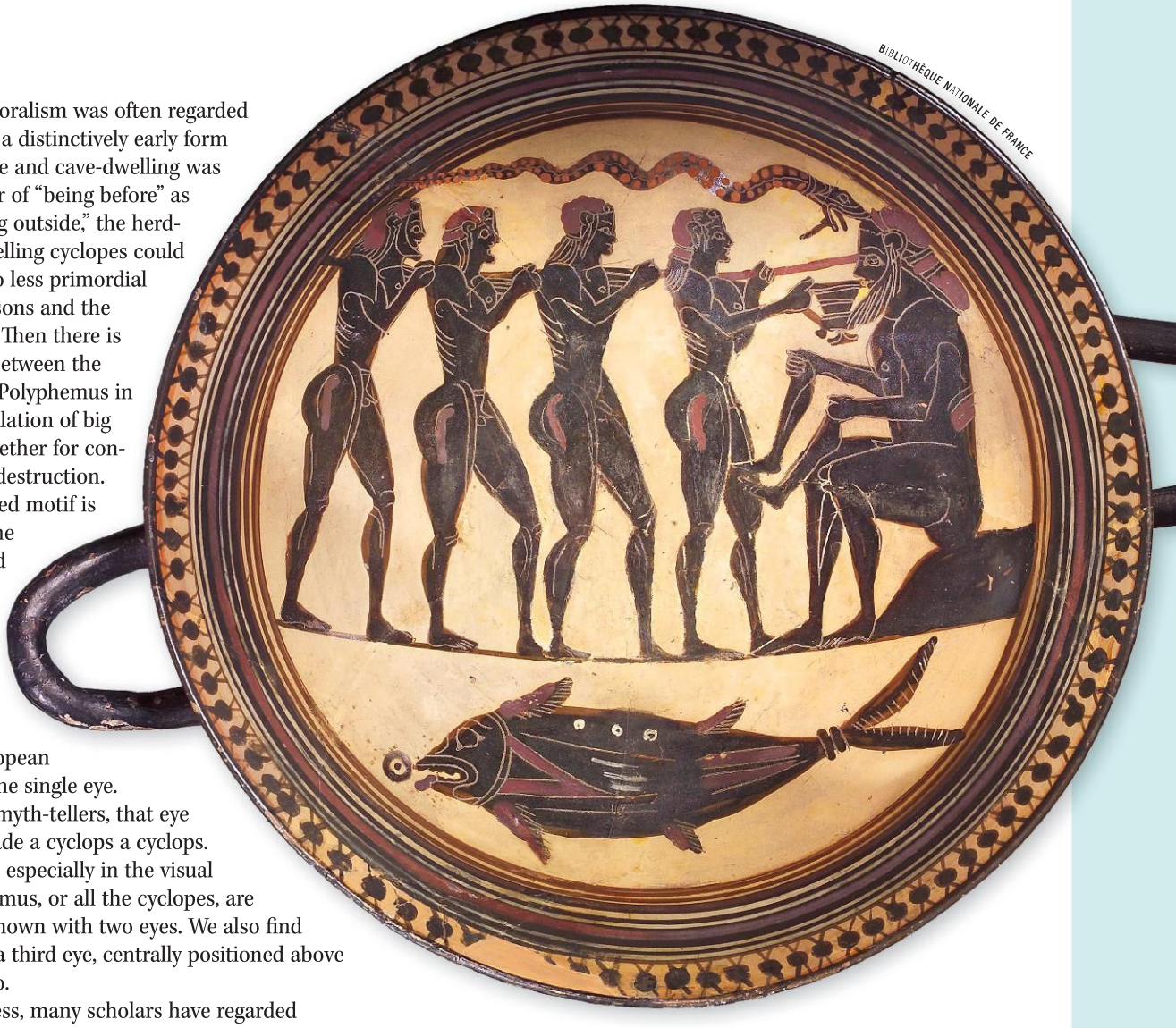
What do the three types of cyclopes—masons, metal-workers, and herdsmen—have in common? The notion of primordiality is worth reiterating:

Because pastoralism was often regarded by Greeks as a distinctively early form of subsistence and cave-dwelling was also a marker of "being before" as well as "being outside," the herding, cave-dwelling cyclopes could be seen as no less primordial than the masons and the blacksmiths. Then there is the overlap between the masons and Polyphemus in their manipulation of big boulders, whether for construction or destruction. Another shared motif is circularity: the city walls and the round eye. Which brings us to what for many has been the point of cyclopean mythology: the single eye.

For some myth-tellers, that eye was what made a cyclops a cyclops. Nevertheless, especially in the visual arts, Polyphemus, or all the cyclopes, are sometimes shown with two eyes. We also find examples of a third eye, centrally positioned above the other two.

Nevertheless, many scholars have regarded monocularity as the origin of the cyclopes. One theory is paleontological: The idea of a cyclops allegedly goes back to observations made in antiquity of the skull of the prehistoric dwarf elephant, notable for the large hole in the middle of its forehead. A second theory is geological: Given the cyclopes' link with Etna, the image of the circular (eye-like) volcanic crater has been seen as a possible origin for the myth. Third comes medicine: There exists in humans an incredibly rare anatomical abnormality—cyclopia—resulting from a failure of the embryonic forebrain to properly subdivide. Observation of individuals with such an abnormality might, so the argument goes, have generated the mythical image of the cyclops.

None of the three origin-oriented explanations, however, weakens the validity of a more fundamental point: What makes a myth a myth is not its supposed origin, but its meaning, in all its successive retellings. The jury will always be out on the origin, and it doesn't matter. Far better to imagine a breed of primordial giants with overlapping and paradoxical characteristics, capable of constructiveness but also destructiveness. Indeed, there is much more to the cyclopes than meets the eye.[1]



CANNIBALISTIC CYCLOPS. On his return from Troy, Odysseus meets the cyclops Polyphemus. As shown here on a Laconian cup (c. 550 B.C.E.), Polyphemus holds the remains—two legs—of Odysseus's companion, as Odysseus (far left) and his men blind the cyclops.

[1] We have attempted to demonstrate this at length in a book about every aspect of Cyclopean mythology, tracing its development from classical antiquity to the present day: Mercedes Aguirre and Richard Buxton, *Cyclops: The Myth and Its Cultural History* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2020).

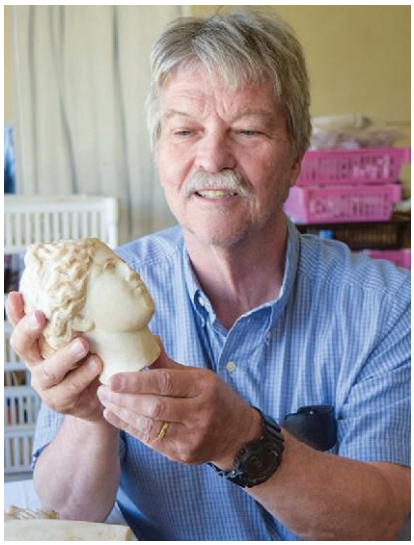
Giants of Jordanian Archaeology

During the past year, the archaeology of Jordan has been devastated by the passing of several leading scholars who dedicated their careers to exploring the ancient lands and peoples east of the Jordan. Provided here are brief tributes to three of these scholars and their contributions. To read the full tributes, visit **biblicalarchaeology.org/milestones**.—G.J.C.

Martha Joukowsky (1936–2022)

On January 7, 2022, Martha Joukowsky died at the age of 85 at her home in Providence, Rhode Island, near the Brown University campus where she taught from 1982 to 2002. In addition to being a professor of archaeology and anthropology, she and her late husband, Artemis Joukowsky, were instrumental in the funding and creation of Brown University's Joukowsky Institute for Archaeology and the Ancient World. Martha's archaeological career spanned five decades, during which she participated in or led excavation projects in Greece, Hong Kong, Italy, Lebanon, and Turkey, though she is perhaps best known for directing the long-running Great Temple excavations in the ancient city of Petra in Jordan. Her commitment to the field of archaeology was manifest in many other ways, including taking on the presidency of the Archaeological Institute of America (1989–1993) and serving as Vice President of ASOR (American Schools of Overseas Research) from 2001 to 2005.—**BARBARA A. PORTER**

COURTESY OF THE JOUKOWSKY INSTITUTE FOR ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE ANCIENT WORLD



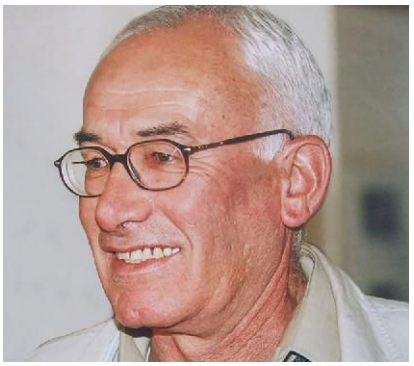
COURTESY OF THE AMERICAN CENTER OF RESEARCH

S. Thomas Parker (1950–2021)

Thomas (Tom) Parker, renowned archaeologist of Roman Jordan, passed away suddenly on September 12, 2021, in Raleigh, North Carolina, at the age of 71. Tom had a long research career in Jordan, where he directed the Limes Arabicus and Roman Aqaba Projects and co-directed the Petra North Ridge Project. Tom was a steadfast advocate of archaeology in Jordan and had served on the board of the American Center of Research (ACOR) since 1987. His research profoundly changed the perception of Roman and Byzantine Jordan as a provincial backwater to a meaningful political and cultural frontier, highlighting the important resources the region provided not only for Roman and Byzantine administrations but also the diverse populations that lived along the Limes Arabicus. Tom's extensive historical knowledge was coupled with his interest in using ceramics not only as a temporal indicator but also as a means for understanding local economies and trade. Over his career, Tom published more than a thousand articles, book chapters, and newsletter contributions, and he produced three major monographs (with three more forthcoming) on his archaeological research.—**MEGAN PERRY**

Ghazi Bisheh (1945–2022)

On January 24, 2022, the archaeological community in Jordan lost Ghazi Bisheh, an ardent scholar who devoted almost half a century to archaeological research. During his undergraduate studies at the University of Jordan, he became fascinated with archaeology, and in 1970 he left Jordan to earn a master's degree in Islamic art and architecture from the University of Michigan, where he also received his Ph.D. Upon his return to Jordan in 1973, Ghazi joined the Department of Antiquities, first as director of registration and documentation and then as director of excavations. In 1989, he was promoted to Director-General, a position he held twice, first from 1989



COURTESY OF THE FAMILY OF GHAZI BISHEH

to 1992 and then again from 1995 until his retirement in 1999.* Across his long career, he excavated at many sites in Jordan, including Hesban, Madaba, Qasr Hallabat, Qusayr 'Amra, and Qastal, and he also devoted considerable energy to combating looting, antiquities trafficking, and illicit forgeries.—**CATREENA HAMARNEH**

* See **BAR**lines: "Jordan Antiquities Department Gets New Director," **BAR**, July/August 1995.

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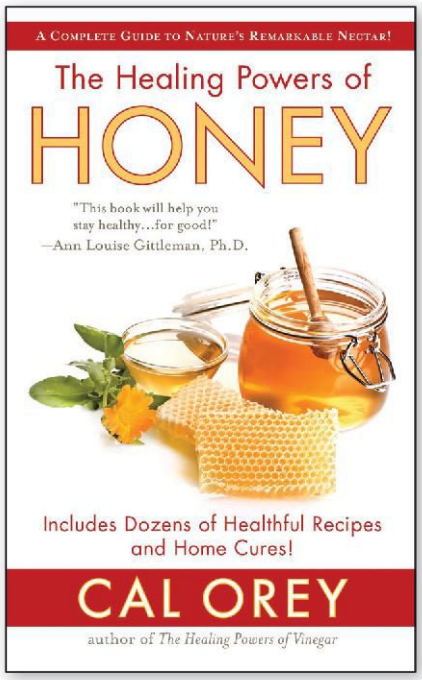

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Good Samaritan Hummus

JOHN GREGORY DRUMMOND

The Samaritans are likely best known in the Western world for one person—the famous "Good Samaritan" of Jesus's parable found in Luke 10:25–37. This character comes from a rich culture—still thriving today—that traces its descent back to the northern Israelite tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, as well as to the tribe of Levi.

Mentioned several times in the Hebrew Bible, the Samaritans helped finance the restoration of the First Temple under King Josiah (2 Chronicles 34:9). However, with the return from exile and the rebuilding of the Temple (Ezra 4), Samaritan assistance was offered but turned away—the returning Jews questioned the Samaritans' claim to Jewish descent and the syncretic elements of their religion.* This cultural break lasted well into the time of the Second Temple and played a role in Jesus's parables and ministry.

Although the Samaritans describe themselves as worshipers of the same God as the Jewish people, and their religion (Samaritanism) is closely related to Judaism, they do not use all of the same scriptures. Whereas the Jews use the Hebrew Bible (consisting of the Pentateuch, Writings, and Prophets), equivalent to the Old Testament for many Christians, Samaritans use only the Pentateuch (first five books of the Hebrew Bible) with some slight differences. The Samaritans believe that their Pentateuch is the true, unchanged version that God presented to Moses. According to Samaritan tradition, the break between the Samaritans and the Jews happened during the time of the high priest Eli in the 11th century B.C.E. when a jealous Eli took the priesthood away from the rightful high priest and led a remnant (mostly from Judah and Benjamin) to worship in Jerusalem, away from the Samaritan sanctuary at Mt. Gerizim near Shechem. For early Jews, this break happened much later, in the eighth century B.C.E., when the Assyrian empire conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel, expelled much of the Israelite population, and resettled newcomers on the land (2 Kings 17:24–41).

To this day, the Samaritans continue to worship God, as prescribed by their holy texts, at their temple on Mt. Gerizim. They practice their festivals, many of which are recognizable to us from Jewish traditions, such as Passover and Sukkot. The Samaritans, much like their Jewish neighbors, have thousands of years of unique culture and history that color their recipes and perspectives. The recipe below is unique for Test Kitchen, as it is not from an ancient source but rather from a modern cookbook that has collected traditional recipes from the Samaritan community, recipes that are "delivered by our ancient forefathers ... all of them an expression of over 3,000 years of Israelite history."[1]

The most time-consuming step in this hummus recipe is cooking the chickpeas. There are two methods to cook dried chickpeas—the long method (which involves allowing them to soak in water overnight) or the quick method. For the quick method, first soak the chickpeas in several inches of water (about 5–6 in), boil for 5 minutes, and then set aside for at least 1 hour. After this, bring the chickpeas to a boil again, then reduce heat to simmer, slightly covered, for about 1.5 hours. Alternatively, you could use canned chickpeas.

Samaritan hummus is a delicious snack best enjoyed with pita or na'an. It is delightful by itself, but to spice things up a bit, we deviated from tradition and added parsley, oregano, and Peri Peri sauce, all to personal preference. This recipe makes a generous portion, so be prepared to share with friends and family!**—J.D.**

* See Lawrence H. Schiffman, "The Samaritan Schism: Schisms in Jewish History: Part 2," *Bible History Daily* (blog), biblicalarchaeology.org/samaritan-schism.

[1] Benyamim Tsedaka, *Samaritan Cookbook: A Culinary Odyssey from the Ancient Israelites to the Modern Mediterranean*, Ben Piven and Avishay Zelmanovich, eds. (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2020), p. 123. Recipes from Batia bat Yefet Tsedaka and Zippora Sassoni Tsedaka.

[2] Adapted from Tsedaka, *Samaritan Cookbook*, p. 39.

Samaritan Hummus

4 cups chickpeas, cooked
1/2 cup water, boiling
3 heaping tbsp tahini
2 garlic cloves, crushed
2–3 tbsp lemon juice
1/3 tsp salt
1/4 cup olive oil

Garnish:
1/4 tsp cumin
1/4 tsp paprika
1 tomato, cut into half circles
1 pickle, sliced
20 black olives

Instructions: Place chickpeas, water, tahini, garlic, lemon juice, salt, and olive oil into a food processor or blender. Blend for 5 minutes or until smooth. Serve on a plate and garnish with cumin, paprika, tomato slices, pickle slices, and black olives (to taste). Any leftover chickpeas can also be used as garnish, along with a spoonful of olive oil.[2]

For step-by-step directions, visit **biblicalarchaeology.org/hummus**.

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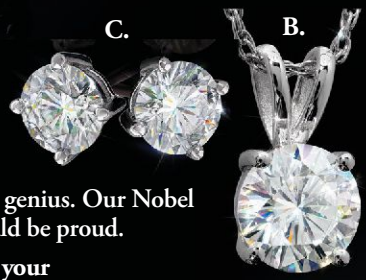

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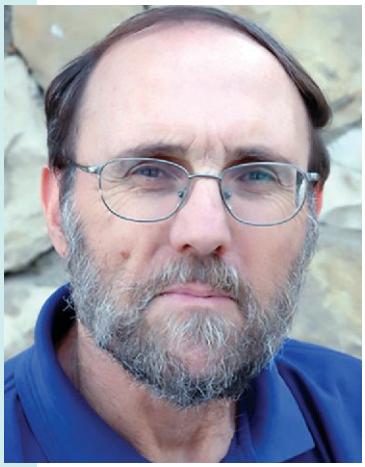
The IAA to the Rescue

Gideon Avni, who heads the Archaeological Division of the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA), began his archaeology career in 1980. Since then, he has conducted extensive archaeological fieldwork throughout Israel. Here, Avni discusses the topic of salvage excavation. To read the full interview with BAR, visit **biblicalarchaeology.org/rescue**.



COURTESY OF GIDEON AVNI AND THE ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY

1 2 3 4 5

What is a salvage excavation?

GIDEON AVNI: This is the basis: If you have antiquities on your property, the site and its artifacts are owned by the state—through the Antiquities Authority. The director of the Antiquities Authority has the right to decide what to do with the antiquities on your property. It can start by saying, "Don't touch; you're not allowed to do anything," but then, after the proper documentation and excavation, you can often go on with your development or construction. The basic idea is that cultural heritage must be protected. This is a practice in many countries all over the world. In Israel, from the Negev in the south to the Galilee in the north, we have about 35,000 archaeological sites in 4,000 square miles, which makes it one of the densest concentrations of sites in the world. At the same time, it is a rapidly developing modern country. Immediately you face this tension: To build new cities, you sometimes must excavate and destroy ancient sites.

1 2 3 4 5

What are the big differences between a rescue excavation and a university expedition?

GA: In university expeditions, you can design your research priorities. In rescue archaeology, you don't plan a research strategy. You're not looking at specific periods; you excavate everything. This is why certain periods, such as the Mamluk period (13th–16th centuries), which were ignored in previous scholarship, are now becoming the frontlines of research. Dating systems have become more refined, and the whole attitude to these periods has changed. It has produced a new scientific approach to the archaeology of Israel.

1 2 3 4 5

What is the scope and cost of rescue archaeology in Israel?

GA: We have about 300 rescue excavations per year. Meanwhile we have around 50 organized prescheduled excavations, sites excavated by Israeli and foreign academic institutions. The IAA has 300 archaeologists working today, which is not only more than any university, but also more than all the universities combined. Regarding cost, the principle that applies in Israel, but not in other countries, is the "polluter pays" principle. If you own land, and there is a need to conduct an excavation because of development, then the landowner, the developer, or the state (if the property is government owned) must fully finance all the aspects of excavation. That includes not only the fieldwork, but also the processing, storage, publication, and so on.

1 2 3 4 5

How do you decide how large a salvage excavation will be?

GA: The volume and size of the development directly impact the size of our excavation. We get all the planning for everything that is being constructed in the country, and we inspect every building plan. Our policy is to excavate only things that are going to be destroyed. Sometimes when the development covers a very large area, we do experimental probes, between 5 and 10 percent of the total area that is going to be covered. But there is another aspect: Once we discover something worthwhile, then we come and reevaluate. We may want to preserve something but must first consider: Who is going to maintain this? It's very nice to keep something, but you need funding for maintenance. Sometimes the process ends in destroying everything; sometimes a section is preserved.

1 2 3 4 5

What determines whether a site is preserved?

GA: UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) has selection criteria for sites on their World Heritage List, and we adopted their criteria. They consider six principles, including the find's rarity, its value to local society, its value to global society, and so on. When we discover a religious building, either synagogue, church, or mosque, then other considerations come into play. Sometimes the local community insists on keeping it. There are all kinds of considerations, but from the point of view of archaeology and cultural heritage, we strictly adopted UNESCO's principles.

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Revealing the Beauty of Early Islamic Art

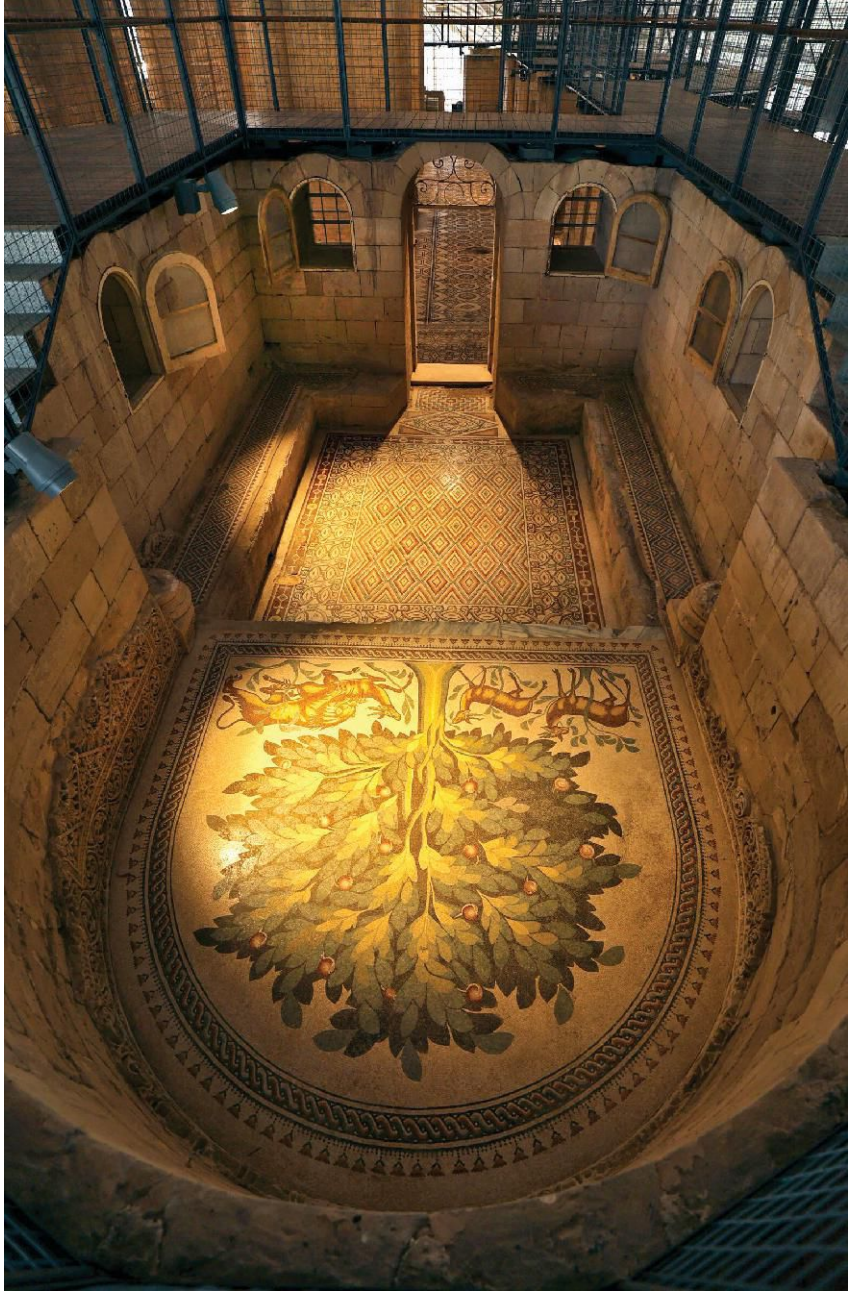

PHOTO BY ABBAS MOMANI / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

After a five-year, $12 million restoration effort, one of the most elaborate and expansive mosaic floors ever discovered in the Holy Land is once again accessible to the public. First uncovered in the 1930s at the site of Khirbat al-Mafjar just north of Jericho, the nearly 9,000-square-foot mosaic adorned the floor of a large bathhouse and palatial complex built by the Umayyad caliph Hisham ibn Abd al-Malik (r. 724–743 C.E.). The mosaic includes several dozen panels with intricate, multicolored geometric designs but is perhaps best known for its elegant figural depiction of grazing gazelles being hunted by a lion beneath a lush and blooming pomegranate tree (right), perhaps meant to recall the biblical "tree of life" (Genesis 2:9). Such images, long considered to be profane depictions of the earthly pleasures enjoyed by the Umayyad princes, were more likely intended to evoke kingly power or religious themes found in the Quran, the Bible, and even classical literature.

After its initial discovery, the mosaic was covered over with cloth and soil for its long-term protection and only rarely exposed to the elements. This meant, however, that the beautiful mosaic floor—considered by many to be one of the world's finest examples of early Islamic art—was largely inaccessible to local communities, scholars, and tourists. In 2016, with support from the Japanese government, the Palestinian Authority's Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities initiated a multiyear restoration project to both protect the mosaics and make them accessible to the public. This included cleaning and preserving the uncovered mosaics, constructing a large domed shelter over the entire floor, and installing suspended walkways and elevated viewing platforms to prevent visitors from walking on and damaging the mosaics. The site—commonly known as Hisham's Palace—and its restored and protected mosaics were reopened to the public in October 2021.

WHAT IS IT? (SEE QUIZ ON P. 11)

Answer: 3

This 900-year-old sword was discovered by a scuba diver off the coast of Israel in November 2021. Although heavily encrusted with sea life, the iron sword is wonderfully preserved. At more than 4 feet long, the date and style of the sword indicate that it probably belonged to a Crusader knight on his way to the Holy Land from Europe. With its deep waters and coves, Israel's northern coast has harbored ships for more than 4,000 years, including during the Crusader period. As marine archaeology increases in popularity, finds like this are becoming more common.

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Community Archaeology at Tel Esur

SHAY BAR

AT DAWN, scores of schoolchildren noisily cross the wheat fields and arrive, full of enthusiasm, at the ancient mound. "Let's find out what was here thousands of years ago!" they shout in Hebrew. The archaeologists raise their heads from sorting and registering finds—another day of community archaeology has begun at Tel Esur.

Tel Esur is located about 20 miles south of Haifa, at the western entrance to the narrow Nahal 'Iron valley. This pass was one of the main routes through which the ancient Via Maris, the major north-south coastal road, crossed the Carmel mountain range toward the fertile Jezreel Valley. Esur was a fortified settlement during the Middle Bronze Age. Later, it appears to have functioned as a Late Bronze Age caravan station on the route between the Egyptian garrison towns of Jaffa and Beth Shean. A nearby early eighth-century B.C.E. administrative building featuring a fortified tower and a paved, tripartite structure (likely storage rooms or stables) may evidence the expansion of the Northern Kingdom of Israel during the days of King Jeroboam II (see 2 Kings 14).

Remarkably, much of the site has been excavated not by professional archaeologists, graduate students, or even seasoned volunteers, but rather by local everyday people and especially teenagers. The Tel Esur excavations began in 2010 as a dedicated community archaeology project, of which there are a growing number within the Middle East.* Though their aims may range from heritage education to site stewardship to social and economic development, all such projects share the common idea that archaeology can be sustained only through direct engagement with the communities who live with and around heritage sites.

Indeed, community archaeology has become very popular in Israel. Although Israel has a tradition of community participation in archaeology since the foundation of the state in 1948, it is only in the past two decades that more projects are focusing on education and youth participation. The Israel Antiquities Authority manages several very large community projects, and youngsters dig at many salvage excavations throughout the country (see p. 20). As **BAR** readers know, there are also several popular "dig-for-a-day" programs—the Temple Mount Sifting Project and the Tel Maresha project in Beit Guvrin—that allow locals as well as tourists the opportunity to experience archaeology firsthand.**

The Tel Esur project, however, is a bit different. We began the project to remember the legacy of the late Yitzhak Dori, an Israeli educator and teacher from Metzer (a kibbutz near Tel Esur), who believed that education could be used to promote peace and friendship among people of all faiths and cultures. With Dori's ideas in mind, we had a two-pronged goal in engaging schoolchildren: to expose local youth to archaeology and to foster collaboration and exchange among people from different backgrounds and identities (religious and non-religious, Jewish and Muslim)—all while learning about the ancient communities that lived in the region more than 3,500 years ago. Our project is also unique in that the excavations are sustained not through grants or university funding, but through the support and contributions of the local community. The project relies on private donations and in-kind contributions from local companies and organizations during the excavation season—by providing heavy machinery, food and drinks, free accommodations for our professional staff, or medical services. Some more entrepreneurial methods of supporting the dig include producing and

SHAY BAR

* See Glenn J. Corbett, Site-Seeing: "Petra's Temple of the Winged Lions," **BAR**, May/June 2017.

** Suzanne F. Singer, "The Dig-for-a-Day Experience," **BAR**, May/June 2010; Gabriel Barkay and Zachi Dvira, "Relics in the Rubble: The Temple Mount Sifting Project," **BAR**, November/December 2016.

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Throughout the ages, there have been many important advances in mobility. Canes, walkers, rollators, and scooters were created to help people with mobility issues get around and retain their independence. Lately, however, there haven't been any new improvements to these existing products or developments in this field. Until now. Recently, an innovative design engineer who's developed one of the world's most popular products created a completely new breakthrough . . . a personal electric vehicle. It's called the ***Zinger***, and there is nothing out there quite like it.

"What my wife especially loves is it gives her back feelings of safety and independence which has given a real boost to her confidence and happiness! Thank You!"

–Kent C., California

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marketing "Tel Esur" brand olive oil, and selling scrap metal collected from the site and surrounding areas.

Every year, nearly 500 teenage students from surrounding communities join us in excavating the site. They come primarily from two Jewish public schools, a Jewish orthodox girls' school, and a Muslim public school. Most participate for about a week. Knowing that fieldwork can be overwhelming for many teens accustomed to learning in air-conditioned classrooms, we first meet with students in their schools to introduce them to archaeology and explain its importance for the community. We present the site, talk about its history, and describe the various tools and methods used in the field to reveal the past.

Once excavation begins, we establish a daily field routine. Early in the morning, on their first day at the site, we hold a pre-dig meeting and introduce them to the area where they will be working. Subsequent days open with a review of new findings, with high praise for the students' hard work and effort in the field. Students dig for about four hours each day and, before they wrap up, supervisors brief them on the day's achievements and the next day's plan. Those who are not comfortable using a pickax or trowel can participate in other on-site activities, such as pottery washing, sorting, and sifting.

Students, parents, and teachers frequently comment how beneficial the project is for the teens. One of the dig's most valuable benefits, they tell us, is promoting confidence and self-esteem. Although many students begin the dig believing they will be unable to cope with the harsh conditions on site (e.g., long hours under the sun, working in a group setting, fear of animals and insects), by the time they leave, they feel a sense of accomplishment, having overcome perceived limitations and fears. Similarly, students who suffer from ADHD (attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder) and sometimes struggle in a traditional classroom setting often shine in our excavations.

Admittedly, our community-based excavation model is difficult to sustain financially. We had to cut back on the number of weeks we are in the field, from five to just three, and community support does not cover the project's very costly research and publication expenses.

But even beyond financing the project, the main question that troubles me is whether we have made an impact. Have we made a difference in the lives of the teens the project aims to serve? Every time I hesitate, I remember the words of Waseb, a boy from the nearby Muslim school who wrote us a touching letter in Hebrew (!) to express what he gained from the dig experience: "I'm glad that I got to meet new good people, and I hope that you'll visit us at our homes and school so we can meet again. You do a great job with cooperation and mutual respect … We learned a lot and enjoyed ourselves. Thank you."

WHO DID IT? (SEE QUIZ ON P. 10)

Answer: William Matthew Flinders Petrie

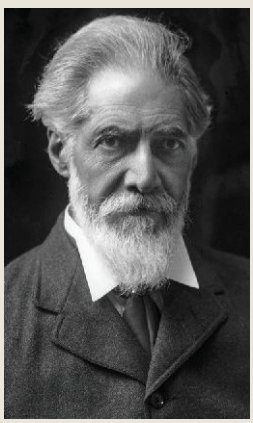


PHOTO BY WALTER STONEMAN / © NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY, LONDON

A founding father of modern archaeology, William Matthew Flinders Petrie (1853–1942) introduced systematic excavation procedures, and his fieldwork in Egypt and the lands of the Bible served to popularize archaeology among the general public.* He was, however, a noted eugenicist who regularly incorporated ideas about racial hierarchies into his academic work.

Petrie was born in Charlton, England. He learned surveying from his father, with whom he produced the first precise survey of Stonehenge. In 1880, Petrie launched his archaeological career in the Middle East, traveling to Egypt to measure the pyramids of Giza.

In 1886, while excavating the mortuary temple of Pharaoh Merneptah in Thebes, Petrie found a massive block of granite inscribed with 28 lines of hieroglyphic text. Standing more than 10 feet tall, the Merneptah (or Israel) Stele celebrates the pharaoh's victory over the Libyans and the Sea Peoples in c. 1208 B.C.E. The stele also refers to Merneptah's successful campaign in Canaan, mentioning the city-states of Ashkelon, Gezer, and Yenoam, and a "people" called Israel (see p. 51).

His first Levantine dig, in 1890, was at Tell el-Hesi, located in the fertile coastal plain of modern-day Israel. Containing numerous superimposed layers of occupational debris from different periods, the site helped Petrie establish two revolutionary archaeological methods: stratigraphic excavation (digging by layers) and ceramic typology (using changes in pottery styles through time to date archaeological deposits).**

Despite having no university degree, Petrie became the first professor of Egyptology at University College London in 1892. He received a knighthood in 1923. Petrie retired from fieldwork in 1938 and then lived in Jerusalem, where he died in 1942. He is buried in the Protestant Cemetery on Mt. Zion.

* See Joseph A. Callaway, "Sir Flinders Petrie: Father of Palestinian Archaeology," **BAR**, November/December 1980.

** Thomas E. Levy, "From Camels to Computers: A Short History of Archaeological Method," **BAR**, July/August 1995.

PANAMA, COCLE EXPEDITION; J. ALDEN MASON, 1940

Sitio Conte, Panama

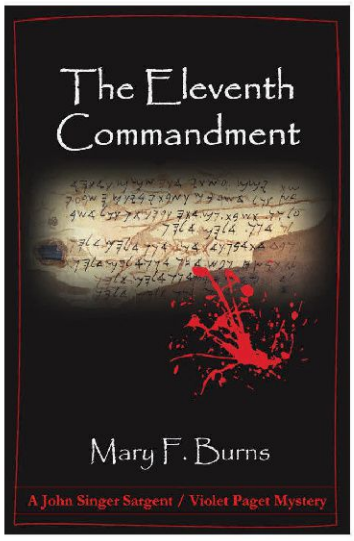
This golden plaque was possibly worn as a breastplate by a pre-Columbian chief of Central America. Not much is known about the society that created this plaque, which was discovered at a necropolis at Sitio Conte, an archaeological site located in the Coclé province of Panama, near Parita Bay. The graves contained numerous individuals—whom scholars have postulated are either chiefs, warriors, or members of chiefly families—and many exquisitely crafted grave goods. The grave goods date the burial ground's use between 450 and 900 C.E.

Measuring almost 9 inches in diameter and made of gold, the plaque dates to 700–900 C.E., toward the end of the site's use. The gold was hammered and then embossed to create the plaque's figure, with scratches from the artist's work and burnishing still visible on the central triangle. While readily available, gold was reserved for the chief and his tribe.

Depicted on the plaque is an anthropomorphic figure with arms and legs outstretched; the legs end in immense claws with arms curved into hooks. With twin tails, sharp teeth, and horns or a headdress with spikes, this imposing figure would have intimidated any opponent that met the chief in battle.

This object is currently held at the Penn Museum, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Great Reads f



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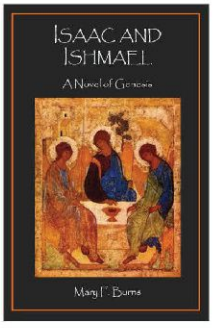
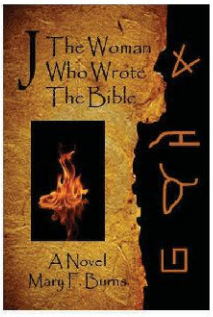
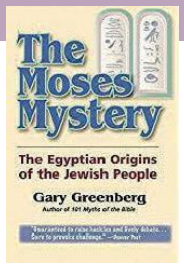




GARY GREENBERG



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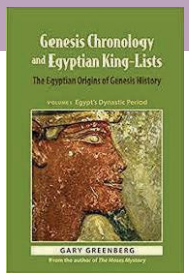
What do history and archaeology *really* say about the origins of ancient Israel? Based on extensive research into biblical and Egyptian history, archaeology, literature, and mythology, Greenberg argues that the first Israelites were Egyptians, followers of the monotheistic teachings of Pharaoh Akhenaten.

"Mr. Greenberg seems to delight in a game of scholarly 'gotcha.'"
~ THE NY TIMES



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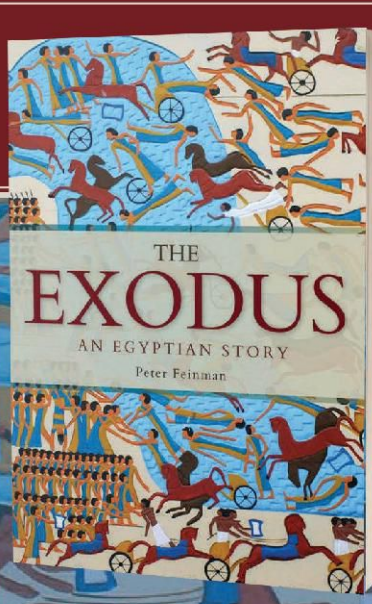
Ramses didn't kill Moses when he returned from the wilderness for the same reason Commodus didn't Maximus.



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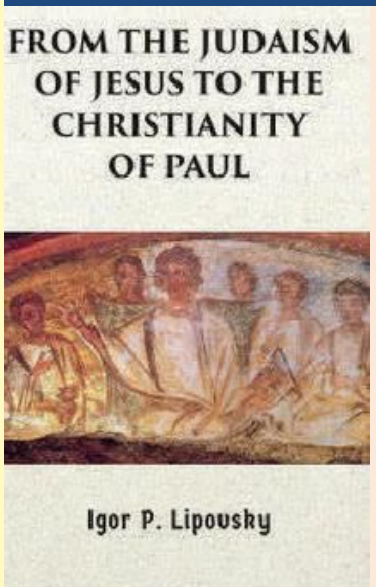
Disciples of Jesus vs. Apostle Paul



The misconception has taken root in our world that the Christian religion was created by Jesus and his disciples. In fact, the true creators of Christianity were the Apostle Paul and his followers. It was they who wrote almost all the New Testament writings, although they had never seen Christ. However, the true gospel of Jesus was much closer to Pharisaic Judaism than to Pauline Christianity. The disciples of Jesus—the apostles Peter, John and James—preached the teachings of the Son of Man, but their ideological opponent, the Apostle Paul, emphasized something else: the resurrection of the Son of God, which corresponded to the mythology of the pagans. In the second century CE, copyists, themselves former pagans, changed the original texts of New Testament writings to sanctify Paul's ideas with the authority of Jesus. To do this, they made numerous anti-Jewish and anti-Judaic additions to the New Testament. This blatant falsification of the legacy of Jesus laid the foundation for hostility to the people of Christ.

American Academy Press, Washington D.C.: 2022, 192 pp. Softcover, $ 11.95, and in digital form for Kindle, $ 9.00

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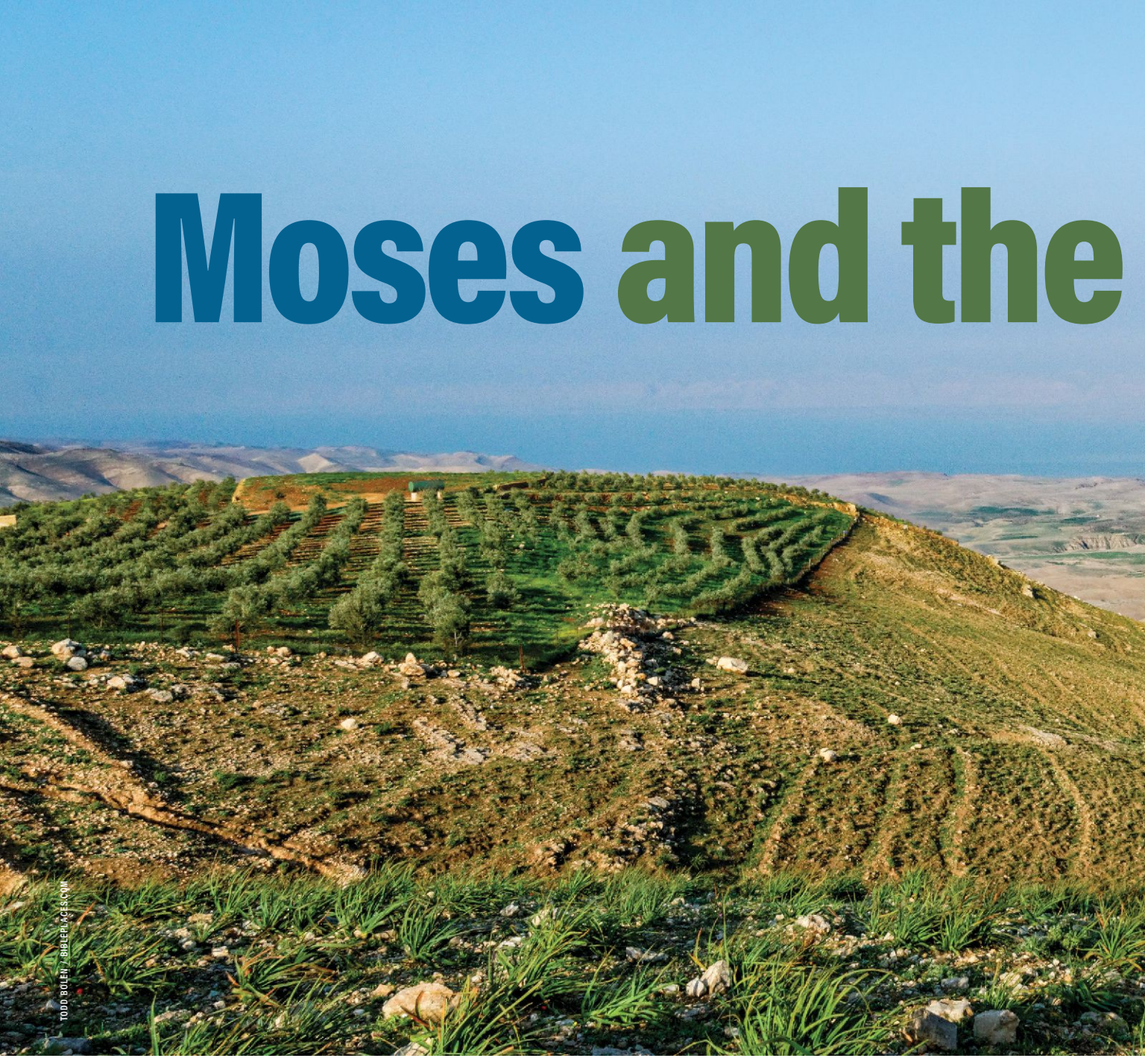
Moses and the



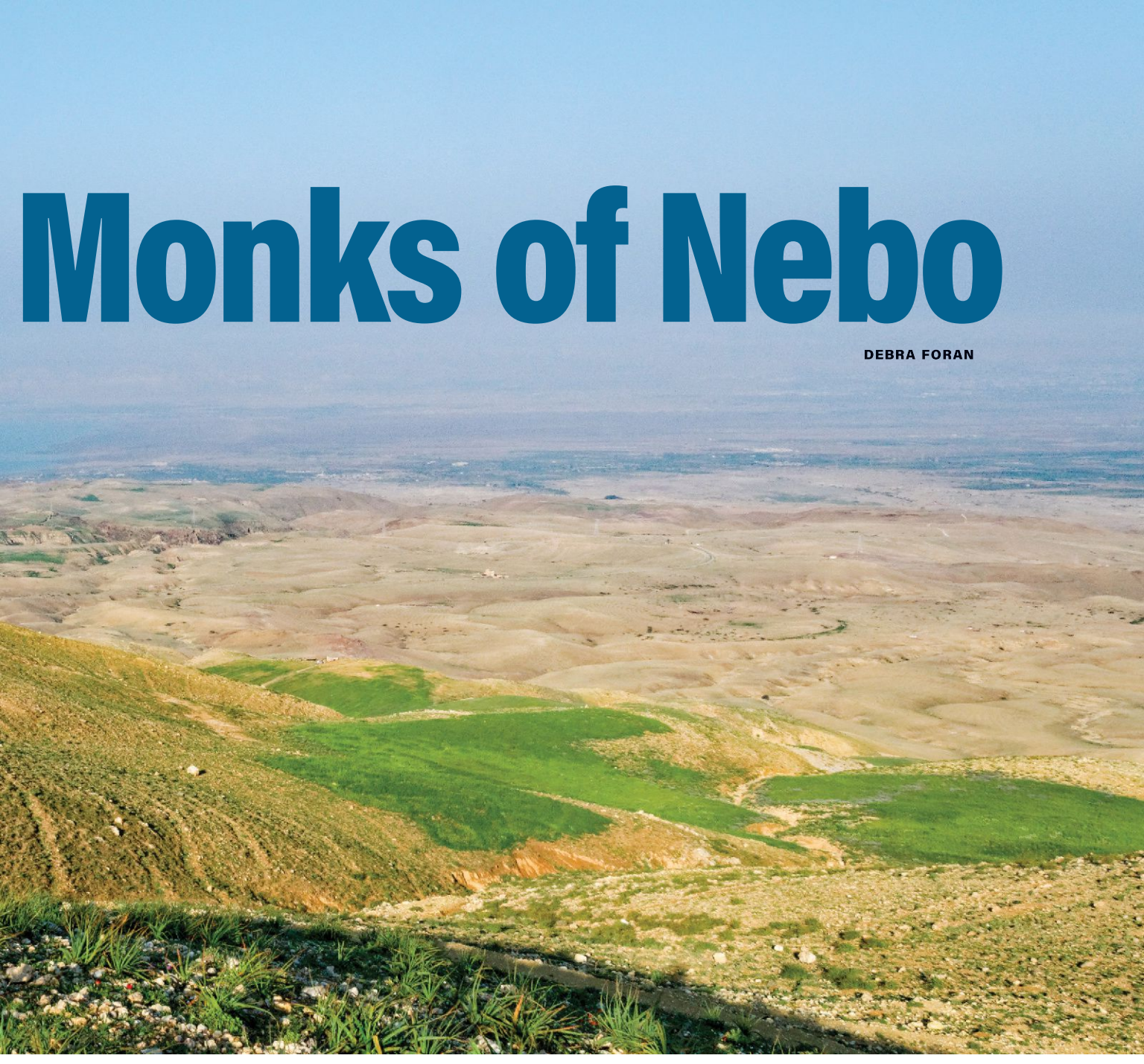
THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY concludes with a brief description of Moses's view from Mt. Nebo and the startling revelation that he would not be entering the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Deuteronomy 34:1–4). This short passage, and the following verse noting Moses's death "in the land of Moab," created a lasting bond between the story of the Exodus and the prominent mountain ridge to the northeast of the Dead Sea, a bond that still exists today. The site of Mt. Nebo affords remarkable views across the Jordan Valley and serves as a popular destination for tourists, pilgrims, and local residents.

The connection to Moses and the Exodus manifested itself during the Byzantine period (fourth–seventh centuries C.E.) as an expansive religious complex atop the mountain, known in Arabic as Siyagha (an adaptation of the name Pisgah in Deuteronomy 34:1). A network of monastic communities extended from there to the east as far as the desert fringes and to the south until the Wadi Mujib (the biblical Arnon River). This development was likely connected to the growing monastic movement across the southern Levant during the Byzantine period, exemplified by the Judean Desert monasteries near Jerusalem.* As elsewhere, the

* Yizhar Hirschfeld, "Spirituality in the Desert: Judean Wilderness Monasteries," **BAR**, September/October 1995.

Monks of Nebo

DEBRA FORAN



THE PROMISED LAND as Moses saw it, with a view over the Dead Sea and the southern Jordan Valley and the Judean hill country in the distance. In Deuteronomy 32:49–52, God directs Moses to go to Mt. Nebo to view the land of Canaan, which he would never enter. This biblical connection between Mt. Nebo and Moses fueled early Christian monastic movements and pilgrimage to this region. As a result, a network of monastic communities grew and prospered around Mt. Nebo, the purported burial place of Moses.

Nebo monasteries marked and commemorated sites connected to both the Old and New Testaments. They also functioned to attract and accommodate the growing numbers of Christian pilgrims who were flocking to the Holy Land during this time.*

Interwoven into this monastic landscape was an active and prosperous lay population that catered to its ascetic neighbors. The rural population also served the many pilgrims traveling through the region. Even the famous Madaba Map, an extensive mosaic incorporated into the floor of a sixth-century church in the nearby city of Madaba, may have been used by

* See Konstantinos Politis, "Where Lot's Daughters Seduced Their Father," **BAR**, January/February 2004; Rami G. Khouri, "Where John Baptized: Bethany Beyond the Jordan," **BAR**, January/February 2005; Benyamin Storchan, "A Glorious Church for a Mysterious Martyr," **BAR**, Fall 2021.

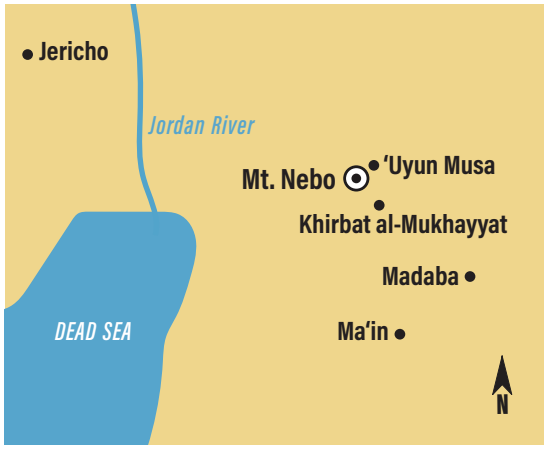
pilgrims to plan their journey and reflect on the locations they had visited.*

As early as the fourth century, pilgrims describe a vibrant monastic community around Mt. Nebo. The pilgrim Egeria tells of a visit to the church and monastery at ʻUyun Musa (the Springs of Moses), a perennial spring in the valley to the north of the mountain. The holy men who lived there were hospitable toward her and her companions. They invited them indoors and offered to accompany them to the summit of Mt. Nebo. Once on top of the mountain, Egeria visited a small church that marked the location of Moses's tomb. The monks who played host to Egeria were part of one of the first monastic communities in the region. This community grew to include a large monastery atop Mt. Nebo and a series of smaller communities in the surrounding landscape.

The monastery of the Memorial of Moses on Mt. Nebo began as a series of simple structures built around several natural caves that could be used for shelter. These isolated cells were eventually refurbished to provide the monks with a quiet place to meditate and pray and to escape the bustling pace of the main monastery.

The focal point of the Mt. Nebo monastery was the Basilica of Moses, which, in its final form in the late sixth century, was a large basilical church with a trilobed apse accompanied by several side chapels and a baptistery. Nearly the entire complex was decorated with intricate mosaics. The nave was paved with marble tiles arranged in geometric patterns, a technique called *opus sectile*. One of the church's most remarkable mosaics, which paved a baptistery on the north side of the basilica, depicts hunting and pastoral scenes and includes a number of exotic animals being led by men in distinctive clothing and attire (p. 34).

There are numerous tombs within the monastic complex, but the most perplexing is the empty tomb in the center of the nave of the basilica, which was discovered during recent restoration work.[1] Located at the highest point of the mountain, this tomb initially may have been part of an earlier shrine dedicated to



* See James Fleming, "Putting the Bible on the Map," **BAR**, November/December 1983.

BOAZ ROTTEM / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

THE BYZANTINE BASILICA at Mt. Nebo is now sheltered by and incorporated into the modern Memorial Church of Moses. The aerial view (opposite, shown prior to recent renovations) shows the extensive remains of the ancient monastic complex, which included a large basilica paved throughout with beautiful mosaics, several funerary chapels, living quarters for the resident monks, and facilities to manage the flow of pilgrims. The above photo shows the basilica's renovated interior, with original columns separating the church's central nave from the mosaic-decorated side aisles and the raised, trilobed apse and altar area at the front.

Moses that was later incorporated into the basilica and sealed under its floor (see p. 36). The monastic community of Mt. Nebo possibly regarded this tomb as a burial monument dedicated to Moses, and it could have been the one that Egeria and her fellow pilgrims saw in the fourth century.

There are also a number of funerary chapels on Mt. Nebo, many of which commemorate the life or burial of one of the original members of the monastic community. The Chapel of Robebus, located to the east of the monastery, includes two crypts that contain multiple burials. The excavation and analysis of these remains provide insight into the diverse cultural background of the monastic community at Mt. Nebo as well as the health issues that afflicted the monks.[2] Based on architectural, epigraphic, and chemical analysis of the crypt remains, it appears that about half of the buried individuals were originally from outside the Nebo region. Many suffered from common age-related health issues, including tooth loss, arthritis, and bone disease.

The monastic population grew and spread from Mt. Nebo to different sites, mainly to the south and east. Some monasteries, such as the Monastery of the Theotokos (referring to the God-Bearer, meaning the Virgin Mary, Jesus's mother) at ʿAyn al-Kanisah, were built in remote areas to provide seclusion for their residents. Other monasteries, such as the Monastery of al-Kanisah (the Monastery of the Church) near Khirbat al-Mukhayyat and the Church of al-Dayr (the Church of the Monastery) at Maʿin, were located close to urban settlements.

These monasteries were built in the mid- to late sixth century. Although their communities differed in size and organization, each monastic complex had a chapel with adjoining rooms and was often paved throughout with mosaics. The mosaic from the Monastery of the Theotokos is

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HUNTING AND PASTORAL scenes decorate the elaborate mosaic floor that adorns the baptistery on the north side of the Mt. Nebo basilica. Sitting about 3.5 feet below the level of the main nave, the baptistery, which features a cruciform baptismal font (top), was built only after some parts of the original monastery were cleared away in the first half of the sixth century.

the most elaborate, depicting birds and various wild animals surrounded by a grapevine, while the Church of al-Dayr mosaics feature intricate geometric designs.

Tombs were also frequently found beneath the floors of the monasteries. Beneath the entrance to the chapel of the Monastery of the Theotokos, for example, was a tomb containing two stone sarcophagi that held the remains of several individuals, including a complete skeleton that might be the burial of George the Recluse, an eighth-century monk, who is mentioned in one of the chapel's mosaic inscriptions. Similarly, the Church of al-Dayr includes a rock-cut tomb under the chapel floor that holds the remains of a man and a woman. It is possible that these two were not part of the community but rather lay people—perhaps the monastery's benefactors—who were buried within the complex.

The similarities in design and layout of these monasteries indicate their shared function. Each served a different community of monks, either living apart or communally, but they were all part of the larger Nebo monastic network.

The wide variety of titles that appear in the inscriptions of the Nebo monasteries attest to a well-organized network of communities (see sidebar, opposite). It is clear that a highly defined hierarchical system was in place to manage these monasteries. From the "archimandrite of the whole desert," under whose control all the monks of the region operated, to the simple monk or the isolated hermit, every member of the community had a specific role within that sphere. The possibility of advancement within the community was available to most of its members.

Monastic Nomenclature

DEBRA FORAN

The inscriptions in the mosaic pavements of the Mt. Nebo monasteries offer insight into how these monastic communities were organized. An inscription from the Monastery of the Theotokos at 'Ayn al-Kanisah refers to "Abraham, the abbot and archimandrite of the whole desert." The term *archimandrite* designates the abbot of the chief monastery who was responsible for all the monks in the region. Thus, in the late sixth century, Abraham was the abbot of the Monastery at Mt. Nebo and archimandrite for all the monasteries of the region.

Each monastery would have been led by an *hēgoumenos* (abbot). The term *abba* (father) is also used on occasion in reference to the leader of a monastic community, such as an abbot. It could, however, also refer respectfully to an elderly member of a monastic community. This title is likely a Greek version of the Semitic title *abouna*.

At Mt. Nebo, most of the abbots also have the title *presbyteros* (priest), suggesting that these individuals had been ordained before entering the monastery. It was rare for a monk to be appointed to the priesthood after joining the community. Each monastery usually had one priest—in some instances also the abbot—who was assisted by *diakonoi* (deacons).

Deacons were appointed to a specific community by the *episkopos* (bishop). This position often allowed those who held it to advance to higher offices within the church. Deacons fulfilled a number of different duties during the services held in their parish, from managing the people who entered the building to reading the Gospels during the celebration. Deacons were also called upon to visit members of the community too ill to attend services. It is clear from the importance granted the office of deacon that their presence would have been necessary at a place like Mt. Nebo. They would have helped control the large groups of visiting pilgrims and minister to ailing members of the monastic community.

An abbot usually had an *oikonomos* (steward) to assist with administrative and financial matters. The steward purchased food and other items, such as beasts of burden, for the monastery. He managed the work schedule, assigning various tasks to the members of the community. The steward was also responsible for the transfer of a monk's possessions to the service building after his death. Monks were appointed to this post for a limited period of time, and those who succeeded in their tasks were usually considered for the position of abbot.

Bishops could appoint a *paramonarios* (warden) to a remote parish. These monks or clerics served as church guardians and were charged with the daily upkeep of the building. The duties of the warden required him to live in or near the church.

Both *monakos* (solitary or alone) and *monazōn* (someone who lives alone) refer to individual monks from the Nebo communities, highlighting the isolated nature of a monk's life. An inscription in the Monastery of the Theotokos mentions an *enkleistos* (recluse) named George, a monk who had taken a vow of seclusion and remained confined to his cell from the time he entered the monastery until his death.

PHOTO BY DEBRA FORAN

INSCRIPTION FROM THE MONASTERY OF THE THEOTOKOS stating that it was "rebuilt in the days of Job, bishop of Madaba, and of George the Recluse, for the preservation of all the benefactors."

The different levels of responsibility inherent in each office allowed those who had previously been ordained to rise through the ranks and one day potentially become abbot of the monastery.

This complex hierarchy suggests that the Nebo monastic community was sizable. Unfortunately, there are no texts listing the number of monks in residence at any given time. We therefore have to rely on the size of each complex, particularly the associated church or chapel, to estimate the population of each community. For the Judean Desert monasteries, the population of a large monastery was around 150 monks, while medium and smaller-sized monasteries ranged between 50 and 20 people. Based on these estimates, the maximum population of the Nebo monastic network, at its peak, was likely around 700 people. The large monastic complex at Mt. Nebo could have housed between 150 and 200 monks. Medium-sized monasteries, like that of the Church of al-Dayr, housed around 50 individuals. The Monastery of the Theotokos was likely a small institution, with about 20 people.

While there is abundant evidence for the monastic network centered on Mt. Nebo, we have less information about the region's lay communities and the two groups' interactions. Nevertheless, the Byzantine villages of Mukhayyat and Ma'in provide some data on the relationship between monastic and lay communities in this region.

Khirbat al-Mukhayyat, a small tell generally identified with the ancient "town of Nebo" mentioned in the ninth-century B.C.E. Mesha Stele,*

* See Siegfried H. Horn, "Why the Moabite Stone Was Blown to Pieces," **BAR**, May/June 1986.

BURIAL PLACE OF MOSES? This roughly 8-foot-long, rectangular tomb in the Mt. Nebo basilica was discovered empty in 2013. Its prime location in the church's central nave suggests it was a burial monument dedicated to Moses. The tomb's shallow depth and lack of human remains or material suggest it was likely a cenotaph—constructed by the church's earliest monastic community to commemorate Moses's burial place.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MARGARET A. JUDD

THE CHAPEL OF ROBEBUS, located to the east of the Mt. Nebo basilica and named after the abbot mentioned in the chapel's dedicatory inscription, contains a large funerary crypt that held the disarticulated remains of nearly two dozen individuals. As the inscription clarifies, the buried individuals were some of the monastery's resident monks. Excavation and analysis of the remains has revealed much about the health and makeup of Mt. Nebo's monastic community during the Byzantine period.

is located southeast of Mt. Nebo. Three Byzantine churches were excavated at the site by the Franciscan Archaeological Mission. The Church of St. George, named for a famous third-century military saint, is located on the summit of the site's acropolis. A dedicatory inscription dates the completion of the building to 535 C.E. and mentions the resident warden who maintained the church.

A second church is situated at the northern end of the tell and dedicated to two saints—Lot, the Old Testament figure associated with the story of Sodom and commemorated at several sites along the Dead Sea, and Procopius, a fourth-century Christian martyr from Scythopolis (Beth Shean). The church's beautiful mosaic pavement, decorated with agricultural and pastoral scenes surrounded by grape vines, is dated by an inscription to 557 C.E.

A third church, likely constructed in the late fifth century, is located off the tell to the east. Inscriptions on the building's chancel posts mention Amos and Kasiseus, presumably benefactors from the local community, after whom the church is named. The Chapel of the Priest John, annexed onto the north side of the church, is paved with a mosaic that depicts scenes of rural life and includes the portrait of a woman who was likely one of the church's patrons (see p. 39).

Three churches at a small site like Mukhayyat might seem excessive, but it is characteristic of Byzantine settlements in this region. The city of Madaba, just 3.5 miles away, has ten churches, and the famous Byzantine and early Islamic site of Umm ar-Rasas some 20 miles away has eight. Why these communities had so many churches remains something of a mystery. Different churches could have been used on different feast days, or perhaps some of the smaller buildings were used for private worship by wealthier

families. These churches may also have accommodated groups of pilgrims traveling between the region's holy sites.

The Byzantine village at Mukhayyat is undoubtedly located on the eastern slope of the tell, facing the Monastery of al-Kanisah. In addition to the Church of Amos and Kasiseus, which must have functioned as the main place of worship for the community, a number of architectural features have been identified at Khirbat al-Mukhayyat, suggesting that as many as 250 people lived in this area at the end of the seventh century.

Although there is little archaeological evidence for the inhabitants of Byzantine Mukhayyat, several mosaic inscriptions provide the names of some of the village's residents. These benefactors would commemorate the passing of a family member or ensure their own salvation by defraying the costs of the mosaic. Some of these wealthy community members also sponsored more than one pavement.

A similar phenomenon occurs at the site of Ma'in to the south of Madaba. In addition to the Church of al-Dayr, excavations have uncovered the Acropolis Church, on the summit of the tell, and the West Church on the site's western slope. My recent surveys indicate that the largest concentration of people—possibly as many as 1,000—lived in the areas closest to the Church of al-Dayr and in the nearby valleys during the Byzantine period. Interestingly, no one seems to have lived on the northern side of the mound.

At Mukhayyat and Ma'in, the village residents chose to settle off the main occupation mounds in areas that were closer to the local monastic community. The location of these monasteries may have played a part in their decision. Perhaps they were prohibited from building on the

KHIRBAT AL-MUKHAYYAT is probably the ancient "town of Nebo" mentioned in the ninth-century B.C.E. Mesha Stele. In the Byzantine period, this prominent tell, located about 2 miles southeast of Mt. Nebo, became one of the region's main monastic centers. Archaeologists have identified at least three churches at the site (highlighted below), a clear sign of the vibrant Christian community that lived there during the sixth and seventh centuries.

AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE OF ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE MIDDLE EAST / APAAME.ORG; APAAME_20130414_MND-0351

AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE OF ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE MIDDLE EAST / APAAME.ORG; APAAME_20070417_FFR-0444-1

MICHELE PICCIRILLO / © STUDIUM BIBLICUM FRANCISCANUM PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE

THE CHURCH OF AMOS AND KASISEUS at Khirbat al-Mukhayyat is named for two presumed benefactors who are mentioned in an inscription found at the site. Located within the site's Byzantine village, the church likely functioned as the main place of worship for the local community. The church's northern side chapel (left of the nave in the photo above), known as the Chapel of the Priest John, included this touching mosaic portrait (right) of a local woman who may have been a church member and patron.

tell because the land belonged to the church. Or perhaps their decision was strategic; these villages would have benefited economically from their proximity to the monasteries. Groups of pilgrims would certainly have visited the monks in these communities, and the monasteries could have provided employment for the villagers. Further investigation of these communities might shed light on their relationship with the monasteries of the Nebo region.

The Byzantine monasteries and churches in and around Mt. Nebo provide clear evidence of how early monastic communities sought to preserve and commemorate the sacred landscape associated with Moses, the Exodus, and other well-known biblical traditions. A closer examination of the archaeology of these sites also tells us a great deal about the monastic communities themselves—their organization and their relationship to the ordinary townspeople who lived around them.

[1] See Davide Bianchi, *A Shrine to Moses: A Reappraisal of the Mount Nebo Monastic Complex between Byzantium and Islam* (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences, 2021).

[2] Margaret A. Judd, Lesley Gregoricka, and Debra Foran, "The Monastic Mosaic at Mount Nebo, Jordan: Biogeochemical and Epigraphical Evidence for Diverse Origins," *Antiquity* 93 (2019), pp. 450–467; Matthew J. Kesterke and Margaret A. Judd, "A Microscopic Evaluation of Paget's Disease of the Bone from a Byzantine Monastic Crypt in Jordan," *International Journal of Paleopathology* 24 (2019), pp. 293–298; Margaret A. Judd, "Commingled Crypts: Comparative Health among Byzantine Monastics in the Levant," *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 172 (2020), pp. 70–86.

1177 B.C.

The Collapse of Bronze Age Civilization

ERIC H. CLINE

PAUL WILLIAMS / IMAGEBROKER / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

A recent survey of leading scientists highlighted the range of interrelated emergencies that we face today: climate change with weather extremes, species loss, water scarcity, and a food production crisis, to name but a few. The scientists noted how these crises are weakening societal governance and infrastructure, further exacerbating food and water shortages that, in turn, are fueling large-scale immigration and global inequity. If such crises continue to occur in parallel, the scientists conclude, "It would cause catastrophic outcomes all over the world."[1]

As someone who has spent a career studying the ancient world, I believe the situation we face today has many similarities to 1177 B.C. That was a time more than 3,000 years ago, when the Bronze Age Mediterranean civilizations collapsed one after the other, changing the course of history.[2] I believe that taking a closer look at the events, peoples, and places of that era is more than merely an academic exercise. History has a lot to teach us—if we are willing to listen and learn.

1177 B.C. was a pivotal moment in the history of civilization—a turning point for the ancient world. By that time, the Bronze Age in the Aegean, Egypt, and Near East had lasted nearly 2,000 years, from approximately 3000 B.C. to just after 1200 B.C. When the end came, as it did after centuries of cultural and technological evolution, most of the civilized and international world of the Mediterranean regions came to a dramatic halt in a vast area stretching from what is now Italy to Afghanistan and from Turkey down to Egypt. Large empires and small kingdoms, which had taken centuries to evolve, collapsed rapidly. These included the Mycenaeans on

PREVIOUS PAGES: In the Late Bronze Age, Hattusa (near modern Boğazkale, Turkey) was the capital of the Hittite empire until its destruction around 1200 B.C. Massive fortifications ringed the ancient city. The double wall guarding the upper city had five gates and more than 100 towers. The King's Gate, situated in the upper city's southeast wall and dated to c. 1500 B.C., was once fitted with wooden doors and used in religious processions. Its name derives from the sculpted figure on the inner gate, whom excavators first thought must have been an important king. However, they later identified the figure as a Hittite war god. Standing more than 7 feet tall, the figure holds an ax and wears a horned helmet, tunic, and crescent sword tucked into his belt.

mainland Greece and the Minoans on Crete, the Hittites in Anatolia (modern Turkey), the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Mitannians in Mesopotamia (modern Iraq and inland northern Syria), the Cypriots on Cyprus, and the Canaanites in the Levant (modern coastal Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Jordan), and, of course, the Egyptians.*

We know that all of these societies and civilizations were in contact with one another over the course of the Late Bronze Age, c. 1550–1200 B.C. The evidence for this is overwhelming, including objects imported from Egypt and the Near East that have been found by archaeologists in the Aegean and, vice versa, Minoan and Mycenaean ceramic vessels found in Egypt and elsewhere, not to mention additional artifacts found on shipwrecks from the period—at Uluburun and Cape Gelidonya—both excavated off the southwestern coast of modern Turkey.**

We also have recovered texts written on clay tablets, found in diplomatic and mercantile archives at sites such as Amarna in Egypt, Hattusa, the capital city of the Hittites, in Turkey, and Ugarit, on the north coast of Syria.† These describe activities commensurate with an intertwined network of commercial and diplomatic interactions, with at least eight different cultures working together on a scale not often seen in the history of the world, bound together through an integrated supply chain that traded in raw materials such as copper, tin, gold, silver, and glass.

The Late Bronze Age was more similar to today's globalized world than we might imagine. For example, we have textual evidence that in the Late Bronze Age

* For more on the Late Bronze Age powers, see Gernot Wilhelm, "When a Mittani Princess Joined Pharaoh's Harem," *Archaeology Odyssey*, May/June 2001; Marian Feldman, "The Iconography of Power: Reading Late Bronze Age Symbols," *Archaeology Odyssey*, May/June 2002; Barry Unsworth, "Imagining the Minoans," *Archaeology Odyssey*, March/April 2004; Hershel Shanks, "The Hittites: Between Tradition and History," **BAR**, March/April 2016.

** Cemal Pulak, "Shipwreck! Recovering 3,000-Year-Old Cargo," *Archaeology Odyssey*, September/October 1999; Eric H. Cline, "Littoral Truths: The Perils of Seafaring in the Bronze Age," *Archaeology Odyssey*, November/December 1999.

† Hershel Shanks, "The Trowel vs. the Text: How the Amarna Letters Challenge Archaeology," **BAR**, January/February 2009; Edward L. Greenstein, "Texts from Ugarit Solve Biblical Puzzles," **BAR**, November/December 2010.

HERCULES MILAS / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

KINGLY KNOSSOS. Knossos was the center of Minoan civilization on Crete, and its palace is legendary. According to Greek mythology, it was the home of King Minos and the Minotaur—housed within a labyrinth. Large and richly decorated, the palace complex spanned 5 acres. At its center was a throne room (see reconstructed room, above), built in the 15th century B.C. as an addition to the palace. Lined with benches, its walls were covered with bright frescoes of griffins and leafy palms and water plants. On its north wall sat a stone throne, the oldest in the Mediterranean, in front of a stone bowl. The palace's rich decoration demonstrates the power, wealth, and grandeur of the Bronze Age kingdoms of the Aegean and Near Eastern worlds.

Aegean and eastern Mediterranean there were diplomatic embassies and economic trade embargoes, magnificent marriages and unpleasant divorces, international intrigues and deliberate military disinformation, rebellions and migrations, and climate change, including drought.

But what brought about the end of one of the most interconnected periods in human history, more than 3,000 years ago? The evidence suggests it was a "systems collapse"—a series of events linked together via a multiplier effect, in which one factor affected the others, thereby magnifying the effects of each. For the Late Bronze Age, we know of several factors that created stress on one or more parts of the system.

We have evidence for invasions, especially the Sea Peoples, who are recorded in the inscriptions of Pharaohs Merneptah and Ramesses III:

> No land could stand before their arms, from Khatte, Qode, Carchemish, Arzawa, and Alashiya on, being cut off at [one time]. A camp [was set up] in one place in Amurru. They desolated its people, and its land was like that which has never come into being. They were coming forward toward Egypt, while the flame was prepared before them. Their confederation was the Peleset, Tjekker, Shekelesh, Danuna, and Weshesh, lands united.

We have evidence for additional attacks by unnamed enemies, as recorded on a recently published text from Ugarit:

> May my lord know that now the enemy forces are stationed at Ra'shu [the port city of Ugarit], and their avant-garde forces were sent to Ugarit. Now may my lord send me forces and chariots to save me, and may my lord save me from the forces of this enemy![3]

UNDER THE SEA. Excavated off Turkey's southwestern coast, the Uluburun shipwreck provides a snapshot of life in the Late Bronze Age. In the photo at left, excavation director Cemal Pulak recovers Canaanite and Mycenaean pottery from the shipwreck. The ship's cargo included copper and tin ingots (to make bronze), pottery, luxury items, and personal items of the crew and passengers. Many of the personal items were Syro-Canaanite in style, suggesting that the crew came from the Levant. The ship itself, which was made of Lebanese cedar, seems to have had similar origins. Although it never completed its journey, the ship demonstrates the interconnectedness of the Bronze Age kingdoms.

We have archaeological evidence for earthquakes, shaking and destroying cities in Greece, Anatolia, and the Levant. Such destructions can be seen at a number of cities and towns in southern Canaan, including Deir Alla, Tall al-Umayri, and Tall es-Saidiyeh in Jordan and Akko in Israel. There are also earthquake destructions visible at the city of Troy in Anatolia and at various sites in the Aegean, including at Mycenae on the Greek mainland. At some of the sites, archaeologists recovered the remains of victims trapped in the debris.

We have evidence for drought, gleaned from studies of ancient pollen, lasting up to 300 years in an area stretching from modern Italy to Iran. The new data come from studies of lake sediments, stalagmites in caves, and coring from lakes and lagoons. All point ever more conclusively to the occurrence of a megadrought that impacted much of the Aegean and eastern Mediterranean beginning around 1200 B.C.

We have evidence for famine, recorded in the texts, as well as for disease. One letter sent to Ugarit from the city of Emar, in inland Syria, says plaintively, "There is famine in our house; we will all die of hunger. If you do not quickly arrive here, we ourselves will die of hunger. You will not see a living soul from your land." One Hittite king said, "It is a matter of life or death!" The list of calamities goes on and on.

Perhaps the inhabitants could have survived one disaster, such as an earthquake or a drought, but they could not survive the combined effects of drought, famine, invaders, and earthquakes all occurring in rapid succession. A domino effect then ensued, in which the disintegration of one civilization led to the fall of the others. Given the globalized nature of their world, the effect upon the international trade routes and economies of even one society's collapse would have been sufficiently devastating that it could have led to the demise of the others.

Many questions remain unanswered, however. We do not know whether the various peoples (Hittites, Mycenaeans, Egyptians, etc.) knew they were in the midst of a collapse. We do not know whether there were organized efforts to evaluate and remedy the overall evolving situation and look to the future. We do not have

Collapse and Rebirth

ERIC H. CLINE

For every end, there is a beginning. This was certainly true of the ancient Near East following the Late Bronze Age collapse. We have firm evidence that it took decades, and even centuries in some areas, for the people in these regions to rebuild and reclaim their societies and to forge new lives that would bring them back up out of the darkness into which they had been plunged.

When the Aegean and eastern Mediterranean areas emerged from the catastrophe, beginning around 1000 B.C., it was a new age. It was time for a new set of powers and a fresh start with new civilizations, including

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THIS IVORY PLAQUE, depicting a sphinx, came from Samaria, the capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. It dates to the ninth or eighth century B.C. and measures about 4 inches tall.

the Neo-Hittites in Anatolia and Syria; the Israelites, Philistines, and Phoenicians in the former lands of Canaan; and the Greeks in mainland Greece and the Aegean islands. Out of the ashes came regular use of the alphabet and other inventions, not to mention a dramatic increase in the use of iron, which gave its name to the new era—the Iron Age.

It is a cycle that the world has seen time and time again: the rise and fall of empires, followed by the rise of new empires, which eventually fall and are replaced in turn by even newer empires, in a repeated cadence of birth, growth and evolution, decay or destruction, and ultimately renewal in a new form.

ALEXANDER SCHICK / BIBELAUSSTELLUNG.DE

MOVING ACROSS THE MED. Stretched across a wall of Ramesses III's temple at Medinet Habu near Luxor, a 12th-century relief documents the Sea Peoples' dramatic arrival in Egypt. The "Sea Peoples," a confederation of people from the "islands" whose homeland had been disturbed, traveled in ships, wreaked havoc across the eastern Mediterranean, and attacked Egypt. But the Egyptian forces, led by Ramesses III (the large figure on the right), defeated them. The Egyptians later settled the Sea Peoples—including the Peleset, or biblical Philistines—in the Levant.

any indications in the archaeological remains or textual records that anyone at the time was aware of the larger picture, though we know that there were certainly individual efforts to counter the effects of famine and drought. For example, texts found at Ugarit and Hattusa mention grain ships sent by the Egyptians, to help those who were starving in Anatolia and northern Syria. There is also archaeological evidence that the Egyptians were crossbreeding for drought-resistant cattle and crops in the Levant, most likely in response to the early years of the drought. Such efforts were apparently for naught, however. It was too little and too late.

Are we today at a similar pivotal moment in history? In our global economy, the fortunes and investments of the United States and Europe are inextricably intertwined within an international system that also involves East Asia and the oil-producing nations of the Middle

COURTESY OF IONE MYLONAS SHEAR

COLOSSAL COLLAPSE. Around 1200 B.C., earthquakes hit numerous Mediterranean sites. Archaeologists digging at Mycenae, located in southern Greece, found evidence of earthquake damage, including the remains of six victims buried in destruction debris. The woman (right) seems to have died suddenly when a house collapsed around her. After a stone crushed her skull, she was buried beneath rubble. Although such isolated disasters might have been overcome, their occurrence alongside other natural and manmade catastrophes likely triggered a wider systemic collapse of the Late Bronze Age kingdoms.

SPECIAL DELIVERY. The Egyptians regularly used ships to convey grain to ports both near and far, as depicted in this 15th-century B.C. painting from the Tomb of Unsu in Thebes, Egypt. During the 13th century, Egyptian grain ships sailed to Syria and Anatolia to try to alleviate the devastating impacts of drought that had brought widespread famine to the land. Such droughts likely contributed to the period's collapse.

East. Think also of what we have all been going through recently, where in just the past few years we have had complex diplomatic embassies (think North Korea) and economic trade embargoes (think Russia and China), magnificent royal marriages (William and Kate; Harry and Meghan), deliberate military disinformation and war (think Ukraine), rebellions (Arab Spring) and migrations (Syrian refugees), and, of course, climate change and pestilence (COVID-19).

Are we at the beginning of another perfect storm of stressors on our interconnected societies? Although most people will survive the current pandemic, its repercussions, both economic and otherwise, are likely to be felt for a long time. Furthermore, we may try to slow down climate change, but some effects are probably already irreversible, and famine is now widespread in the developing world. Are other cataclysmic events on the way? Are we headed for a collapse of multiple elements of our complex global society?

And if our interconnected world is nearing the breaking point, are there lessons we can learn from the Late Bronze Age collapse to help prevent or stave off our collective demise?

First, we should be aware that no society is invulnerable. Every society in the history of the world has ultimately collapsed. The collapse of similarly intertwined civilizations just after 1200 B.C. should be a warning to us that it can certainly happen again.

Second, while it is clear that climate change and pandemics have caused instability in the past, there is at least one major difference between then and now—we are aware of what is happening, both scientifically and socially, and can respond accordingly.

Our world has the knowledge, technology, and resources to meet the challenges posed by a "systems collapse." If we are aware of serious problems on the horizon that can affect the world order, such as climate change, it behooves us to take steps to fix them as best we can and as soon as we can.

We would do well to heed what happened to the flourishing kingdoms of the Aegean and eastern Mediterranean during the collapse at the end of the Late Bronze Age. We are not as far removed from those days as one might think; COVID-19 has just exposed a vulnerability of modern societies to one of the forces of nature. The story of their collapse has its own inherent fascination, but it should also remind us of the fragility of our own world.

[1] Cited in Fiona Harvey, "Humanity Under Threat from Perfect Storm of Crises—Study," *The Guardian* (February 6, 2020).

[2] For more on this pivotal moment in antiquity, see Eric H. Cline, *1177 B.C.: The Year Civilization Collapsed*, rev. ed. (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2021). Parts of this essay are adapted from material in that updated edition; footnotes and full citations have not been included here but can be found therein.

[3] English translation courtesy of Yoram Cohen, Tel Aviv University.

Pharaoh's Fury

Merneptah's Destruction of Gezer

STEVEN ORTIZ AND **SAMUEL WOLFF**

THE MERNEPTAH STELE, which most scholars date to c. 1208 B.C.E., provides the earliest known reference to Israel outside the Bible. But while history books focus on the stele's reference to Israel having been "wasted without seed" during Pharaoh Merneptah's campaign into southern Canaan, the bigger prize was almost certainly the prominent Canaanite city-state of Gezer, located in the Judean foothills about 20 miles west of Jerusalem, which the stele says was "captured" during the same campaign. Indeed, in a companion inscription carved on the walls of the Temple of Amada in Upper Nubia (located near Egypt's modern border with Sudan), Merneptah (r. 1213–1203 B.C.E.) brags not about conquering Israel but rather being the "subduer of Gezer."

Gezer was a frequent target of the New Kingdom Egyptian pharaohs as they marched through Canaan to control its trade routes

WRATHFUL PHARAOH. Son and successor to the great Ramesses II, Merneptah (r. 1213-1203 B.C.E.) continued Egyptian dominance over the southern Levant. To quell rebellious elements in the region, he mounted a military campaign to Canaan that ended tragically for Gezer. This fragmented granite statue of the pharaoh, which was once painted in brilliant colors, comes from Merneptah's mortuary temple in Thebes.

VLADISLAV GAJIC / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

TODD BOLEN / BIBLEPLACES.COM

TEL GEZER overlooks the fertile Aijalon Valley of the Judean foothills. Located on a major trade route between the central hill country and the Mediterranean coast, the site was occupied from prehistoric times to the Roman era. During the Late Bronze Age (1550–1200 B.C.E.), Gezer was a prominent Canaanite city-state and a frequent target of Egypt's New Kingdom pharaohs who sought to control Canaan. The mound consists of a western and an eastern hill, separated by a saddle. Recent excavations along the southern slope of the site's western hill (circled above) have revealed dramatic new evidence of the city's destruction at the end of the 13th century, likely at the hands of Pharaoh Merneptah.

and extract taxes from local city-states. The earliest reference to Gezer comes from the Temple of Amun at Karnak, where a commemorative relief lists it as one of the Canaanite cities conquered by Thutmose III (r. 1479–1425 B.C.E.). Similarly, at his mortuary temple at Thebes, Thutmose IV (r. 1400–1390 B.C.E.) mentions taking Hurrian captives from Gezer. Gezer is also mentioned several times in the 14th-century Amarna Letters, and at least eight letters written from the city were delivered to the Egyptian royal court.*

Unfortunately, very little of the Late Bronze Age city known to the New Kingdom pharaohs has been uncovered, even though Gezer has been repeatedly excavated over the past century and more.[1] Indeed, despite Merneptah's boast, archaeologists have found little evidence of the 13th-century city that the pharaoh claims to have subdued. Our recent excavations, however, are beginning to fill in this picture.

Gezer is strategically located in the Aijalon Valley of the Judean foothills. The site overlooks Israel's southern coastal plain, along which ran the ancient Via Maris, the major north–south route that led from Egypt to Mesopotamia, and it guards one of the primary routes leading from the Mediterranean coast to the central hill country. The rectangular-shaped mound, roughly 30 acres in size, consists of a western and an eastern hill, separated by a slight depression or saddle.

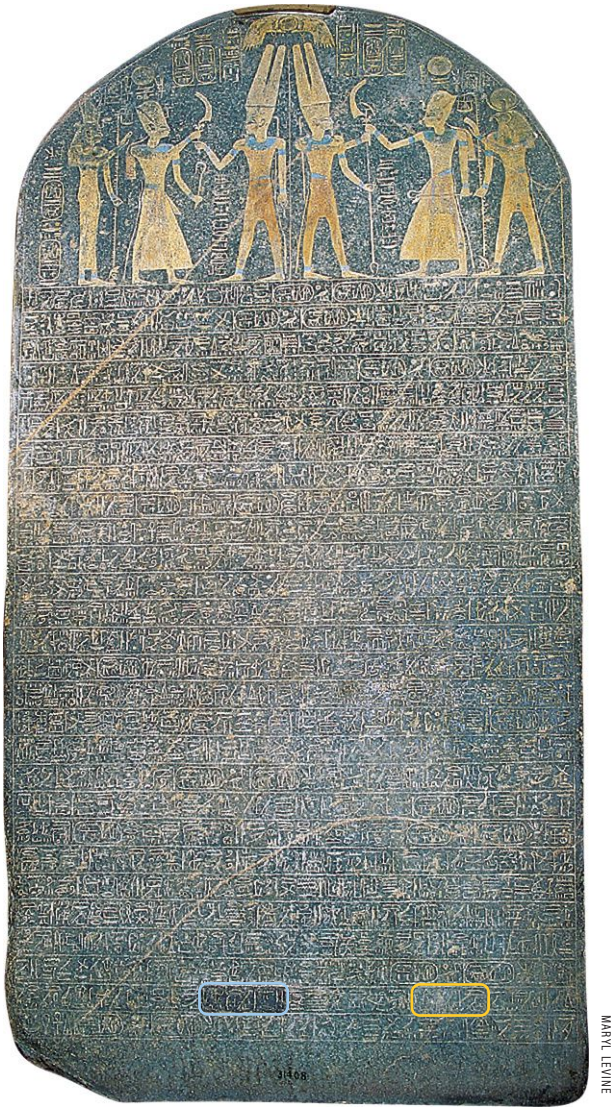
* Hershel Shanks, "The Trowel vs. the Text: How the Amarna Letters Challenge Archaeology," **BAR**, January/February 2009.

Buried in the debris were three individuals who were not able to escape the building's destruction. Now, for the first time, Gezer has provided a snapshot of the devastation wrought seemingly by Merneptah's campaign into Canaan.

The building sits on the southern slope of Gezer's western hill. We exposed nearly 15 by 20 meters of this large complex, though much more of the structure appears to have eroded down the southern slope of the tell. The building is an example of a "patrician house," a well-attested type of Late Bronze Age structure characterized by a series of large central rooms surrounded by smaller side rooms. Similar patrician buildings, which archaeologists have typically associated with a site's wealthy or elite classes, were excavated at nearby Tel Batash (biblical Timnah) and Tell es-Safi (ancient Gath).

The renewed Gezer excavations, which we directed from 2006 until their completion in 2017, were focused primarily on issues related to the chronology, history, and layout of the site's later and better-known Iron Age city (associated by many with King Solomon's building campaign, mentioned in 1 Kings 9:15–16).* The surprise find, however, was the exposure of a large building, dating to the late 13th century—the very end of the Late Bronze Age—that was completely destroyed by fire.[2]

* Hershel Shanks, "The Sad Case of Tell Gezer," **BAR**, July/August 1983.



MARYL LEVINE

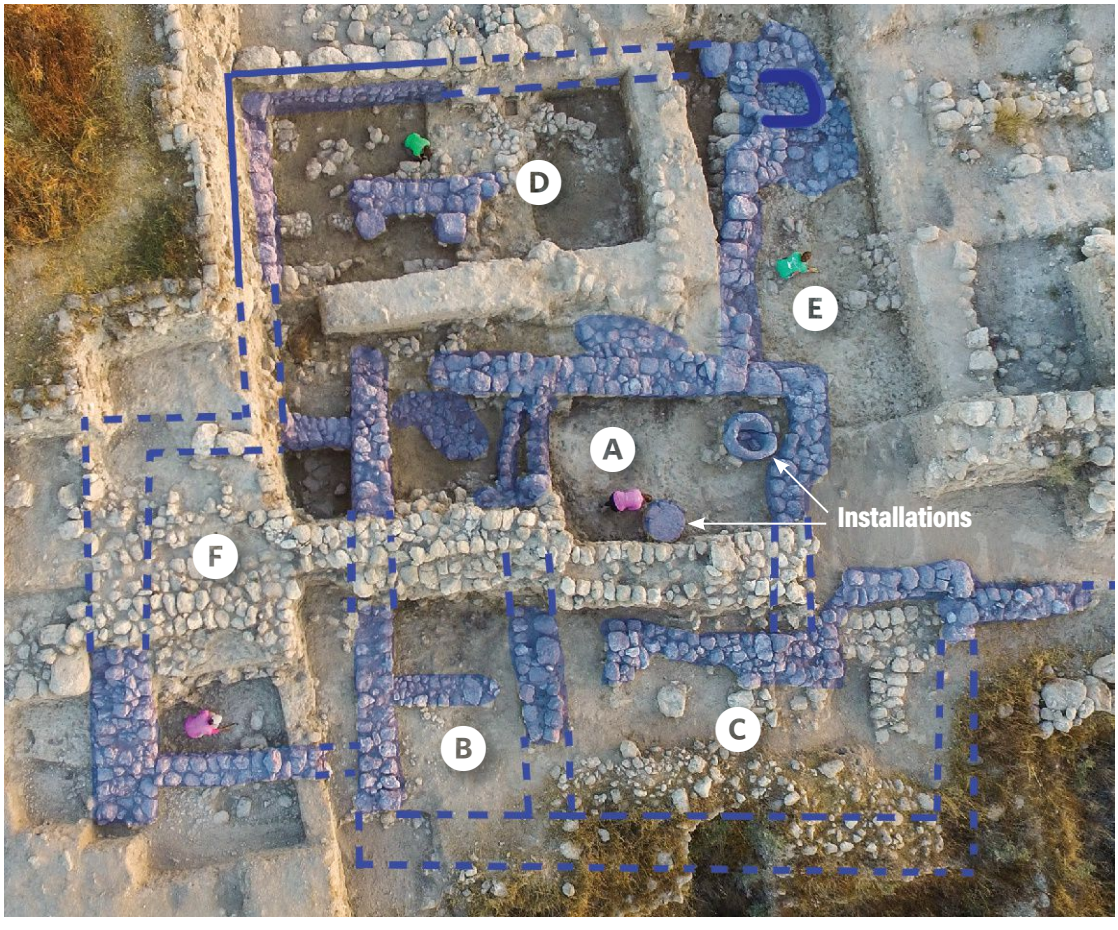
MERNEPTAH'S VICTORY STELE—also called the Israel Stele, since it provides the earliest historical reference to "Israel" (highlighted in blue)—boasts: "Canaan is seized by every evil, Ashkelon is carried off, and Gezer is seized, Yenoam is made as (though it) never existed, Israel is wasted without seed." Until recently, however, little archaeological evidence had been found to support the pharaoh's claims. Gezer's name (highlighted in yellow), spelled *Q'tch'r* in Egyptian, is followed by two hieroglyphic signs that designate it as a foreign city.

Gezer's patrician house consists of two large rectangular main rooms (A and D) with three adjoining smaller rooms (B, C, F) to the south and a cobbled courtyard (E) to the east. The northern main room (D) includes a central wall with two engaged pillars that likely served as a room divider and ceiling support. A cobble stone pavement covered the floor. In the room's northwest corner, we found an Egyptian amulet with the cartouche of Thutmose III, possibly an heirloom commemorating the great pharaoh of the 18th Dynasty.

The building's other main room (A), positioned in the center of the complex, was likely used as an industrial space. Like Room D, it was divided into two areas by a central partition wall. The western half of the room appears to have been used for storage. The eastern half contained a large stone vat with a shallow depression in the bottom, and, just a few feet away, a flat, rounded stone with a smoothed upper surface. A stone roller and fragments of large storage jars were found throughout the room, suggesting the possible presence of an olive press. Room A also held several remarkable finds, including restorable pottery, a scarab of Amenhotep III (r. 1390–1353 B.C.E.), and a unique cylinder seal featuring the Canaanite god Reshef battling enemies and taking captives. The complex's smaller auxiliary rooms (B, C, F), which could be accessed only from the main industrial room (A), were probably used for storage, as evidenced by the many storage jar sherds that were discovered, especially in Room F.

While we were able to excavate only a portion of the building (the rest having eroded away), its size, layout, features, and finds suggest

THE LARGE "PATRICIAN HOUSE" excavated at Gezer shows evidence of having been destroyed in a violent conflagration. Dating to the late 13th century, this wealthy house probably fell victim to Merneptah's military campaign into southern Canaan. Although its walls and plan are poorly preserved, the expansive complex featured a pillared main room (D), a large industrial area, perhaps used to process grains and olives (A), three smaller side rooms (B, C, F) that were likely used for storage, and a cobbled courtyard (E). The building's size and layout, together with recovered artifacts, suggest it was the residence of one of Gezer's wealthier families. The dig volunteers visible in green and pink shirts provide a sense of the building's scale.



TEL GEZER EXCAVATION PROJECT, S. WOLFF

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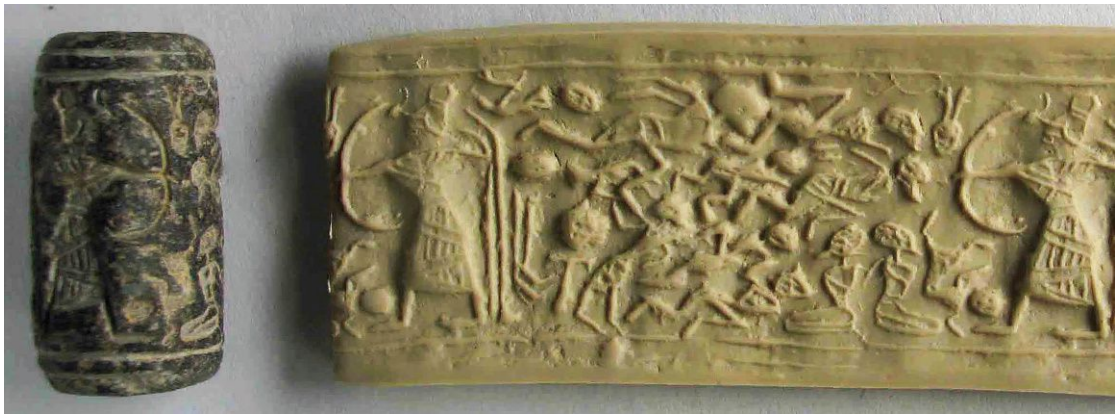
DEADLY DEVASTATION. The skeletal remains of three people who died in the collapsing patrician house are a gruesome witness to the violent end of Late Bronze Age Gezer. Found under layers of debris, ash, and fallen stones, the remains are those of an adult male, who died under the collapse of the pillared room (above), and another adult and child who fell together in the house's adjoining industrial space (right; the child's remains, barely preserved, are visible next to the adult's left leg, just below the north arrow in the photo).

it was likely the residence of a wealthy, elite family, perhaps one that had some connection to the Egyptian administration in Canaan. The industrial room may also provide evidence that the family was engaged in small-scale industrial activities, perhaps producing and storing olive oil or processing cereals.

Although there is much we still do not know about this structure, one thing is clear: It was violently destroyed, as evidenced by the destruction debris found throughout the complex. This ashy debris was sometimes 3 feet thick and included collapsed stone walls, fallen and burnt mudbrick, burnt timbers, and the broken remnants of crushed pottery vessels.

But what really brought to life the brutal end of Late Bronze Age Gezer was the discovery of the remains of three people—two adults and one child—who died as the building burned and collapsed around them. The remains, which were discovered in the complex's two main rooms, were surrounded by ash and covered by debris. One of the adults and the child were found together in the industrial room, the adult lying on its back with arms upraised and the child lying close by, near the adult's left leg. Both bodies were so badly burned that it was impossible to identify whether they were male or female. The other adult, preliminarily identified as a



PHOTOS: TEL GEZER EXCAVATION PROJECT, S. WOLFF

FANCY FINDS. Among the objects discovered in the main rooms of the destroyed house was a cylinder seal (above) featuring Reshep, the Canaanite plague and war god, battling enemies and taking captives. Pottery (right) and radiocarbon evidence date the house's destruction to the late 13th century, when Pharaoh Merneptah launched his devastating campaign into Canaan.

male, was found in the southwest corner of Room D, possibly hiding to escape the destruction or trying to make his way to the next room to reach his companions. His remains, which were far better preserved, showed that he died curled up on his right side, his arms outstretched. Collapsed stones were found both beneath and on top of his body, implying that the building was already collapsing when he fell, with more of the structure falling on top of him.

When did this terrible destruction happen? Initially, we dated the building to the 14th century, based primarily on the discovery of the Amenhotep III scarab seal mentioned above. Upon further analysis, however, we found that the building's pottery, which included both local and imported wares, dated to the 13th century, and materials from the destruction debris were radiocarbon dated to the end of the same century. Given the date of the building and the evidence for massive destruction, we believe it was most likely destroyed by Merneptah during his campaign into the southern Levant.

Why did Merneptah attack Gezer? Although the nature of Egypt's control over Canaan is still debated, scholars agree that Gezer was central to Egyptian activity in the region. As indicated by the Amarna Letters and analysis of Late Bronze Age settlement patterns, Gezer dominated many of the towns and villages along the coastal plain, including the port of Jaffa. We know from excavation that in the final days of Ramesses II's rule (r. 1279–1213 B.C.E.), the Egyptian governor's estate at Aphek as well as the administrative center at Jaffa were violently destroyed. Some scholars attribute these destructions to the Canaanite king of Gezer who might have sought to take advantage of Egypt's perceived weakness during the waning years of Ramesses II's reign.[3] It would then be conceivable that Ramesses's son and heir, Merneptah, responded to this unrest with a devastating campaign against Gezer and like-minded rebellious groups—including early Israel—who posed a threat to Egyptian control. Our excavations now offer a glimpse of the pharaoh's wrath.

[1] The site's first excavator, R.A.S. Macalister, identified several Late Bronze Age buildings on the tell's acropolis in the early 20th century. The later Hebrew Union College excavation (1965–1973), led by William Dever, uncovered a palace which they dated to the Late Bronze Age IIA (c. 14th century B.C.E.), but which likely dates to the Late Bronze Age I (c. 1500 B.C.E.).

[2] For our in-depth summary, see Steven Ortiz and Samuel Wolff, "A Reevaluation of Gezer in the Late Bronze Age in Light of Renewed Excavations and Recent Scholarship," in Aren Maeir, Itzhaq Shai, and Chris McKinny, eds., *The Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages of Southern Canaan* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019), pp. 62–85.

[3] See, e.g., Yuval Gadot, "The Late Bronze Egyptian Estate at Aphek," *Tel Aviv* 37 (2010), pp. 48–66.

Ezra and the Dead Sea Scrolls

CHARLOTTE HEMPEL

EZRA, THE EARLY JEWISH PRIEST AND SCRIBE, has been described as the father of Judaism as it emerged from the ashes of the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple and the loss of statehood. The Babylonians destroyed Solomon's Temple in 586 B.C.E. and took many from Judah into exile. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah describe how Ezra, whose impeccable priestly pedigree is said to go all the way back to Moses's brother, Aaron (Ezra 7:1–6), returned to the land during the reign of the Persian king Artaxerxes, brought with him the Law of Moses, and presided over its correct interpretation.

SEARCHING FOR EZRA. The Dead Sea Scrolls are considered by many to be the most significant archaeological discovery of the 20th century. Dating from the third century B.C.E. to the first century C.E., they represent the earliest collection of biblical manuscripts. Not only do they illuminate the biblical world, but they also shed light on the composition of biblical texts. Here, a researcher examines one of the Psalm scrolls in the Israel Museum. Although some fragments of the Book of Ezra have been found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, Ezra's story—his role in reinstating Jewish law after the exile—is not preserved in the scrolls.

ABOVE: EYAL BARTOV / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Surprisingly, the story of Ezra's return and role in preserving the law is never mentioned in the Dead Sea Scrolls, our earliest collection of biblical writings, dating from the third century B.C.E. to the first century C.E. Originally preserved as a single book, Ezra and Nehemiah only came to be considered separate works by Origen of Alexandria in the third century C.E. when they were divided. In any case, only three small fragments of the Book of Ezra were found at Qumran, while nothing from Nehemiah has been identified among the scrolls.* What is more, the surviving Ezra fragments contain material only from Ezra 4–6, chapters largely concerned with the rebuilding of the Temple, with nothing of Ezra's story, which begins in chapter 7.

In fact, the period of the return and the rebuilding of the Temple barely features in the scrolls. In the well-known *Damascus Document*, for example, the return from exile and the rebuilding of the Temple are

* See Sidnie White Crawford, "Has Every Book of the Bible Been Found Among the Dead Sea Scrolls?" *Bible Review*, October 1996.

QUMRAN COMMUNITY. Qumran sits on the northwestern shore of the Dead Sea and is best known as the findspot of the Dead Sea Scrolls. A Jewish group lived at Qumran from the first century B.C.E. to the first century C.E. This group copied, collected, and composed the Dead Sea Scrolls discovered in caves within and near the settlement. Fragments of the Book of Ezra came from Cave 4.

completely passed over in a summary of God's benevolence in the wake of Israel's rebellious acts against God:

> For when they acted unfaithfully, in that they forsook him, he hid his face from Israel and from his sanctuary and gave them over to the sword. But when he remembered the covenant with the ancestors, he left a remnant for Israel and did not give them over to annihilation. And in the time of wrath—390 years after he had given them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon—he visited them and caused a root of planting to grow from Israel and from Aaron to take possession of his land and to grow fat on the goodness of his soil. They considered their sin and knew that they were guilty. But they were like the blind and like those who grope for the way for 20 years. And God considered their deeds for they sought him with a whole heart. And he raised for them a teacher of righteousness to lead them in the way of his heart.
>
> (*Damascus Document* 1.3–11, author's translation)

As presented in the *Damascus Document*, the next noteworthy event following the Babylonian destruction was not the reversal of Judean fortunes under Persian rule, but the emergence of a Jewish reform movement, led by a "teacher of righteousness," four centuries later.

One important exception to this "radio silence" about the immediate post-exilic period is found in the *Apocryphon of Jeremiah* (4Q390), which does refer to the return from Babylon and the rebuilding of the Temple (written as if God were the speaker):

> And they too will do what is evil in my eyes, like all that which the Israelites had done in the former days of their kingdom, except those who came up first from the land of their captivity to build the Temple. And I shall speak to them and send them commandments, and they will understand everything which they and their fathers had neglected.

Interestingly, however, the text's reference to the return does not name any of the key biblical figures associated with these events, such as the lay leaders Sheshbazzar, Zerubbabel, and Nehemiah, or the priestly

leaders Jeshua and Ezra.

This state of affairs is exceedingly curious. Why would the Qumran scribes or their community not have referenced Ezra or the period of the return in their writings, especially when speaking of the post-destruction renewal?[1] Although the silence could be a deliberate snub based on ideological or theological disagreements, it is worth looking at the wider literary landscape of the Second Temple period before jumping to conclusions.

On the one hand, we have several well-known works where Ezra is prominent. The clearest witness, of course, is the Book of Ezra-Nehemiah itself, where Ezra takes center stage alongside Nehemiah. The book's presumed original Hebrew and Aramaic text was translated into Greek in the second century B.C.E., which demonstrates that a text very close to what we read in our Bibles today was already known to some Jewish scribes and Greek translators in the closing centuries before the Common Era.[2]

Another intriguing witness is the third- or second-century B.C.E. work known as 1 Esdras, identified by the Greek form of Ezra's name, found in the Apocrypha of many Christian Bibles and considered canonical in the Orthodox tradition. In 1 Esdras, Ezra is elevated to the rank of high priest and completely overshadows Nehemiah, who is never mentioned. Scholars believe that the scribes behind the Greek translation of Ezra-Nehemiah and of 1 Esdras were active around the same time as the scribes who left us the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Ezra is also prominent in the apocalyptic work known as *4 Ezra*, composed after the Roman destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 C.E. and later included with several other writings as a book of scripture (2 Esdras) in a number of Orthodox churches. This composition presents Ezra as a seer who experiences visions and is guided by the archangel Uriel. In the book's climactic chapter, we find a story about Ezra who, being infused by a fiery magic potion from God, dictates nearly 100 books—the majority reserved only for the wisest among the people—to five attending scribes (2 Esdras 14). Then Ezra is taken up to heaven like Enoch and Elijah before him.

Ezra's profile continued to grow in later Jewish tradition. According to the Babylonian Talmud, Ezra knew the pronunciation of the divine name and was identified with the prophet Malachi. Before departing from Babylon to Jerusalem, he was also said to have been educated as a student of the prophet Jeremiah's scribe Baruch. In sum, Ezra's importance and legacy in Jewish tradition can barely be overstated despite the cool reception he receives in the scrolls and, as we shall see, in a number of other contemporary witnesses.

Scholars have long debated whether Ezra was a real historical figure, with some claiming he was a fictive creation and others arguing that Ezra was not only real but, in fact, the original source for the authors who wrote the biblical book that carried his name.[3] What is clear, in any case, is that there was a circle of early Jews—however small or influential—who were sympathetic to Ezra and worked to preserve his legacy and the values, traditions, and activities they associated with him.

On the other hand, there exists a range of other ancient Jewish sources where, much as in the Dead Sea Scrolls, Ezra is largely absent. One example is the famous "Praise of the Ancestors," a hymn offered by the second-century B.C.E. priestly sage Ben Sira that is included within the apocryphal work that takes his name (Sirach 44–50). Ben Sira singles out a host of honorable figures in Jewish history, from Enoch, Noah, and the patriarchs of Genesis to the righteous kings of Israel and Judah and revered biblical prophets. However, when we reach the time of the return from exile and the beginning of the restoration period, where we might reasonably expect Ezra to be mentioned, we read:

> How shall we magnify Zerubbabel? He was like a signet ring on the right hand, and so was Jeshua son of Jozadak; in their days they built the house and raised a temple holy to the Lord, destined for everlasting glory. The memory of Nehemiah also is lasting; he raised our fallen walls, and set up gates and bars, and rebuilt our ruined houses.
>
> (Sirach 49:11–13)

PHOTO SHAI HALEVI, COURTESY OF THE ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY

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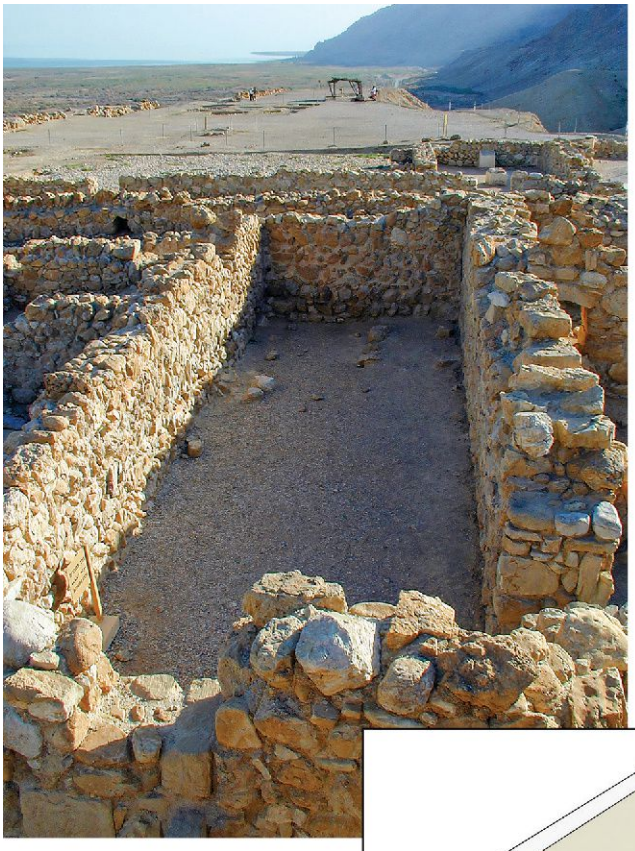
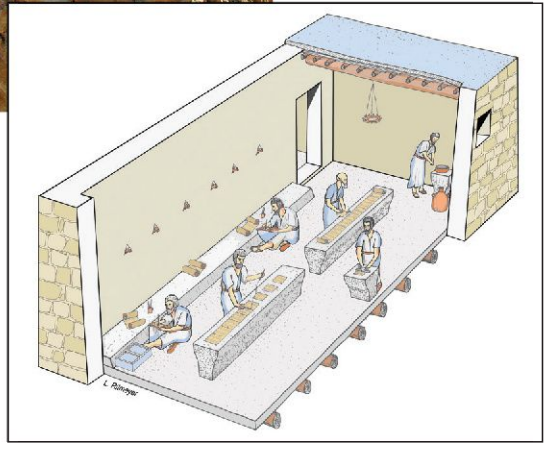
EZRA FRAGMENT. Three fragments of the Book of Ezra, which once belonged to the same scroll, were found in Cave 4 at Qumran. This piece, the largest of the three, records part of Ezra 5:17–6:5. The other fragments contain portions of Ezra 4:2–6 and 4:9–11. The figure of Ezra steps onto the stage in chapter 7 of the Book of Ezra, though none of Ezra's story—his role as priest, scribe, and teacher of the law—is preserved among the Dead Sea Scrolls.



TOP: DANIEL GEBHARDT / BIBLEPLACES.COM; INSET: © RITMEYER ARCHAEOLOGICAL DESIGN / RITMEYER.COM



SCROLL CENTER. Archaeologists have identified the above room at the Qumran settlement as a scriptorium (room for copying manuscripts). In it they found inkwells and benches, which may have served as desks. Scrolls, likely even some of the Dead Sea Scrolls, would have been written there. The reconstruction (right) envisions the space in ancient times.

Ben Sira credits the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua and praises the achievements of Nehemiah, but he has not a word about Ezra. It is particularly curious that Ben Sira—a writer widely credited with explicitly integrating the law into the realm of wisdom—does not refer to Ezra's contribution in this regard.

Second Maccabees, another second-century B.C.E. Jewish work, similarly presents Nehemiah alone as the one who built the Temple and the altar. Moreover, Nehemiah is credited with instructing the descendants of exiled priestly families to retrieve the fire of the altar from a dry cistern where it had been hidden after the Temple's destruction (2 Maccabees 1:19–23). In short, rather than being primarily responsible for the repair of the city walls, as in the account found in the Book of Ezra-Nehemiah, the Nehemiah of 2 Maccabees is closely engaged with the rebuilding of the Temple and thereby exceeds the achievements of Jeshua, Zerubbabel, and Ezra.

So in light of this diverse and often conflicting array of Jewish literary traditions associated with Ezra, what do we make of his absence in the Dead Sea Scrolls? It could be that additional fragments of the Book of Ezra, including chapters that refer to Ezra, did once exist at Qumran and subsequently perished. Alternatively, as some scholars have suggested, the omission of Ezra in the scrolls could have been deliberate, perhaps reflecting the ideological or theological views of their authors.

However, having reviewed the diverse literary landscape of Second Temple Judaism, which is patchy when it comes to acknowledging Ezra, I suggest another possible, more likely, explanation: Ezra was simply unknown to some Jewish scribes of the Second Temple period, including those of Qumran and the near contemporary writers behind the books of Ben Sira and 2 Maccabees.

While this might at first seem a radical idea, given the prominence of Ezra in the Bibles we read today, we must remember that the evidence of the Dead Sea Scrolls, Ben Sira, and 2 Maccabees represents a significant portion of ancient Jewish literature, whose authors seem not to have had access to the Ezra tradition. This is in contrast, of course, to the writings and collections of other Jewish groups, where Ezra was not only present but prominent.

In a world before bookstores or Kindles, early Jewish communities only had access to those scrolls that their teachers or families had acquired or collected. Ancient Jewish scribes wrote their works on lengthy parchment scrolls, which were difficult to transport, store, access, and preserve as uniform collections. Although the Qumran scribes clearly had access to a comprehensive collection of biblical manuscripts from antiquity, it may well be that works preserving the Ezra tradition simply did not make it into their collection.[4]

[1] Some scholars postulated that Ezra does actually appear in the scrolls as the cryptically named "teacher of righteousness." Others identified this mysterious figure with Nehemiah. See, e.g., Theodor H. Gaster, *The Scriptures of the Dead Sea Sect in English Translation* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1957), p. 108; Isaac Rabinowitz, "A Reconsideration of 'Damascus' and '390 Years' in the 'Damascus' ('Zadokite') Fragments," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 73 (1954), pp. 11–35.

[2] The Book of Ezra-Nehemiah found in our Bibles depends on the Hebrew text of the Leningrad Codex, the oldest complete manuscript of the Hebrew Bible, which dates to 1008 C.E. The book's ancient Greek translation closely follows the Hebrew of the Leningrad Codex, which indicates that an original Hebrew-Aramaic text of Ezra-Nehemiah was already circulating in the second century B.C.E.

[3] See Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, *Ezra-Nehemiah: Israel's Quest for Identity* (London: T&T Clark, 2017).

[4] This article is based on the author's research, which was made possible with support received from the United Kingdom's Arts and Humanities Research Council.

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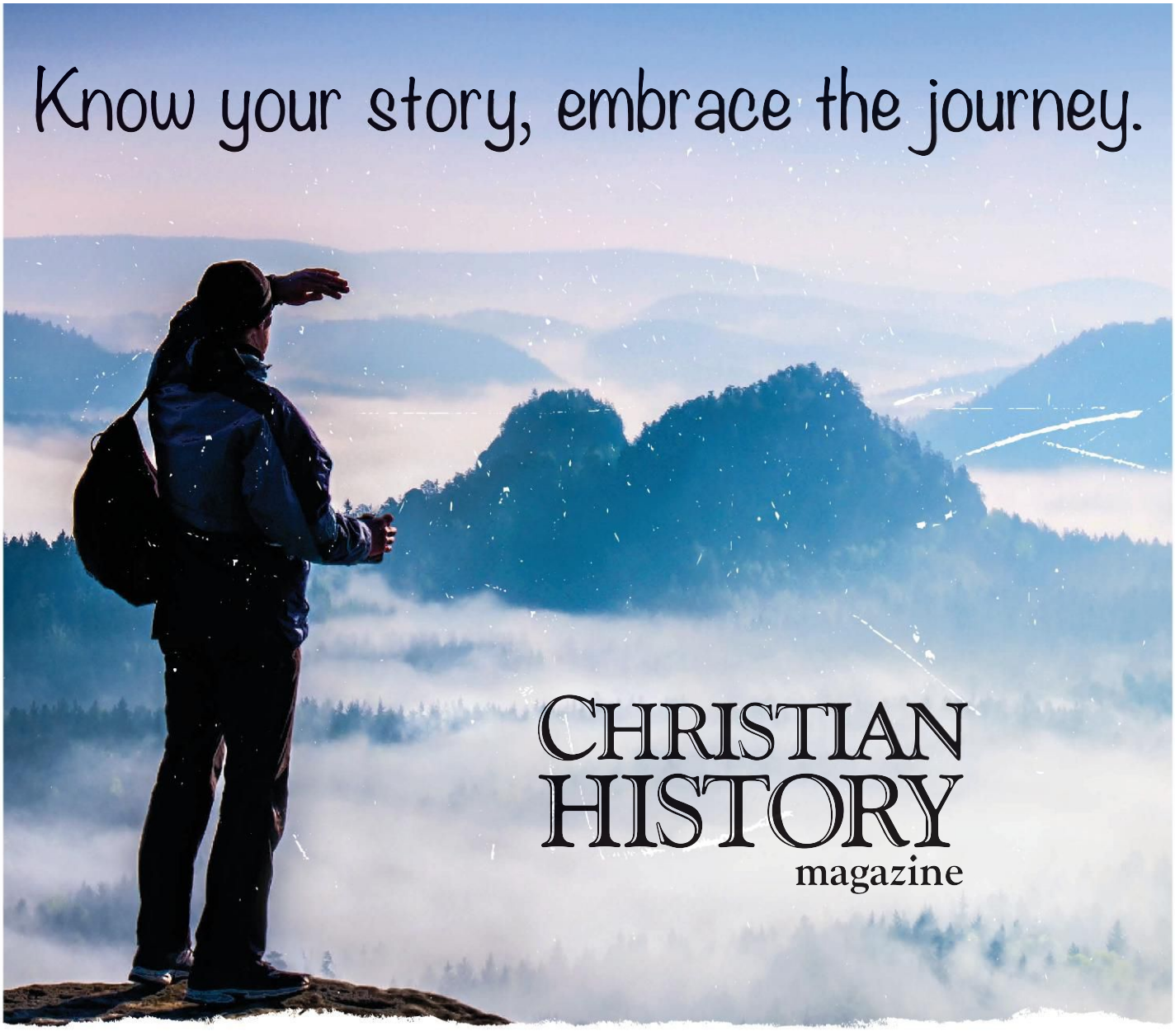

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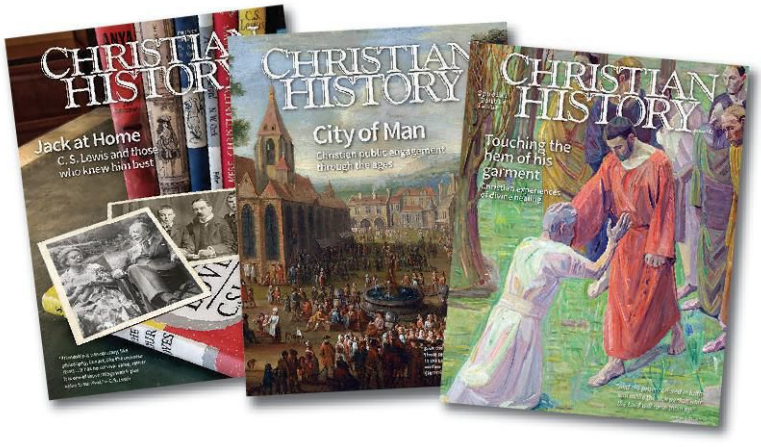

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Second Life for the Psalms

DIMITRIOS PAPANIKOLAOU

MANY PSALMS enjoyed a second life in postclassical and medieval Greek epigraphy (inscriptions). Hundreds of Greek inscriptions from the first to 15th centuries A.D. preserve verses—or entire psalms—taken from the Book of Psalms of the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) compiled in the third and second centuries B.C. Alongside the ornate manuscripts sponsored by church authorities or medieval magnates, these inscriptions might appear rugged. Yet they constituted an important cultural element in the Greek-speaking world of the long-lived eastern Roman Empire, from the beginnings of Christianity up until the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453.

Greek inscriptions bearing passages from the Bible have been found in the entire postclassical Greek-speaking world, from the central Mediterranean to Asia Minor and the Levant, including late antique Syria, Crimea, Egypt, and Palestine.[1] In the first three centuries A.D., the few inscriptions preserving (or alluding to) a Greek Old Testament passage receive their text from various books, including Leviticus and Deuteronomy. The inscriptions come from various archaeological contexts, mostly Jewish and pagan (the latter should be associated with the *sebomenoi*, or "Godfearers," Greek converts to Judaism or Greek attendees of synagogues).* From the third century onward, the Book of Psalms takes the lead in Old Testament quotations, almost monopolizing the presence of the Old Testament in later Greek epigraphy: More than 95 percent of inscriptions preserving an Old Testament text contain verses from the Psalms.

The majority of medieval Greek inscriptions bearing a psalmic text contain only a few verses.

* Angelos Chaniotis, "Godfearers in the City of Love," **BAR**, May/June 2010.

COURTESY MORDECHAI AVIAM

THIS GREEK INSCRIPTION from a Byzantine church records Psalm 118:19, "Open to me the gates of righteousness," as well as the artist's name. Psalm 118:19–20, referencing the gate "of the Lord" and the entry of the righteous, was considered to offer protection to those passing through gates. The fifth-century inscription was uncovered from the southern church at Khirbet Karkara, located in western Upper Galilee—in a dig directed by Professor Mordechai Aviam and Dr. Yaakov Ashkenazi, from Kinneret College, and assisted by Dr. Achiya Cohen-Tavor.

Some inscriptions, however, bear (or initially bore) larger portions of psalmic texts or entire psalms. Notable examples include the inscriptions from Akroinon (today's Afyonkarahisar, Turkey), which preserves five psalmic passages; from Lapethus (near modern Karavas in Cyprus), with all of Psalm 15; from Rhodes, with Psalm 80; from the catacombs of Kertsch, with Psalm 91 and other psalmic verses; and from Salamis of Cyprus, similarly with Psalm 91 in whole.*

There is a connection between the presence of psalms in postclassical Greek inscriptions and the popular belief in certain psalms' apotropaic (protecting from or repelling evil) nature. This is especially the case with Psalm 91 and with Psalms 29:3; 46:7, 11; 118:20; 121:8, which frequently appear in inscriptions. The assumed apotropaic and protective nature of those psalms is further attested in objects of Byzantine handcraft, such as amulets or jewels, and distinguished parts of civil and religious buildings, such as façades and entrance gates. Even after the demise of an early Christian building, the stone bearing the psalmic text would be incorporated into later churches to provide an unbroken continuum in apotropaic protection.

Redactors or engravers took some liberties when reproducing the psalms. They sometimes abbreviated the text, collated passages from different psalms, or rephrased the verses to adapt them to a Christian environment. Nevertheless, many inscriptions—whether inscribed on stone or handcrafted objects—are a testimony to the textual history of the Greek Psalms. This is especially the case with inscriptions dated before the ninth century A.D. Those inscriptions offer a glimpse to an early Greek text of the Septuagint, which is much older than the one preserved in the majority of the extant Greek biblical manuscripts. In many cases, some psalmic inscriptions are contemporary to the oldest extant Greek biblical manuscripts, such as the Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Vaticanus, or Codex Alexandrinus, those landmark Bible manuscripts that are dated from the mid-fourth to mid-sixth centuries A.D.

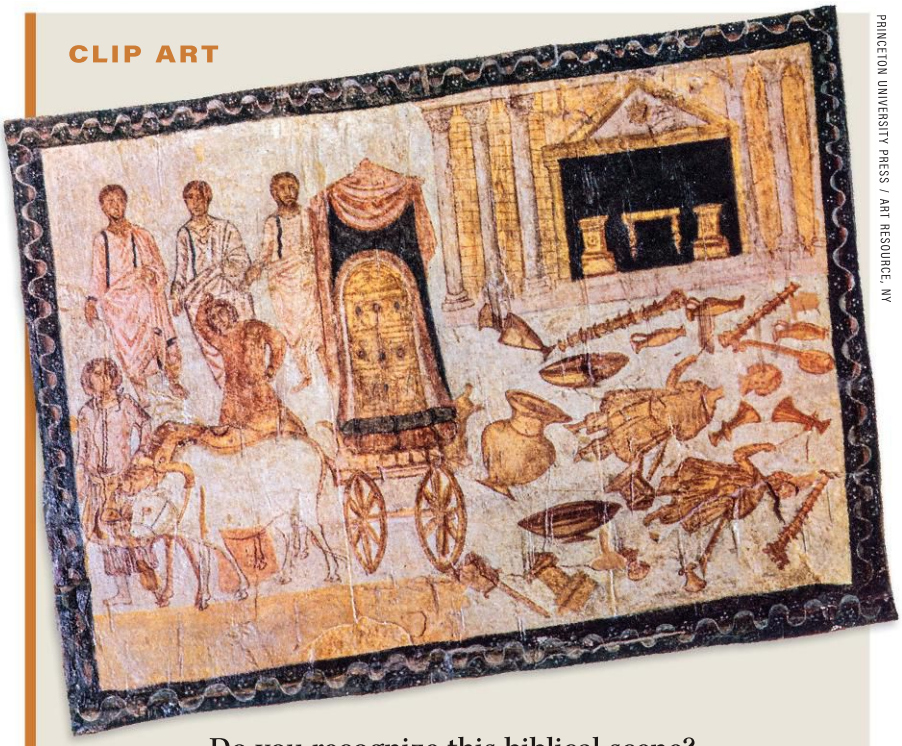
Inscriptions are, thus, a good source of information for the early text of the Septuagint Psalms. Inscriptions bearing psalmic verses can potentially preserve a version of Septuagint text that was available in a certain region of the eastern Mediterranean prior to the oldest surviving manuscripts, and this forms a vast unexplored area of study. Such geographically specific information on the text of the Greek Old Testament in the late antique Mediterranean cannot be gleaned from papyri, which survived almost exclusively in Egypt.

Medieval Greek psalmic inscriptions are not only a manifestation of an older biblical text but also of the presence of the Psalms in the life of the medieval Greek-speaking world and of the popular reception of the Psalms by clergy and lay people alike.

*Most English translations of the Psalms are derived from Hebrew manuscripts, which differ in some of the numbering of the Psalms from the Septuagint (Greek translation). The numbering of the psalms referenced in this article corresponds to the NRSV. Psalm 15 in the NRSV would be Psalm 14 in the Septuagint, Psalm 80 would be Psalm 79, Psalm 91 would be 90, etc.

[1] For more on these inscriptions, see Louis Jalabert, "Citations bibliques dans l'épigraphie grecque," in Fernand Cabrol and Henri LeClercq, eds., *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, vol. 3.2 (Paris: Librairie Letouzey et Ané, 1914), pp. 1731–1747; Denis Feissel, "Notes d'épigraphie chrétienne (VII). XXIII. Une inscription de Salamine de Chypre et les citations du psaume 90," *Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique* 108.1 (1984), pp. 575–579; Denis Feissel, "La Bible dans les inscriptions grecques," in Claude Mondésert, ed., *Le monde grec ancien et la Bible* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1984), pp. 223–231.

CLIP ART



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   Huqoq, Israel
3. ***Siege of Jerusalem***
   Moldovita, Romania
4. ***The Ark and the Temple of Dagon***
   Dura-Europos, Syria
5. ***Jesus Raises Lazarus***
   Rome, Italy

ANSWER ON P. 67

Exploring the Holy Land with David Nunn

St. Paul in Greece

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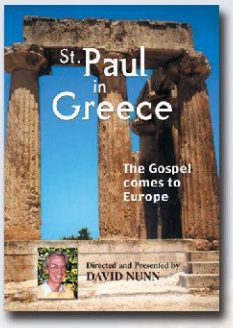

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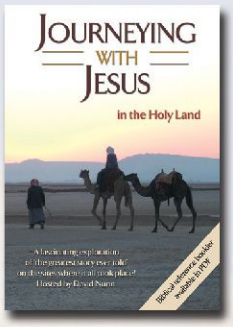

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Journey with us in this compelling video in which Bible events come to life. Follow the adventures of Lot, as he fled from Sodom and was sheltered in a cave; Jacob, as he wrestled with God by the river Jabbock; and Moses, as he led the great Exodus northwards from Aqaba. These, and much more, make this a unique and gripping program. Documentary, 59 minutes.

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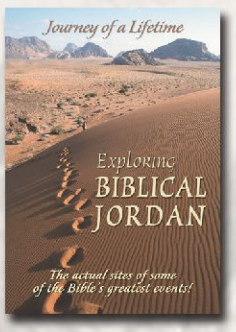

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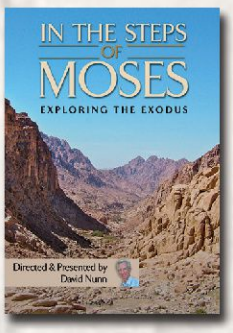

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A fast-moving exploration of all the major sites featured in the Gospels. Starting with the Annunciation, David Nunn follows through the Gospel drama chronologically, providing fascinating and illuminating insights into the life of Jesus and the world-changing events that took place at these locations. Documentary, 43 minutes.

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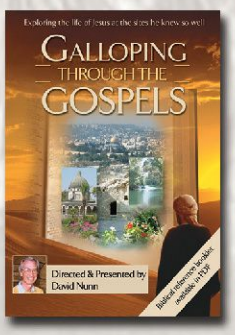

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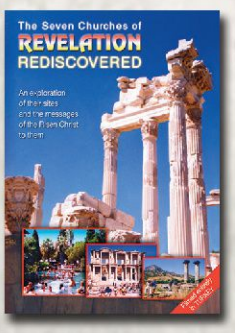

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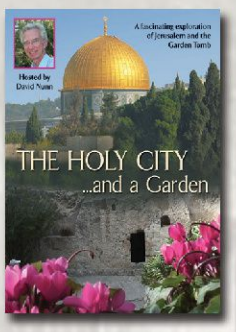

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Aseneth of Egypt

PATRICIA AHEARNE-KROLL

MANY KNOW THE TALE ABOUT JOSEPH, Jacob's beloved son who was sold into slavery by his jealous brothers, exploited, and imprisoned, but who eventually rose to become second-in-command over Egypt (Genesis 37–50). Buried in this story is a brief reference that fascinated Jewish writers in antiquity: Joseph's wife, Aseneth, was Egyptian.

According to Genesis, she was the daughter of an Egyptian priest (Potiphera in Hebrew; Pentephres in Greek), and she married Joseph and bore Manasseh and Ephraim (41:45, 50–52). Aseneth is never mentioned again in the Tanakh or Christian Bible, and Genesis expresses no concern that she was Egyptian. The Israelite ancestral stories are interesting in this regard; sometimes they care about endogamy (marrying within kinship boundaries), and sometimes they do not (e.g., compare Genesis 24 and 28 with Genesis 38). Nevertheless, what didn't bother the scribes of Genesis raised questions for later Jewish writers. How could Joseph marry an Egyptian woman?

Among other ideas, rabbinic authors suggested that Aseneth was the daughter of Joseph's half-sister Dinah (*Pirqe Rabbi Eliezer* 38; *Soferim* 21), but a Hellenistic Jewish writer took a different tack, narrating how Aseneth changed her allegiances to Joseph's deity.[1]

That text, *Joseph and Aseneth*, embeds its plot into the biblical story about Joseph, but it tells the story of Aseneth—a woman renowned for her beauty but who disdained men, until she caught sight of the handsome Joseph, married him, and ultimately became a model of mercy and a refuge for treacherous brothers. When we first meet Aseneth, she spends her time in a tower of elaborate chambers where she venerates her Egyptian gods daily. Pentephres plans to arrange Aseneth's marriage to Joseph, and although she initially scowls at the idea, she becomes smitten with him after watching Joseph arrive to Pentephres's complex. But when she finally meets Joseph, he refuses to greet her with a kiss because, he explains, "It is not fitting for a God-fearing man" to kiss a woman who venerates other gods.

This rejection motivates Aseneth to discard her religious objects and disavow her allegiance to Egyptian gods. She sits in mourning attire and ashes for a week and offers prayers of repentance and lament. On the eighth day, an unnamed angel visits her. He declares that God has heard her pleas, promises that her name will be written in a heavenly book of the living, renames her "City of Refuge," and confirms that she will marry Joseph. This encounter concludes with Aseneth sharing a meal with the angel by consuming part of a heavenly honeycomb, which provides Aseneth knowledge of God's mysteries; royal-looking bees rise out of this comb in a miraculous scene that seals her encounter with the angel. Joseph returns and reciprocates Aseneth's affection, the two wed soon after, and Aseneth bears their sons.

Yet now, in a fit of jealousy, Pharaoh's

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ASENETH appears on the right, next to Joseph, in Rembrandt's *Jacob Blessing the Sons of Joseph* (1656).

son tries to enlist Levi and Simeon to kill Joseph and kidnap Aseneth. Pharaoh's son had heard of the military prowess of these sons of Jacob at Shechem (Genesis 34), and he promises great rewards if they cooperate with him. Simeon wishes to respond with his sword, but Levi abruptly stops him, saying that as God-fearing men, "It is not fitting to repay evil for evil." Levi sternly rejects the proposal of Pharaoh's son. He also warns that he and Simeon will use their swords in defense against him if he proceeds.

Pharaoh's son then turns his attention to Jacob's sons born of Bilhah and Zilpah. In ancient Israel, children born of a female slave and her male owner could be legitimate heirs; it was one way that wealthy men maintained property ownership within their household. Bilhah and Zilpah, the female slaves of Rachel and Leah, produced legitimate sons according to Genesis (29–30; 49), but in this story, we find out that Dan, Gad, Naphtali, and Asher worry about their future and so commit to the plan without hesitation. Pharaoh's son commissions thousands of soldiers under their care, and an ambush attempt is set. Military skirmishes follow, which include Aseneth protecting the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah and convincing their brothers not to repay evil for evil. Within days, though, both Pharaoh and his son pass away, and Pharaoh had left the crown to Joseph. He reigns for 48 years in Egypt and then passes the crown on to his predecessor's next heir.

Joseph and Aseneth was likely composed in Greek in Egypt during Hellenistic and early Roman rule (between 100 B.C.E. and 100 C.E.), and it expresses one way that Jewish communities rewrote their heritage in Egypt—a place where many of them thrived but which their ancestral stories despised. *Joseph and Aseneth* subverts Jewish ancestors to be greater than Hellenistic rulers (one of their own *was* a pharaoh), but it also echoes real life in Hellenistic Egypt where a high percentage of Jewish men were soldiers, all inhabitants had to negotiate hostilities and disputes in their multicultural environment, foreign rulers embedded their presence into pharaonic history, and some Jews arguably married people from non-Jewish families.

Joseph and Aseneth's literary style and content borrow from other Septuagint texts (Judges, 1 Samuel, Daniel, and the Psalms), and it is one of several stories composed during this period that rescripted power to belong to Jews and their deity and not to imperial rule (other examples are the books of Judith and Tobit).[2]

Joseph and Aseneth likely began as a Jewish story, but it spread among Christian scribes in later years. It is preserved in 91 manuscripts, spanning the seventh to early 19th centuries and written in several languages (primarily in Armenian, Greek, Latin, Slavonic, and Syriac). Some scholars argue that the story was created in late antiquity as a Christian text, but most still posit a Hellenistic Jewish origin.[3] Interestingly, the manuscripts share a core storyline but individually exhibit distinct alterations, deletions, and expansions. If anything, the evidence demonstrates the longevity and popularity of this story about Aseneth, a Hebrew queen of Egypt.

[1] Patricia D. Ahearne-Kroll, "Joseph and Aseneth," in Louis H. Feldman, James L. Kugel, and Lawrence H. Schiffman, eds., *Outside the Bible: Ancient Jewish Writings Related to Scripture*, vol. 3 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), pp. 2525–2589.

[2] Patricia D. Ahearne-Kroll, *Aseneth of Egypt: The Composition of a Jewish Narrative* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2020).

[3] The most thorough argument advocating for a late antique, Christian setting is Ross Shepard Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph: A Late Antique Tale of the Biblical Patriarch and His Egyptian Wife, Reconsidered* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998).

WHENCE-A-WORD?

"Chasing After Wind"

"ALL IS VANITY AND A CHASING AFTER WIND," proclaims the Book of Ecclesiastes (*Qoheleth*, in Hebrew). The notoriously pessimistic biblical book pairs the metaphor of the wind (*ruah*) with the concept of "vanity" (*hebel*, which literally means "vapor") six times (e.g., 1:14; 2:11, 26) to underscore the folly, futility, and transitory nature of all human toils for understanding the world and finding meaning and happiness. To be chasing after wind is therefore a synonym for any futile endeavor, a chasing of elusive goals.

Though rooted in and disseminated by the Bible, the phrase might have its origins in ancient Near Eastern literature. A particularly close parallel is found in the Mesopotamian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, where the protagonist says to his friend Enkidu, "Whatever one may achieve, it is but wind." Because this phrase is not the only seeming parallel to Ecclesiastes, some assume that the anonymous biblical author knew and was inspired by this work. But it is also possible that the expression was a common idiom used throughout the ancient Near East.

In modern times, the phrase is the focal point of the satirical allegory *The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart*, by John Amos Comenius (1592–1670), a Moravian philosopher and theologian. The work tells the story of a pilgrim visiting a city (the world), where he observes different human conditions, occupations, and pursuits, only to discover that all is vanity, "a chasing after wind," unless one turns to his heart to find God.

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Voices from the Ruins

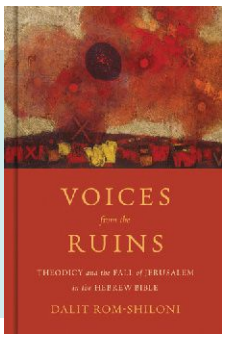
STEPHEN L. COOK

JERUSALEM'S RAZING IN 586 B.C.E. was devastating, and conflicting cries from the tragedy echo down across the ages. In a host of Hebrew Scriptures, we hear the clash of varying voices from Judah's smoking ruins—destroyed at the hands of the Babylonian army of King Nebuchadnezzar II. Together with the biblical writers, we search for meaning amid such crisis. This inquiry is a perfect example of theodicy, which is an attempt to reconcile our understanding of God as good and omnipotent with the perceived existence of evil and suffering in the world. A balanced search for meaning, however, requires listening to all the voices, including those of severe doubt and protest. The dissonances between conflicting voices must clang in Bible readers' ears, compelling serious reflection. The dissonant voices are on full display in biblical passages such as Jeremiah 21:2–5, Psalm 79:8, and Ezekiel 5:9.

As of 586 B.C.E., Jerusalem lay in ruins, and the Israelites were anxiously asking about God's nature and character. Professor Dalit Rom-Shiloni's magisterial work of descriptive theology, *Voices from the Ruins*, transports us back to the sixth century to hear the voices sounding amid the Bible's most extreme calamity. A biblical scholar at Tel Aviv University, Rom-Shiloni is passionate about the conversation. Her biblical theology is specifically *descriptive*. It is not driven by Christian or Jewish concerns but attends strictly to the historical and ideological contexts that biblical texts of multiple genres engage.

The author unearths a vast, lively interplay of ideas in the sixth century and gives each voice serious airtime. The study presents a plurality of informed and pious voices sharing equal footing in a dialogue. Rom-Shiloni insists that we not automatically privilege prophetic voices that justify God's anger, as past studies have often done. The Bible's voices of dissent are often sincere—not ignorant, impious, or heretical. However, there is an unseen elephant in the proposed approach. It is the voice of Scripture as Scripture (i.e., the final holistic biblical corpus, which exceeds the sum of its parts in vision and purview), which should arguably be allowed a place in the discussion.

Voices from the Ruins: Theodicy and the Fall of Jerusalem in the Hebrew Bible
By Dalit Rom-Shiloni
(Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021), xviii + 562 pp., graphs, $70 (hardcover)



It is easy to ignore the voice of Scripture as Scripture. Like fish in a pond, Bible readers do not generally notice the water. Like others before her, Rom-Shiloni leaves out the voice in describing the argument of prophets over Jerusalem's coming fate. The prophets Jeremiah and Hananiah famously banged heads over Jerusalem's future (see Jeremiah 28). In presenting the clash, Scripture parts company with Rom-Shiloni and resists construing the confrontation as an even contest of equally plausible views. It notably refuses to accede to a construal of true prophets as debaters who toss out revelations at will. Instead, Scripture contributes a theocentric perspective on the confrontation, in which God and Jeremiah know the future and wait in anguish for Judah's assured judgment and sure re-creation.

As another example of this missing voice, Rom-Shiloni fails to engage the Book of Isaiah's obvious cross-referencing of Lamentations. Lamentations, as a biblical book with a biblical context, sits in an intertextual continuum that includes Isaiah 40–55 in dialogue. Interconnections with Isaiah 40–55 bid readers step back from the heat of the historical moment—from the searing hurt out of which Lamentations initially sounded its cries of pain—and gain perspective. As the cries of Lamentations echo in the texts of Isaiah, their pain is allowed time to "breathe," and a coming sublime intervention of God takes shape as an unexpected marvel. A theocentric perspective again emerges to open readers' eyes to God's ultimate fairness.

Rom-Shiloni's impressively documented tome represents intense dialogues and debates over theodicy that together constitute a religious struggle for comprehension. More than 550 pages thick, her book is a definitive study of Israelite religious responses to the fall of Jerusalem as found in the Bible.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Merneptah

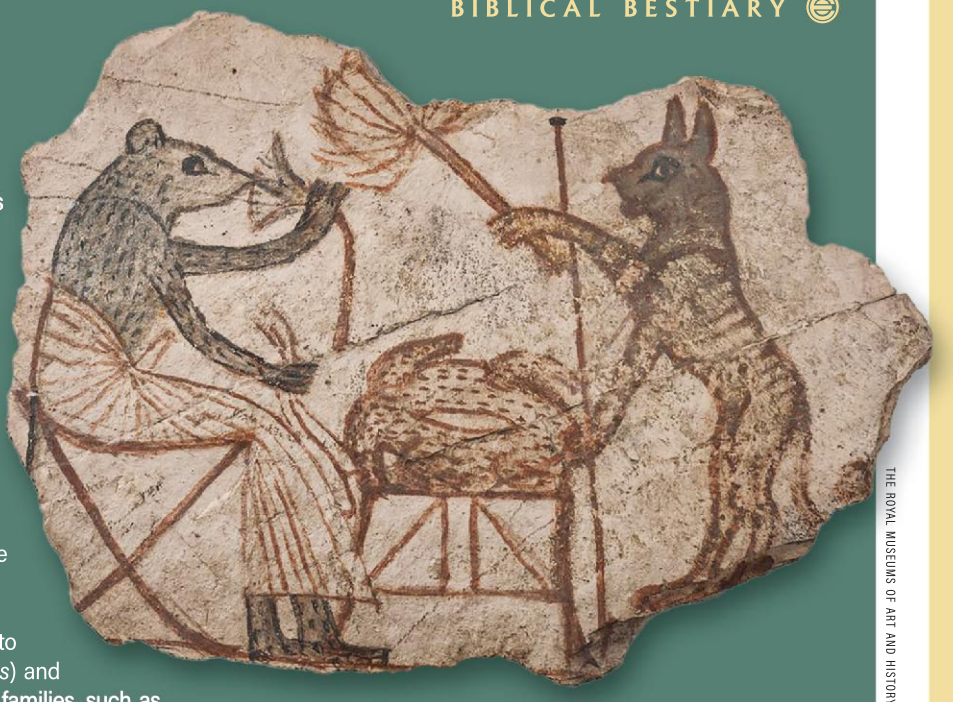
Mr-n-ptḥ

Mr = "beloved" | *n* = "of" | *Ptḥ*= "god Ptah"

Merneptah ruled Egypt as the fourth king of the 19th Dynasty, from 1213 to 1203 B.C.E. His theophoric name contains the verb *mrj* (to love) in the form of the passive participle—*mr* (beloved)—and the name of the Egyptian creator god Ptah. These two words are joined by the preposition *n* (of), which functions to express a relationship between both elements. The result is the phrase "Beloved of Ptah."

BAR readers know Merneptah thanks to the so-called Merneptah Stele, which celebrates the pharaoh's military victories, including in Canaan (see p. 51). The monumental stele's penultimate line refers to a people called Israel, and, therefore, the stone is sometimes referred to as the "Israel Stele."

Mouse



THE ROYAL MUSEUMS OF ART AND HISTORY, BRUSSELS

Ever since *Homo sapiens* domesticated grains and animals, mice have been our uninvited hangers-on, always happy to grab an easy meal and take up free lodging afforded to them by human settlement. In agricultural societies of the ancient Near East, the mouse and similar rodents were primarily thought of as vermin and a major source of crop damage.

In modern usage, the term "mouse" is not strictly taxonomic and is applied also to species from outside the genus *mus*. Ancient texts similarly do not allow one to determine the exact species of rodent, whether mouse or otherwise; for example, the generic Hebrew word *akbār* can refer to various mice but also rats (genus *rattus*) and even species from different taxonomic families, such as jerboas, hamsters, and dormice. About 25 different species of such animals can be found in the southern Levant today.

According to Herodotus (*History* 2.141), the formidable army of Sennacherib, which had come against the helpless Egyptians in 701 B.C.E., was defeated by field mice that had gnawed through the army's bowstrings and shield straps prior to battle. This story seems inspired by Yahweh's delivery of Jerusalem the same year (2 Kings 19:35) and may refer to the pestilence that rodents were known to communicate.

Humans have been eating rodents since early times, but Leviticus 11:29 prohibits consumption of mice and similar "creatures that swarm." Other biblical mentions of "mice" include Isaiah 2:20, where moles (or other rodents) are prophesied to destroy people's gold and silver idols. First Samuel 6 recounts how "mice that ravage the land" afflicted the Philistines prior to their returning the Ark of the Covenant.

Ancient Egyptians had a mixed relationship with mice. They feared them, as is apparent in the spells to ward off mice, but they also considered some mice sacred, especially within the solar cult: The shrewmouse was sacred to the solar deity Horus of Letopolis. Associated with the sun's regenerative powers, mice became a symbol of rebirth, which explains mouse imagery in funerary contexts. In later periods, Egyptians even mummified mice and shrews. Due to their observed fertility, mice also played a medical and magical role, as witnessed in apotropaic figurines.

In the above drawing from the Egyptian New Kingdom (c. 1539–1077 B.C.E.), a cat in the role of a funerary priest approaches a sitting mouse with offerings. The motif may be a humorous satire or an illustration to a now-lost story.

CLIP ART (SEE QUIZ ON P. 61)

Answer: 4

The fresco of *The Ark and the Temple of Dagon*, from the synagogue of Dura-Europos in modern Syria, was painted by an unknown artist c. 240 C.E. This scene, from 1 Samuel 5:1–8 in which God uses the Ark of the Covenant to destroy the statue of Dagon in the Philistine temple at Ashdod, is one of many biblical scenes found in the synagogue. Others include the *Crossing of the Red Sea*, *Sacrifice of Isaac*, and *Elijah and the Prophets of Baal*, to name a few. All are beautifully preserved, thanks in large measure to the synagogue being filled in with earth and incorporated into the city's defenses prior to the attack of the Sasanian Persians around 256 C.E.

Discovered in 1932, the synagogue's frescoes (paintings on fresh, or wet, plaster) are some of the most sophisticated to be found at Dura-Europos. An artist may have been brought in to paint them, which could indicate that other synagogues in the Roman Levant had similarly brilliant frescoes. We know from rabbinic literature that Jews in Roman Palestine commissioned such wall paintings in the third century.

The Dura-Europos synagogue frescoes, including *The Ark and the Temple of Dagon*, were preserved and relocated to the National Museum in Damascus shortly after their discovery.

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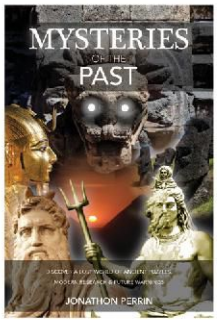

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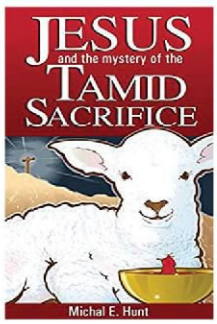
Jesus and the Mystery of the Tamid Sacrifice

The Jerusalem Temple's Daily Worship Prefigured Christ's Sacrifice



by Michal E. Hunt

Christ's Passion reveals the mystery of the Jerusalem Temple's twice-daily communal sacrifice of a lamb in a morning and afternoon liturgical service for the atonement and sanctification of the covenant people. The Tamid sacrifice took precedence over all other sacrifices and prefigured Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the altar of the Cross. He was the true Tamid Lamb that all past Tamid lambs prefigured.

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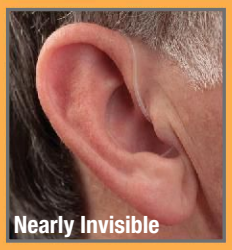

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ERIC CARLSON

"Pops, you're going to love my lamb chowder, or my name isn't Esau!"

FENTON GROFF
MAYS LANDING, NEW JERSEY

Thank you to all those who submitted caption entries for our Winter 2021 cartoon (left), based on Genesis 27:19: "Jacob said to his father, 'I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me; now sit up and eat of my game, so that you may bless me.'" We are pleased to congratulate Fenton Groff of Mays Landing, New Jersey, who wrote the winning caption, and our runners-up:

RUNNERS-UP

"Mom has put me in a hairy situation ..."

PHILLIP HADDEN
CONCORD, ILLINOIS

"What do you mean you are waiting for an Uber Eats delivery from Chick-fil-A?"

ROY BEDFORD
ST. ALBERT, ALBERTA, CANADA

HONORABLE MENTIONS

"Hi, Pop! Are you game for a game with game?"

HATTEE CHRISTIAN
COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA

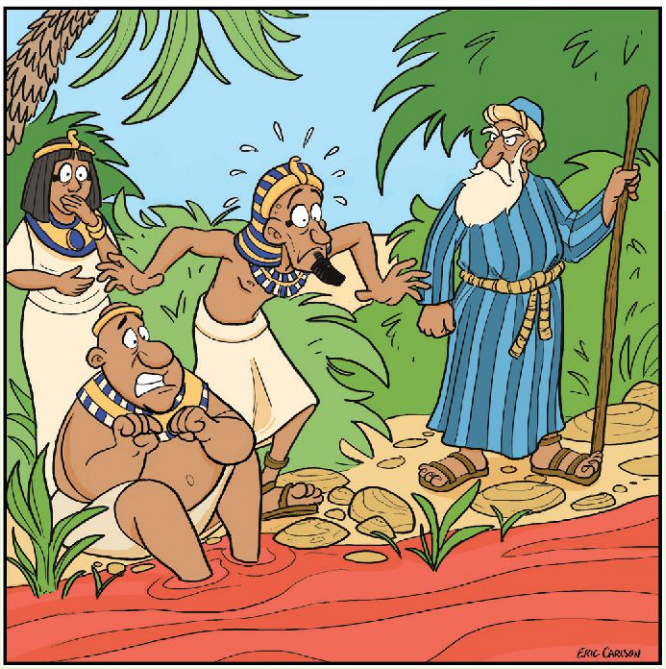
"I wonder if Esau me?!"

CHAIM KAGEDAN
TEANECK, NEW JERSEY

For additional caption entries, as well as past cartoons and captions, please visit **biblicalarchaeology.org/captioncontest**.

Write a caption for the cartoon (right) based on Exodus 7:20: "Moses and Aaron did just as the Lord commanded. In the sight of Pharaoh and of his officials he lifted up the staff and struck the water in the river, and all the water in the river was turned into blood." Submit it via our website at **biblicalarchaeology.org/captioncontest**.

Please include your name and address. The deadline for entries is August 15, 2022. The author of the winning caption will receive a BAS All-Access membership and three gift subscriptions to give **BAR** to friends. Runners-up will receive an All-Access membership and two gift subscriptions for friends.



ERIC CARLSON

Exodus 7:20

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Carl & Mary Rasmussen

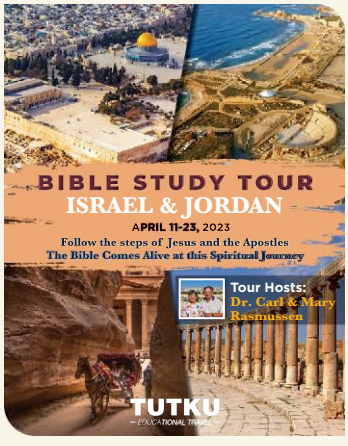
Greetings! The following is the handcrafted itinerary of the Bible Study trip that Mary and I are leading in response to those who have asked us to put together a "not for credit" study tour. I will be giving mini-lectures along the way both on the bus and on the sites, drawing from my studies. I have spent 16 years of my adult life living in, and guiding, academic groups in Israel, Jordan, Greece, and Turkey *(including living, teaching, and guiding in Jerusalem for 7 years).*

I maintain the web site www.HolylandPhotos.org that features over 6,400 free, high-quality and high-resolution images of Israel, Turkey, Greece, Jordan, and Italy.

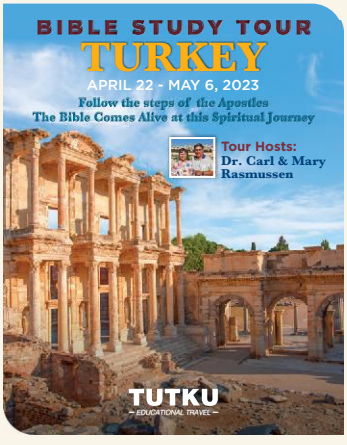
I am the author of the *Zondervan Atlas of the Bible*.

Dr. Carl Rasmussen, *Ph.D.*
Emeritus Professor of Old Testament, Bethel University

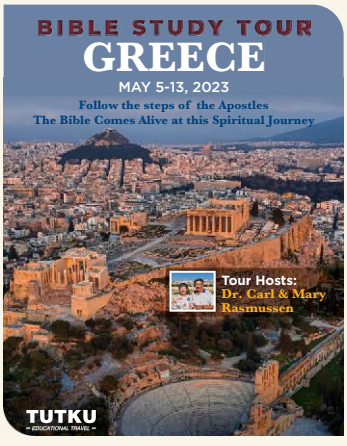
1 13 DAYS
April 11-23, 2023



2 14 DAYS
April 22 - May 6, 2023



3 9 DAYS
May 5-13, 2023



4 33 DAYS
April 11 - May 13, 2023

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