BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY REVIEW

WINTER 2023 ▪ VOL 49 NO 4

Stone Statues
of the Ammonites

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BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY REVIEW
VOL. 49 NO. 4
WINTER 2023

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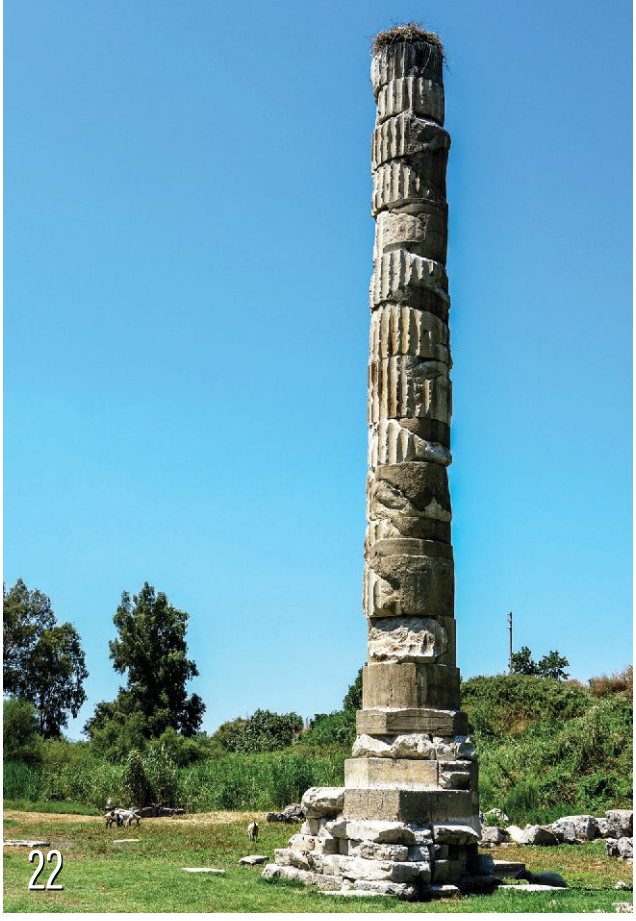
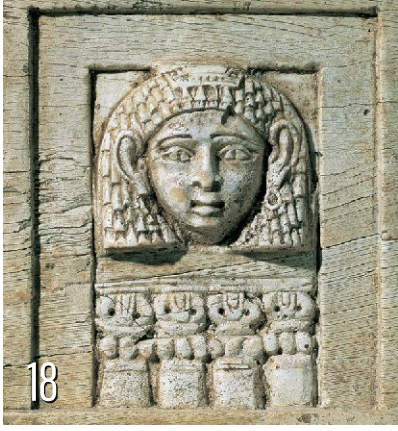
FEATURES

ON THE COVER: This bust, with its piercing eyes, well-defined features, and closely cropped beard, probably represents an Ammonite deity. The distinctive conical crown with side volutes, similar to the Egyptian *atef* crown, was included in depictions of gods and goddesses throughout the region during the Bronze and Iron Ages.
PHOTO: ERICH LESSING / ART RESOURCE, NY

EDITOR'S NOTE: An image with human skeletal remains appears on p. 35 of this issue.





STRATA

EPISTLES

PLUS

WEB EXCLUSIVE

The Great Paul Debate

biblicalarchaeology.org/pauldebate

Was the apostle Paul an early convert to Christian belief, or steadfastly committed to the Judaism of his day? Biblical scholar David Clausen explored such questions in his recent **BAR** article, "Five Myths About the Apostle Paul." In this Web Exclusive, two Pauline scholars, Ben Witherington III of Asbury Theological Seminary and Nijay Gupta of Northern Seminary, weigh in with their own perspectives on Paul and his teachings, while Clausen responds to their arguments.

LUCA SARTONI / CC BY-SA 2.0

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A BAR for Every Taste

EVERY ISSUE, WE GET A LOT OF LETTERS from our readers (see Queries & Comments, p. 6). Some remark on how much they enjoyed a particular article; others voice their displeasure when our authors question the Bible; still others have thoughtful, insightful questions about something they read (my favorite!).

It's always fun to read through these letters, but they are also a constant reminder never to assume too much about who you are, what you believe, and why you read the magazine. **BAR** reaches an amazing array of people: believers, nonbelievers, seekers, armchair archaeologists, history buffs, students, teachers, Bible study groups, pastors, and rabbis, to name but a few. Given **BAR**'s eclectic readership, my main goal as Editor-in-Chief is simply to make the best and latest scholarship on the world of the Bible accessible and interesting to as many people as possible.

I hope our Winter 2023 issue does just that! In "Archaeology in the Land of Midian," explore the ruins of Qurayyah, a thriving desert oasis that dominated northwest Arabia—biblical Midian—during the time of Moses and the Exodus. In "The House of Peter: Capernaum or Bethsaida?" revisit the site of El-Araj on the Sea of Galilee and examine new evidence that its Byzantine church was where early Christians commemorated the house of the chief apostle.

In "Hard Power," learn about the impressive stone statues of the biblical Ammonites, one of ancient Israel's chief rivals east of the Jordan, and why this small Iron Age kingdom developed such a monumental artistic style. And in "Warrior Women," study a new mosaic from the Huqoq synagogue that depicts Deborah's victory over the Canaanites and learn why this famous biblical story continued to resonate with Jewish audiences in late antiquity.

In addition to news, updates, and our always-enjoyable quizzes, Strata examines the "woman in the window" motif in ancient Near Eastern art and the biblical passages that shed light on its meaning and symbolism. Author Jennifer Tobin seeks the origins of the world's seven great wonders and finds that ancient authors could never quite agree on which sites should make the list. Test Kitchen also delivers a savory meat cake from medieval Mongolia that will add the perfect amount of spice to any holiday meal.

Epistles takes a critical look at the history, traditions, and peoples behind the biblical text. In searching for the Nativity story's Star of Bethlehem, **BAR** Assistant Editor Nathan Steinmeyer reminds us of the very different ways in which ancient astronomers perceived and interpreted celestial events. Andrew Tobolowsky probes the origins of ancient Israel's tribes and concludes that the 12-tribe tradition was likely more idealized myth than historical reality. Finally, Jonathan Robie demonstrates how artificial intelligence is revolutionizing Bible translation but also presenting new challenges for producing reliable and trusted results.

As with every issue of **BAR**, some will find these articles informative and enlightening, others will find them challenging or even troubling, and many will simply enjoy their beautiful illustrations (which is fine, too!). But my hope is that everyone finds something to enjoy while also appreciating the diverse values, backgrounds, and interests of all those who read the magazine.—**GLENN J. CORBETT**

BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY REVIEW

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A NOTE ON STYLE: BCE (Before the Common Era) and CE (Common Era), used by some of our authors, are the alternative designations often used in scholarly literature for BC and AD. Biblical citations come from the NRSV, unless otherwise specified.

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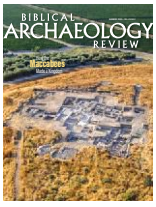

Thank you for sharing your thoughts and comments about our Summer 2023 issue. We appreciate your feedback. Here are a few of the letters and responses we received. Find more online at **biblicalarchaeology.org/letters**.

Pleasant Trend

AS A CHURCH PASTOR and amateur historian, I've always enjoyed **BAR** and find many of the articles of personal interest. Lately, I've noticed a pleasant trend in the overall focus of the articles—that they are, well, biblical. Each article seems to relate directly to the Bible, whereas before some of the articles were a bit more tertiary and critical. For what it's worth, I appreciate your work.

BRUCE BUTLER
GLENDORA, CALIFORNIA

Invisible David and Solomon

THE AUTHORS of "David and Solomon's Invisible Kingdom" point to the paucity of archaeological evidence for tent-dwelling nomads. However, most nomads move with their herds in routine ways in search of good grazing ground. Each location has water and other geography to support tent living. Some nomads might even build permanent features like platforms, tables, or seating to use when they return to a certain location. Looking for these features could also reveal trash heaps, broken crockery, and household goods that they left behind.

JOANN MCFARLAND
STANFIELD, OREGON

ZACHARY THOMAS AND EREZ BEN-YOSEF RESPOND:

Unfortunately, the archaeological study of nomads in the southern Levant proves otherwise. We also should be wary of a positivistic approach that assumes if something existed, it must have left traces. Although it has been observed that nomads in the modern Middle East modify their seasonal campsites, we have no reason to assume that this was the case with all historical nomads. In any case, archaeologists have looked for possible "household" remains, but those are rare, difficult to date, and, most importantly, do not reveal much about the social structure of these nomads.

THE REASON WHY archaeologists have not been able to find evidence for David and Solomon's kingdom is because it was never there. Unfortunately, biblical scholars tend to have tunnel vision about the earliest figures in the Bible. They insist the Bible is accurate, and then have to squeeze the evidence into a false narrative. Is that true scholarship? It seems more like a comedy of errors.

MARGARET KING
THE WOODLANDS, TEXAS

Memorable Maccabees

THANKS TO ANDREA BERLIN for such a clearly written piece on how the Maccabees were able to achieve power ("The Rise of the Maccabees"). I appreciated not only her logic and explanations, but also her memorable historical and archaeological descriptions. What gorgeous writing!

DANA WATERS
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

Praise for Gilgamesh

I WAS PLEASED to read your article on the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. I first read *Gilgamesh* years ago, was deeply impressed, and have reread it several times in different translations. Among its many fascinating qualities are its clear ties to the Bible, especially Genesis. It's so obvious they have a common source but a different emphasis.

MARIAN POWELL
HUMBOLDT, ARIZONA

To learn more about the cultural and literary connections between the Epic of Gilgamesh *and the Bible, read Adam Miglio's* Bible History Daily *article "Genesis and Gilgamesh": biblicalarchaeology.org/gilgamesh.*—ED.

I AM AN AVID SUPPORTER of animal welfare and read several magazines on the subject. Amazingly, one of them recently featured an article about the *Epic of Gilgamesh*! Michael Mountain, a well-known animal activist, wrote about how the ancient epic "captures the essence of our relationship to our fellow animals," and how the saga encourages us to live in harmony with nature. One of the themes he covers is how the Gilgamesh story addresses our need to accept that we are also animals and instead of conquering nature, we need to find a way to fit into it. It is a different and refreshing take for modern times on an ancient tale.

CLARE FEINSON
WASHINGTON, DC

Paul Pushback

CORRECT ME if I'm wrong, but **BAR** is an archaeological journal, not a forum for theological debate. The article "Five Myths About the Apostle Paul," by David Clausen, is not only a poor example of new age religious revisionism, but it isn't even remotely connected to biblical archaeology. Instead, it only seems to serve as a childish and

LET US HEAR FROM YOU!

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uninformed attempt at tearing down core Christian doctrines.

PHILLIP HORTON
SPRINGVILLE, ALABAMA

BAR does aim to present the latest archaeological discoveries from the world of the Bible. But in our Epistles section, we also highlight new scholarly insights into the Bible's history and composition, including, in this case, how Paul's letters would have been read and understood in their own time.—ED.

WHILE I AGREE there are misconceptions about Paul, Clausen weakens his case by overstating certain elements while eliding evidence that speaks against his arguments. One example: He states, "Paul brought his gospel to those who had no covenant relationship with the God of Israel" (p. 61). This ignores the fact that, as often recorded in the Book of Acts, Paul "brought his gospel" into the synagogues whenever he entered a city, preaching first to his fellow Jews. It is unfortunate that Clausen, in his desire to "de-mythologize" Paul, transgresses Paul's admonition to the believers in Corinth: "Do not go beyond what is written."

PATRICK PAULSEN
TORONTO, ONTARIO, CANADA

DAVID CLAUSEN RESPONDS:

Because of its late, second-century date, Acts should not be used as an unimpeachable source about what Paul did. In Paul's own letters, he proclaimed himself apostle to the Gentiles. Undoubtedly Paul stopped at synagogues (where there were any) while he traveled, and likely explained his mission and message about Gentile redemption to their leadership (he says they whipped him a number of times over it), but this did not alter his stated mission.

I READ WITH INTEREST David Clausen's "Five Myths" but take exception to his assertion that "Historically, we know that there was no such thing as 'Christianity' in the time of Paul, and the word 'Christian' was likely not in use either" (p. 60). Acts 11:26 states, "For a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch" (NIV). It thus seems that the term "Christian" was indeed in use during the time of Paul. Am I misreading that passage?

RUSSELL V. OLSON JR.
DAVIDSON, NORTH CAROLINA

DAVID CLAUSEN RESPONDS:

Note that Acts does not say when Christianity became a term for the movement in Antioch. If Acts is indeed a second-century composition, it tallies with the time in which Ignatius of Antioch also began using the term "Christianity."

SPACE WOULD NOT PERMIT a full listing of the New Testament passages contradicting David Clausen's fourth myth that "Paul taught that Christ died for the sins of the world." Instead, I will just appeal to logic. If Jews already had "ample means of atonement" for sin, why wouldn't God's solution for the Gentiles simply be for them to convert to Judaism? It is not surprising that many people believe that Christ's death is not necessary for *them*. But it is logically untenable to believe that God has one plan for Jewish salvation and a different plan for the Gentiles.

PATRICIA MOKHTARIAN
ATLANTA, GEORGIA

DAVID CLAUSEN RESPONDS:

Paul certainly acknowledged that everyone had to deal with sin. But as any first-century Jew would have known, they had for centuries dealt with sin within their covenant relationship with God, which offered them means of atonement. This does not mean that the resurrected Jesus had no meaning for believing Jews, who found much meaning in his life and message and anticipated his imminent return. Their hope lay largely in Jesus's ability to restore Israel once he returned, not in forgiveness of sin for individuals.

As for converting Gentiles to Judaism, Paul knew the Hebrew prophecies that spoke of Gentiles ("the nations"), not converted Jews, joining their Jewish neighbors in the worship of God, ostensibly on the Day of the Lord. This was Paul's message: There was now a means for Gentiles to remain Gentiles yet be redeemed of their sin within a new covenant relationship that would number them among God's people.

biblicalarchaeology.org/pauldebate
Check out this issue's Web Exclusive (see p. 3) for other leading scholarly perspectives on the apostle Paul.

Debating the Bible's Relevance

IN HIS REVIEW of John Dominic Crossan's *Render Unto Caesar*, Zeba Crook criticizes Crossan for not showing "why the Bible should not be used to shape modern social, political, and economic policy." His suggestion is wrong on multiple levels. Although a work of literature, the Bible is considered by Christians to be the revealed word of God. To suggest the Bible is no longer "culturally relevant" goes against the heart of what the Bible says and is entirely wrong. The Bible has endured for thousands of years, and its spiritual truths will endure forever.

ANDY HEATON
HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA

A Nice Surprise

I WAS PLEASANTLY SURPRISED to see the Summer issue's "Who Did It?" quiz about Barbara Mertz! Only a few hours before, I had been looking at Mertz's two Egyptian books, which I read not once but twice many years ago. They were some of the most interesting books I have ever read, and I had kept them in a special place. I did not know that she had been a mystery writer as well. I can only say that anyone, especially a person who likes Egyptology, should read her books and enjoy!

PAUL SANGSTER
GARDNERVILLE, NEVADA

Define Error

I HAD A GOOD LAUGH reading the answer to "Define Intervention" in the Summer issue where it says: "In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Dilmun is the island reserved for Utnapishtim and his wife, who survived the Great Food" (p. 66). I wonder what may have been on the menu that was revered as Great Food.

CARL NYE
COTTONWOOD, ARIZONA

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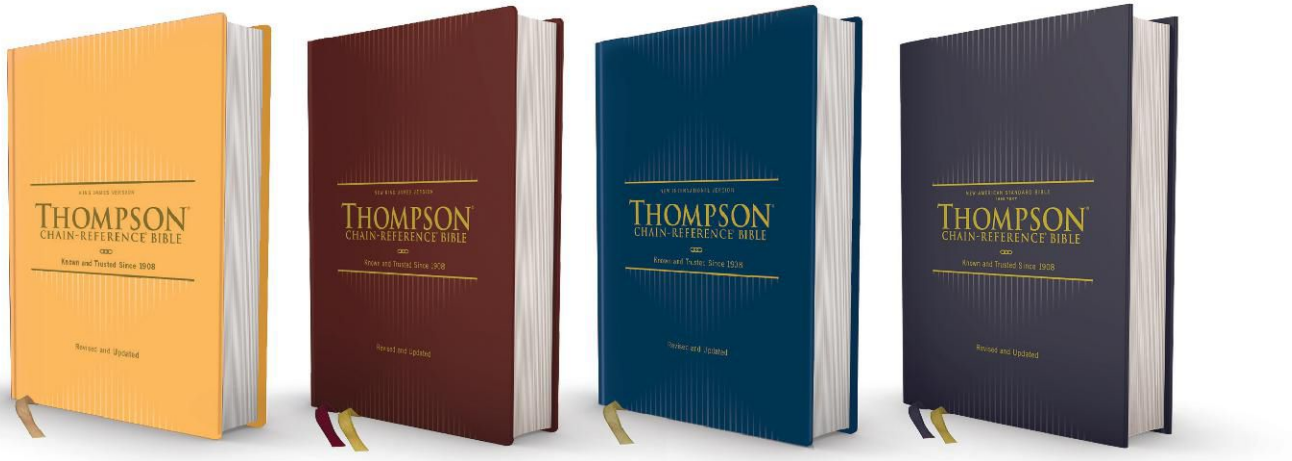

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Teomim Cave, Israel

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Gateway to the Underworld

THE EXPANSIVE TEOMIM CAVE, just 20 miles west of Jerusalem, has yielded a variety of objects that suggests it was the site of necromancy in the second through fourth centuries CE. In antiquity, caves were considered gateways to the underworld, and this sometimes led to the performance of necromantic or divinatory rituals in which mediums consulted the spirits of the dead. Such ceremonies frequently involved the kinds of objects that archaeologists found in Teomim Cave: oil lamps, human skulls, metal implements for repelling spirits, and bowls for pooling and reflecting water.

According to local lore, Teomim Cave (the "Cave of the Twins") is associated with the supernatural. The cave's name in both Hebrew and Arabic refers to a legend about an infertile woman who drank from the water pooled in the cave and then gave birth to twins. This led to a traditional belief in the healing power of the cave's water. The cave's role in ancient necromancy thus fits within a more extensive tradition surrounding the site's magical significance.

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COURTESY THE MEGIDDO EXPEDITION

Grave goods from Megiddo

Wine for the Departed

A NEW STUDY shows that wine was a regular feature of Canaanite burials at Megiddo, providing a rare window into how the Bronze Age peoples of the Levant may have perceived the afterlife.

Using chemical analysis, a research team studied 30 ceramic vessels from two separate sections of Megiddo, both dating to the Middle Bronze Age (c. 2000–1550 BCE): a normal residential area and an elite monumental tomb. About a third of the vessels showed signs of having been filled with wine. Other vessels had traces of beeswax, animal fat, olive oil, resin, and even vanilla.

Researchers believe these precious products may have been part of funerary feasts or left as offerings for the dead, or perhaps both. If the wine was meant for the deceased, the custom would be similar to the Egyptian practice of burying the dead with supplies for the afterlife, thus possibly demonstrating a belief in the need to nourish the soul after death.

BLICKWINKEL / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

WHAT IS IT?

1. Poppy
2. Lotus
3. Rose of Sharon
4. Flax
5. Papyrus

ANSWER ON P. 24

Amnon Ben-Tor (1935–2023)

AMNON BEN-TOR, one of the giants of biblical archaeology and long-time excavator of the biblical site of Hazor in northern Israel, passed away on August 22. He was 87 years old.

Ben-Tor belonged to the first generation of Israeli archaeologists trained in the State of Israel. He began his studies in 1955 at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where he participated in his first study excavation at Hazor, which was then directed by the pioneering Israeli archaeologist Yigael Yadin.

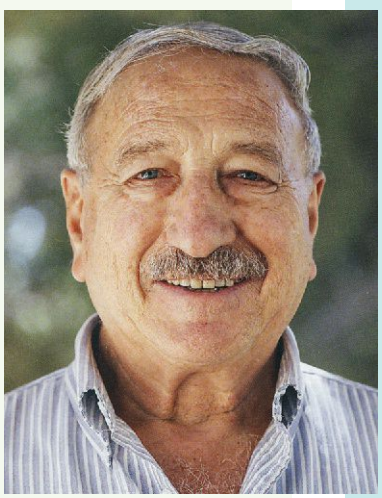

PHOTO BY GABI LARON, COURTESY IGOR KREIMERMAN

In 1969, Ben-Tor completed his Ph.D. and became a lecturer at the Hebrew University's Institute of Archaeology. He was named the Yigael Yadin Professor in the Archaeology of Eretz Israel in 1988, a position he held until his retirement in 2003.

Ben-Tor was among the first archaeologists in Israel to study sites in a regional context. From 1977 to 1988, he conducted the Western Jezreel Valley Regional Project, which included the excavation of not just the large mound of Yoqneam and two smaller sites but also a survey of the valley.

Of course, Ben-Tor was best known for directing the Hazor excavations, which he renewed in 1990 after inheriting the project from Yadin. His excavations were a great success, uncovering monumental Canaanite architecture from the Middle and Late Bronze Ages (second millennium BCE), as well as Iron Age fortifications, storage houses, and domestic structures that contributed significantly to our understanding of ancient Israelite society and to debates about the archaeology of David and Solomon.

Ben-Tor was a formidable archaeologist who shaped the field of biblical archaeology as we know it today. Although this wonderful, charismatic teacher is gone, his legacy lives on through his students, his publications, and the future excavations of Hazor.—**IGOR KREIMERMAN**

To read the full tribute, visit **biblicalarchaeology.org/milestones**.

Pompeii Pizza?


Fresco with various food items on a silver tray

EXCAVATIONS IN ANCIENT POMPEII, which was destroyed in 79 CE by the eruption of nearby Mt. Vesuvius, have revealed a traditional Roman home with a central atrium, kitchen shrine, oven, and beautiful frescoes. Astonishingly, one of the frescoes includes a depiction of something that looks an awful lot like pizza, a cuisine that originated in Naples nearly 2,000 years later.

The home's entrance opened onto its central atrium on the eastern side. To the atrium's north were found a laundry area and a bed that was destroyed in the eruption. On the west was a large oven, as well as the ash-covered remains of three individuals in a nearby workroom.

On the atrium's southern side, a cluster of rooms served as a kitchen and were decorated with ornate frescoes of animals and geometric designs. One of the rooms functioned as a small shrine where fish, fruits, and other foods were likely offered to the household gods.

Just outside of the kitchen, a beautiful fresco depicts a variety of foods presented on a large silver tray, including a goblet of wine and various fruits and nuts. Of particular note is a depiction of what looks like pizza (at left in the photo), although notably absent are staple pizza ingredients such as tomatoes and mozzarella; instead, it appears to be a focaccia-like bread on which are placed various food items, including possibly a pomegranate and a date.


THE WALTERS ART MUSEUM; GIFT OF NANCY AND ROBERT NOOTER, 1997

Ethiopia at the Crossroads

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NEARLY TWO MILLENNIA of Ethiopian art is currently on display at the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore. Titled *Ethiopia at the Crossroads*, the exhibition examines an array of Ethiopian cultural and artistic traditions from their fourth-century origins to the present day. Through more than 225 diverse objects, it illuminates Ethiopia's notable history and the country's rich engagement with surrounding cultures and faiths.

An early adopter of both Christianity and Islam, and the historic home of a sizable Jewish community, Ethiopia developed distinctive artistic traditions that often emerged from and expressed one of the three Abrahamic faiths. Accordingly, the exhibit explores the country's immense artistic and religious diversity, but also the ways in which Ethiopian artists and communities encountered and exchanged ideas with other cultures. Specifically, it traces the creation and movement of materials, artifacts, and styles into and out of East Africa. Integrated throughout the exhibit are works by contemporary Ethiopian artists, who often engage with historical artworks.

On display is this hand cross, meant to be carried by a priest and used for blessings. It was carved from a single piece of wood in the 18th or 19th century. Human figures, which double as the handles in similar crosses, are variously identified as Christ or Adam.

Ethiopia at the Crossroads is the first exhibition of its kind in the United States. A collaborative effort of three museums, the exhibit will also be on view later in 2024 at the Peabody Essex Museum in Massachusetts (April 14–July 7) and the Toledo Museum of Art in Ohio (August 18–November 10).

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"Kingdom of David and Solomon Discovered" will showcase over three dozen artifacts from 10th-century B.C.E. biblical Israel. It will mark the world premiere of both the Ophel pithos inscription and a selection of artifacts discovered by Dr. Eilat Mazar in the City of David. The exhibit will also feature elements of monumental Jerusalem, including a Phoenician-style capital discovered in Jerusalem.

Discovered at archaeological sites across modern Israel, including Jerusalem, Timna, Lachish and Khirbet Qeiyafa, this unique collection of iron, pottery, stone and textiles will be presented within a sensational exhibit featuring life-size monumental wall reconstructions, virtual reality tours, video presentations, and several original illustrations and artwork selections.

This is the first time such a diverse collection of 10th-century B.C.E. archaeological finds have been displayed in one place and presented in the broader scientific, historic and biblical context to reveal the monumental nature of the united monarchy during the reigns of kings David and Solomon. Come experience the kingdom of Israel's greatest monarchs!

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Deir al-Surian Monastery, Egypt

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Restoring Egypt's Medieval Murals

THIS DAMAGED but incredibly vibrant painting, which adorns the Church of the Holy Virgin in the Syrian Monastery (Deir al-Surian) in Wadi al-Natrun, Egypt, depicts the Epiphany—the adoration of newborn Jesus by the Magi and shepherds.

At the center of the scene is Virgin Mary enthroned with Christ Emmanuel on her lap. To the left of Mary is the archangel Michael, who gestures to the three Magi, each of whom carries a gift and is dressed in colorful eastern attire. To the right of Mary is the archangel Gabriel, who similarly beckons to two shepherds tending their flocks in the field. Above Mary's head, in the conch of the semi-dome, is the Star of Bethlehem, shown as a bright reddish orb against a dark blue background.

Dating to the eighth century, the painting is one of several murals from the church that celebrated key events from Jesus's life. Remarkably, no one knew of the painting's existence until the early 2000s, when conservators began carefully removing later layers of plaster. Over the past three decades, an international team of conservators has worked tirelessly to restore the paintings, revealing the remarkable beauty and intricate details of the church's original medieval decoration.

Wadi al-Natrun is remembered as one of the places where Mary, Joseph, and Jesus stayed during their sojourn in Egypt. According to Matthew (2:13–15), the family fled King Herod's decree to kill all newborn boys from Bethlehem. Since the fourth century, the oasis—located about 60 miles northwest of Cairo—has been settled by numerous monastic communities that welcome pilgrims seeking blessings and wanting to honor the holy family. Even today, Wadi al-Natrun's medieval monasteries—and their painstakingly restored murals—are highlight stops on the Holy Family Trail, a newly launched tourism initiative that connects 25 archaeological and religious sites across Egypt and retraces the family's more than 2,000-mile trek through the country.**—G.J.C.**

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Understanding the Woman in the Window

LACY K. CROCKER PAPADAKIS

THE IMAGE of the "woman in the window" conjures many different connotations, from Juliet's enchanting exchange with Romeo to prostitutes in Amsterdam's Red Light District. The ancient world also paired women and windows in iconography and literature. A particularly well-known example appears in Levantine and Near Eastern ivories.[1]

Around 80 ivory objects featuring a woman peering from a window have been found at sites across the ancient Near East, including Samaria, Arslan Tash, Khorsabad, and Nimrud. Dating from the ninth and eighth centuries BCE and made from elephant tusks, the carvings are generally quite small (around 4 inches tall and only half an inch thick) and were used as inlays for decorating furniture, to which they were attached through tenons or by glue.

The choice of material implies an elite context. The Assyrians collected ivories through tribute and as spoils of war. In the Hebrew Bible, the prophets reference ivory as a symbol of wealth and in their rebukes of the elite (Amos 3:15; 6:4; Ezekiel 27:6, 15).

Despite stylistic variations among the ivories, the woman in the window motif has a standard recognizable form. The frontal depiction of a female face appears within a triple- or quadruple-inset frame. The woman's face appears above a horizontal sill situated on a three- to four-columned balustrade adorned with floral capitals. This balustraded window parallels excavated examples of Iron Age monumental architecture, such as at Ramat Rahel (see opposite). In some ivories, the woman's face fills the space of the plaques and presses against the borders of the frame as if bulging forth, conveying a sense of power. Other examples produce a more proportionate balance between the use of negative space between the columns and the woman's head. Additional stylistic variations include the woman's hairstyle, ears, and type of jewelry, which may all reflect regional differences. Although many ivories appear monochrome, artisans frequently applied color through gilding, glass inlays, powdered pigment, or stains.

But who is this woman in her elaborately carved window, and what does she represent? What was her role in society, and what symbolism does her image evoke? Drawing from Hebrew, Babylonian, and Greek literature, earlier scholars identified the woman as a fertility goddess or cult prostitute. Although such interpretations receive less acceptance today, vestiges that link women, windows, and sex still influence current scholarship. Others envision the woman as the queen mother who represents the goddess Asherah. More recent perspectives focus on the status of the woman as a queen awaiting her lover, husband, or son. All these interpretations fail to take into account

MUSÉE DU LOUVRE, DIST. RMN-GRAND PALAIS / RAPHAEL CHIPAULT / ART RESOURCE, NY

"Woman in the Window" ivory from Arslan Tash, in modern Syria.

the various "woman in the window" stories in the Hebrew Bible.

Most of the women who appear in windows in the Hebrew Bible are elite women connected to powerful men (Sisera's mother in Judges 5:28; Michal in 1 Samuel 19:12 and 2 Samuel 6:16; and Jezebel in 2 Kings 9:30). The only prostitute to appear at a window is Rahab, who lets Joshua's men down from the window and ties a scarlet cord to the window to secure her safety (Joshua 2:15, 21). Additionally, Ecclesiastes 12:3 mentions nondescript women who look through the windows and "see dimly," reflecting the transitory nature of life.

In the Bible, the window serves as the space between life and death, danger and safety. The women illustrate their shifting societal places and the need to guard and protect.

These window scenes include stories of women of varying societal positions, but each woman experiences a shift in status or a transformation. The window functions in the story as a liminal place, that is, a point of transition, reflecting an interplay between life and death, danger and safety. These stories in the Hebrew Bible help elucidate the symbolism of the woman in the window ivories but not through a focus on any one societal role. Instead, the meaning derives from the function of the women *and* the windows in these stories. I have identified two categories of the woman in the window motif in the Hebrew Bible: the "heroine in the window" and "seeing death" scenes that focus on the woman's actions.

In the "heroine in the window" category, the woman intervenes as danger approaches, and the window bridges the threat of death and the pursuit of safety. The heroines represent opposite sides of society—a prostitute, Rahab, and a king's daughter, Michal. The immediate danger specifically targets the men. The women risk their safety and devise lies to protect the men. Rahab's window scenes do not reflect a prostitute seeking business, but rather a heroine who protects Joshua's spies and her family. The window scenes transform Rahab from a potential enemy of Israel destined to be killed into an ally who lives and proclaims victory for Israel's God (Joshua 2:8–21; 6:22–25). Michal, like Rahab, performs her heroism at a window, where she helps David escape from the harm her father, Saul, intends (1 Samuel 19:11–17). Michal chooses David, as she transitions from the daughter of Saul to the wife of David. Rahab and Michal mediate as guardians to protect the men from the danger that threatens.

ISRAEL MUSEUM IN JERUSALEM

Window balustrade from Ramat Rahel.

The "seeing death" category includes women who view death from the window. Sisera's mother awaits her son's return from war. She peers from a window and proclaims his anticipated but ultimately unrealized conquests (Judges 5:24–30), seeing not her son's triumphant return but likely a messenger bearing news of his death. Jezebel adorns herself as a queen, not as a prostitute or seductress as some suggest (2 Kings 9:30–37). From her window, she taunts Jehu, who challenges her rule. However, even through her taunt, Jezebel sees the end of her reign and her impending death. Michal appears in a second window scene, but her loyalty to David reverts to her father and his legacy. From her window, Michal regards David with disdain (2 Samuel 6:16). The story of Michal foreshadows the death of Saul's royal line. Michal will not have David's children or rise to the position of queen mother, and perhaps this episode portends the end of Saul's reign and his descendants (2 Samuel 6:23; 21:8–9). Finally, Ecclesiastes 12:3 illustrates an interruption in domestic life, and the women function through the window scene as a warning of death and aging. In this subcategory, the women stand as guardians in the window, but they unsuccessfully mediate the threat of death.

The window in these biblical stories serves as a liminal place—the space between life and death, danger and safety. The female figures illustrate their own shifting societal places and the need to guard and protect. Through their liminality, these women mediate the danger posed by the impermanence of life. Likewise, the ivory windows represent transitional places, and the women function as symbols that protect against the dangers that liminality brings. Biblical stories featuring women in the window thus provide an avenue for understanding the symbolism behind the ivory inlays of the ninth and eighth centuries BCE.

[1] I have explored the subject in my Ph.D. dissertation, *"The Windows of Heaven": Temple Windows in the Hebrew Bible and in Comparative Ancient Near Eastern Evidence* (Waco, TX: Baylor University, 2020).

Mongolian Meat Cakes

FOR THIS TEST KITCHEN, we are going a bit further afield, to China's Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368 CE). Founded by Kublai Khan, grandson of Genghis Khan, the Yuan Dynasty was the successor to the great Mongol Empire founded by Genghis. Our recipe comes from a dietary menu, the *Yinshan Zhengyao* ("Proper and Essential Things for the Emperor's Food and Drink"), written by Hu Sihui, a 14th-century dietary physician who served under several of Kublai Khan's descendants.

Like its Mongolian predecessor, Yuan China was a cosmopolitan civilization. At its zenith, the Mongol Empire stretched from the Sea of Japan to Eastern Europe, bringing together the many diverse cultural elements—and cuisines—that fell within its realm. Indeed, many recipes from Hu Sihui's text show Near Eastern influences, including these meat cakes, which are very similar to *kofta*, a dish still popular in the Middle East today. The Mongols' nomadic way of life, however, permeated Yuan society, and so ingredients typical to the Eurasian steppe were introduced to the recipe.

Two of these ingredients—asafoetida (*kasni*) and long pepper—are hard to find in most grocery stores today but are readily available from Indian or southeast Asian grocers or online. Asafoetida is a strong spice with a unique odor (its nickname is "devil's dung"), but it adds a special umami flavor that is hard to replicate; as an alternative, you can add a minced clove of garlic and a pinch of onion powder. Long pepper is from the same family as black and white peppers (think peppercorns, not spicy peppers), so you can substitute with black or white pepper if needed, though the recipe will lose some of its earthy flavor.

For **BAR**'s recipe, we took Hu Sihui's ancient version but added some elements of modern *kofta*. These delicious Mongolian meat cakes are best when served with hummus and pita and would be a welcome addition to any gathering! Enjoy!**—J.D.**

[1] From Paul D. Buell and Eugene N. Anderson, *A Soup for the Qan: Chinese Dietary Medicine of the Mongol Era as Seen in Hu Sihui's* Yinshan Zhengyao, Sir Henry Wellcome Asian Series, vol. 9 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), p. 297.

Ancient Recipe

"Select mutton (10 *jin*; remove the fat, membrane, and sinew. Mash into a paste), *kasni* (three *qian*), black pepper (two *liang*), long pepper (one *liang*), finely ground coriander (one *liang*). [For] ingredients, use salt. Adjust flavors evenly. Use the fingers to make 'cakes.' Put into vegetable oil and fry."[1]

BAR's Variation

1 lb ground lamb
1 tsp asafoetida *or* 1 clove garlic (minced)
1 tsp black pepper
½ tsp long pepper *or* white pepper
1 tsp coriander
1 tsp cumin
Dash of cardamom
Dash of cinnamon
Handful of chopped parsley
Salt (to taste)

Instructions: Place all of the above ingredients into a bowl and knead together. Form golf ball-sized meatballs then gently press into patty form. Pan fry in vegetable oil 5–6 minutes per side, or grill for a healthier alternative.

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

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Pyramids of Giza, Egypt

The Seven World Wonders

JENNIFER TOBIN

THE LIST OF THE SEVEN WONDERS of the ancient world has captured humanity's imagination for more than two millennia. These seven structures and statues surpassed all others in beauty, size, and skill of construction, constituting seven testaments to the creativity and ingenuity of their builders. But what monuments made up the list, and why has the list maintained its popularity over the ages?

Throughout much of its history, the list was mutable. Although the number of monuments usually remained anchored at seven, various buildings and statues were added and removed over time. Between the second century BCE, when the list first appeared, and the Renaissance, some 25 diverse lists were created, among which 35 different monuments were cataloged as wonders. This flexibility allowed the list to be current, as it could accept new monuments as they were built. As we shall see, the adaptable nature of the list also made it the ideal platform for displaying political power, religious affiliation, and cultural identity.

The earliest list of the Seven Wonders appeared in the late second century BCE in a poem by the Greek author Antipater. Here he enumerated a collection of monuments that are commonly included in later Roman and medieval wonder lists. Let us briefly examine the poem and its wonders:

> I have seen the Walls of rock-like Babylon that chariots can run upon, and the Zeus on the Alpheus, and the Hanging Gardens, and the great statue of the Sun, and the huge labour of the steep Pyramids, and the mighty Tomb of Mausolus; but when I looked at the house of Artemis soaring to the clouds, those others were dimmed, … apart from Olympus, the sun never yet looked upon its like.[1]

Antipater's wonder list includes the Walls of Babylon, which, according to Greek legend, were built by Queen Semiramis and were so wide that two four-horse chariots could easily pass each other along its top. In reality, these walls were built by Nebuchadnezzar in the sixth century BCE and were an impressive 88 feet wide. The poet then obliquely cites the "Zeus on the Alpheus," meaning the statue of Zeus at Olympia, created by Phidias around 430 BCE. The seated image of the god measured around 40 feet tall and was constructed of gold and ivory.

Antipater's third wonder was the Hanging Gardens, which, according to some ancient Greek traditions, were also erected by Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. Constructed on a series of sloping artificial terraces that had passageways beneath, and watered by mysterious means, the gardens were said to have been built for the king's wife, who missed her native mountains.

Antipater's "statue of the Sun" refers to the Colossus of Rhodes, a 110-foot bronze statue representing the god Sol. Constructed in the early third century BCE, it stood for some 75 years before it fell in an earthquake. The Pyramids at Giza were the poet's fifth wonder: the Pyramid of Khufu, constructed in the 26th century BCE and originally measuring 481 feet tall, the neighboring tomb of his son Khafre, which was 10 feet lower in height, and the even smaller pyramid of his grandson Menkaure.

Antipater's second-to-last wonder was another tomb, that of Mausolus, built in 350 BCE in Halicarnassus (modern Bodrum, in western Turkey). The fame of this grand tomb, standing 140 feet tall and richly adorned with sculpture, was such that the name Mausoleum (literally, the place of Mausolus) became a byword for a grand sepulcher. This monument and the five preceding, however, did not compare to the final wonder, the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus, which, in the opinion of Antipater, outshone them all. The temple was the largest ever built by the Greeks, measuring 236 by 410 feet (the length of 2.5 football fields).

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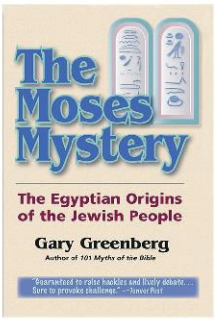
The Moses Mystery

The Egyptian Origins of the Jewish People

By Gary Greenberg



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.

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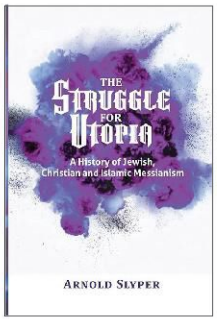

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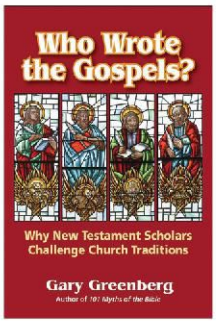
By Gary Greenberg



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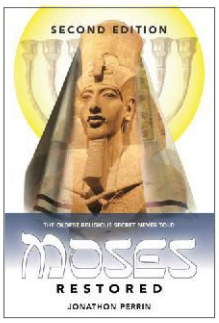

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This single, 60-foot-tall column is almost all that remains of the Temple of Artemis in Ephesus, Turkey, once considered the greatest of the world's wonders.

Antipater describes his monuments in a neutral, albeit cursory fashion, only stressing his preference for the last on his list. Such a list could, however, be manipulated for propagandistic purposes. In 70 CE, the Roman court poet Martial composed an epigram about the Seven Wonders where he lists six monuments (nearly identical to those of Antipater) but denigrates them as having been built by soft foreigners. The greatest wonder, according to Martial, was the Flavian Amphitheater, known today as the Roman Colosseum. Its builders, the Flavians, had recently come into power, so the poem was specifically designed to celebrate the new rulers as well as proclaim Rome's cultural dominance.

The Seven Wonders list was also used to promote religious supremacy. In the sixth century CE, St. Gregory of Tours created a list of seven monuments that numbered some traditional pagan monuments but also included Noah's Ark and the Temple of Solomon. He concluded, however, that these man-made wonders were nothing compared to the natural miracles (seeds, moon, stars, etc.) wrought by God. In the tenth century, a Byzantine scholar jotted down in a notebook two competing lists of the Seven Wonders, only to insist that the greatest monument ever built was the church of Hagia Sophia in his native Constantinople.

During the Renaissance, etchings of the Seven Wonders by the Dutch artist Maarten van Heemskerck gained widespread popularity. This version comprised the monuments on Antipater's list (with the two Babylonian wonders lumped together as one), as well as the Lighthouse of Alexandria. For centuries, this roster of wonders remained unchanged. In 2007, however, an organization called the New 7 Wonders Foundation invited nominations for a new list. Votes poured in from nations, resulting in a global list: the Great Wall of China, the Taj Mahal, Machu Picchu, Chichen Itza, Petra, the Christ the Redeemer Statue in Brazil, and the Colosseum. Missing were the Pyramids of Giza, but when the Egyptian government complained, the foundation awarded the tombs an honorary status as an eighth wonder.

Even today, nearly two and a half millennia since its first appearance, the list of the Seven Wonders remains flexible, and inclusion on it continues to bring prestige and authority.

[1] A.S.F. Gow and D.L. Page, *The Greek Anthology: The Garland of Philip and Some Contemporary Epigrams*, vol. 1 (London: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1968), pp. 68–69.

WHAT IS IT? (SEE QUIZ ON P. 13)

Answer: 5 Papyrus

These are the blossoms of the papyrus plant, *Cyperus papyrus*, a type of wetland grass best known for its use as a writing material. The oldest known texts on papyrus date to the middle of the third millennium BCE, although it likely was in use several hundred years earlier.

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK / ROGERS FUND, 1930

To convert the plant to a writing surface, the inner pith from the papyrus stalks was sliced into thin strips. These were laid out side by side and slightly overlapping, and a second layer was laid on top in perpendicular orientation. The resulting sheet was then hammered flat, pressed, dried, and polished with a stone or other smooth object.

Papyrus was cheap and easy to produce, but it also was brittle and susceptible to the elements, including both dampness and excessive dryness. It did not attain widespread use outside of Egypt, and eventually it was superseded by other writing materials, such as parchment, vellum, and, later, paper.

***Book of the Dead for the Chantress of Amun Nauny*, c. 1050 BCE, on papyrus.**

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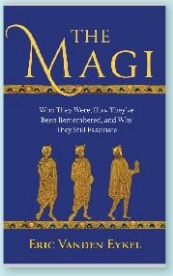
The Magi in History and Tradition

REVIEW BY **CHRISTOPHER A. FRILINGOS**



The Magi
Who They Were, How They've Been Remembered, and Why They Still Fascinate
By Eric Vanden Eykel
(Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2022), 218 pp.; $28 (hardcover), $25.99 (eBook)

ONE OF THE MANY funny set pieces in John Irving's spectacular novel *A Prayer for Owen Meany* is a Christmas pageant at a small New England church. After a children's choir rehearses the carol "We Three Kings of Orient Are," a boy in the choir asks, "Where are 'Ory' and 'R'?" It's been 20 years since I last read *Owen Meany*, and remembering the scene still makes me giggle.

But are they kings, the Magi of the New Testament? (No.) Are there three of them? (There are three gifts, but the precise number of gift-givers is not stated.) "R" they from "Ory," or put another way, where are they from? ("From the East" is the vague geography.) These are some of the questions that Eric Vanden Eykel addresses in his engaging new book, which sets out to examine various traditions and ideas surrounding these mysterious figures in the Gospel of Matthew. Vanden Eykel also describes a fascinating legacy. Third-century frescoes of the Magi, wearing Phrygian caps, can be found in the Roman Catacomb of Priscilla.* A sixth-century mosaic in the Basilica Sant'Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna includes the traditional names of the Magi: Balthasar, Melchior, and Gaspar. The apocryphal *Armenian Gospel of the Infancy* adds even more details to the canonical story, portraying the Magi as both kings and military commanders. To scholars like me, who have studied and written about apocryphal infancy gospels, the early Christian impulse to "fill in the gaps" of Gospel narratives is well known.[1] Even so, it remains exciting to be shown these examples by an expert guide like Vanden Eykel.

Readers of **BAR**, I suspect, will be most interested in what Vanden Eykel has to say about the slender account of the Magi in the New Testament. Their sole appearance comes in a dozen verses in the Gospel of Matthew (2:1–12). The Magi emerge first as figures "from the East" who, because of a star they see, travel to Jerusalem in search of a king. When Herod hears about their quest, he summons the

* See Megan Sauter, "Rome's Queen Catacomb," **BAR**, Fall 2023.

Magi and asks them to report back on what they find. Warned by a dream, the Magi never pass along the intelligence Herod seeks about an apparent rival.

What could this story mean? Vanden Eykel's theory is based on exploring the range of meanings attached to the Greek word *magoi*, and the use of the term in ancient narratives.* From these sources, Vanden Eykel identifies a theme of proximity to power. So too for Matthew's Magi. Their presence in the home of the infant Jesus and their offering of gifts serve at once as proof of the power of the newborn and of the illegitimacy of Herod's rule.

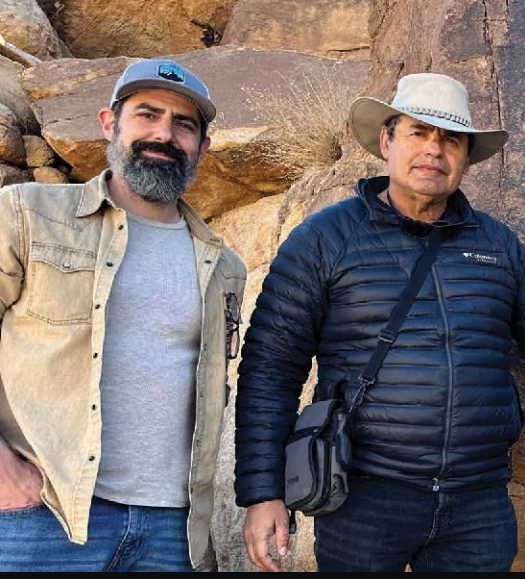
In his introduction, Vanden Eykel states clearly that the book examines the Magi "*not as historical figures* but as fictional characters" (emphasis mine). But the subtitle of the book—"Who They Were, How They've Been Remembered, and Why They Still Fascinate"—may nevertheless lead some to expect a verdict on historical accuracy. The tension between the book's subtitle and contents could trigger frustration. If so, it would be a shame, since *The Magi*, in all other respects, delivers on its promises. Readers learn the literary and cultural context of Matthew's story in rich detail, and much else besides.

The Magi delivers on its promises. Readers learn the literary and cultural context of Matthew's story in rich detail, and much else besides.

To me, the most important "value added" of *The Magi* comes from getting to know its author. Vanden Eykel mixes in just the right amount of real-life examples and personal anecdotes. The voice of Vanden Eykel, often witty, comes through loud and clear. He is a thoughtful interpreter of Christian rituals and a sober critic of the ills of anti-Semitism in Christian texts and the use of blackface in pious dramas. But the tone is never preachy. In the final chapter, which surveys allusions to the Magi in contemporary storytelling—examples include O. Henry's sentimental "Gift of the Magi" and Christopher Moore's edgy *The Lamb*—Vanden Eykel poignantly reflects on why the Magi still matter. It's a fitting conclusion. Reading the book is akin to following a gifted docent around a museum: The works on display come to life because we encounter them through the love of a true and learned guide. We may never solve all the mysteries of the Magi, but, thanks to Vanden Eykel's new book, readers can gain a richer appreciation for the 2,000-year journey of the Magi through the Christian imagination.

* Related to our word "magic," the term in Matthew has been translated in a bewildering number of ways: "magi," "wise men," "astrologers," and more. Vanden Eykel wisely leaves *magoi* untranslated in the book. When discussing the Christian literary characters, he uses the calque *Magi*.

[1] See my book *Jesus, Mary, and Joseph: Family Trouble in the Infancy Gospels* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2017).



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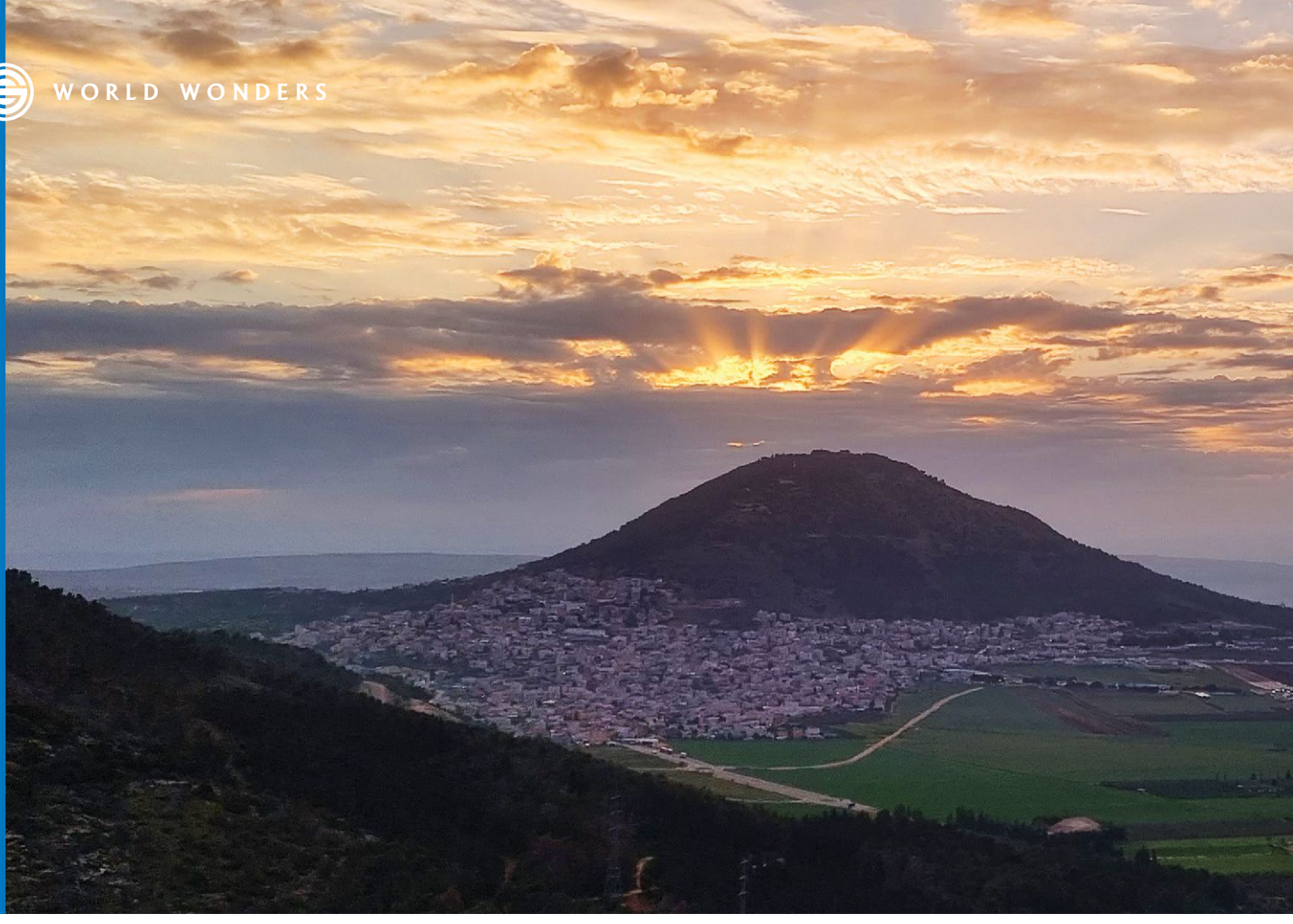

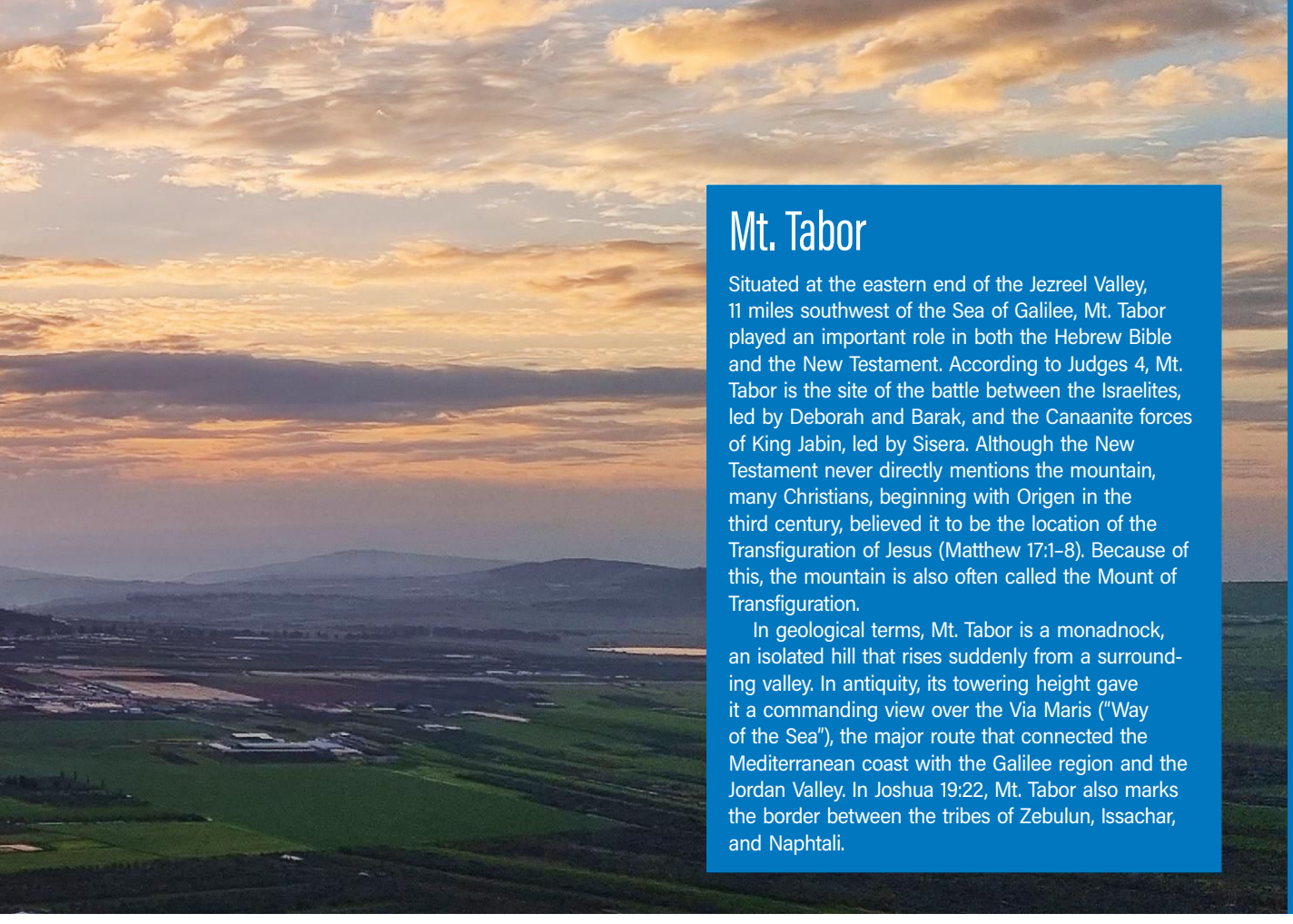

Mt. Tabor

Situated at the eastern end of the Jezreel Valley, 11 miles southwest of the Sea of Galilee, Mt. Tabor played an important role in both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. According to Judges 4, Mt. Tabor is the site of the battle between the Israelites, led by Deborah and Barak, and the Canaanite forces of King Jabin, led by Sisera. Although the New Testament never directly mentions the mountain, many Christians, beginning with Origen in the third century, believed it to be the location of the Transfiguration of Jesus (Matthew 17:1–8). Because of this, the mountain is also often called the Mount of Transfiguration.

In geological terms, Mt. Tabor is a monadnock, an isolated hill that rises suddenly from a surrounding valley. In antiquity, its towering height gave it a commanding view over the Via Maris ("Way of the Sea"), the major route that connected the Mediterranean coast with the Galilee region and the Jordan Valley. In Joshua 19:22, Mt. Tabor also marks the border between the tribes of Zebulun, Issachar, and Naphtali.

PHOTO COURTESY NAEL BUTTO

Archaeology in th

Excavating the

MARTA LUCIANI

LOCATED IN NORTHWEST SAUDI ARABIA, Midian has long been a land of biblical legend. In the 1800s, Western travelers and explorers described Midian as the desert wilderness that Moses and the Israelites crossed during their Exodus travels en route to the Promised Land. It was also the desert where Moses met and married Zipporah, the daughter of a Midianite priest (variously named Jethro, Reuel, or Hobab), and was initiated into their desert religion (Exodus 2–4). The so-called Midianite Hypothesis, first popularized in the 19th century but now questioned by most scholars, held that Moses was introduced to the god Yahweh in the land of Midian and the neighboring Hejaz mountains, where some have located Mt. Sinai.*

When I applied to excavate the site of Qurayyah, a vast urban oasis settlement in the far northwest of Saudi Arabia, I knew I would have to confront the "Midianite" question: Is there any archaeological evidence for the biblical Midianites? Some have viewed Qurayyah

* See Juan Manuel Tebes, "Yahweh's Desert Origins," **BAR**, Fall 2022.

e Land of Midian

Qurayyah Oasis

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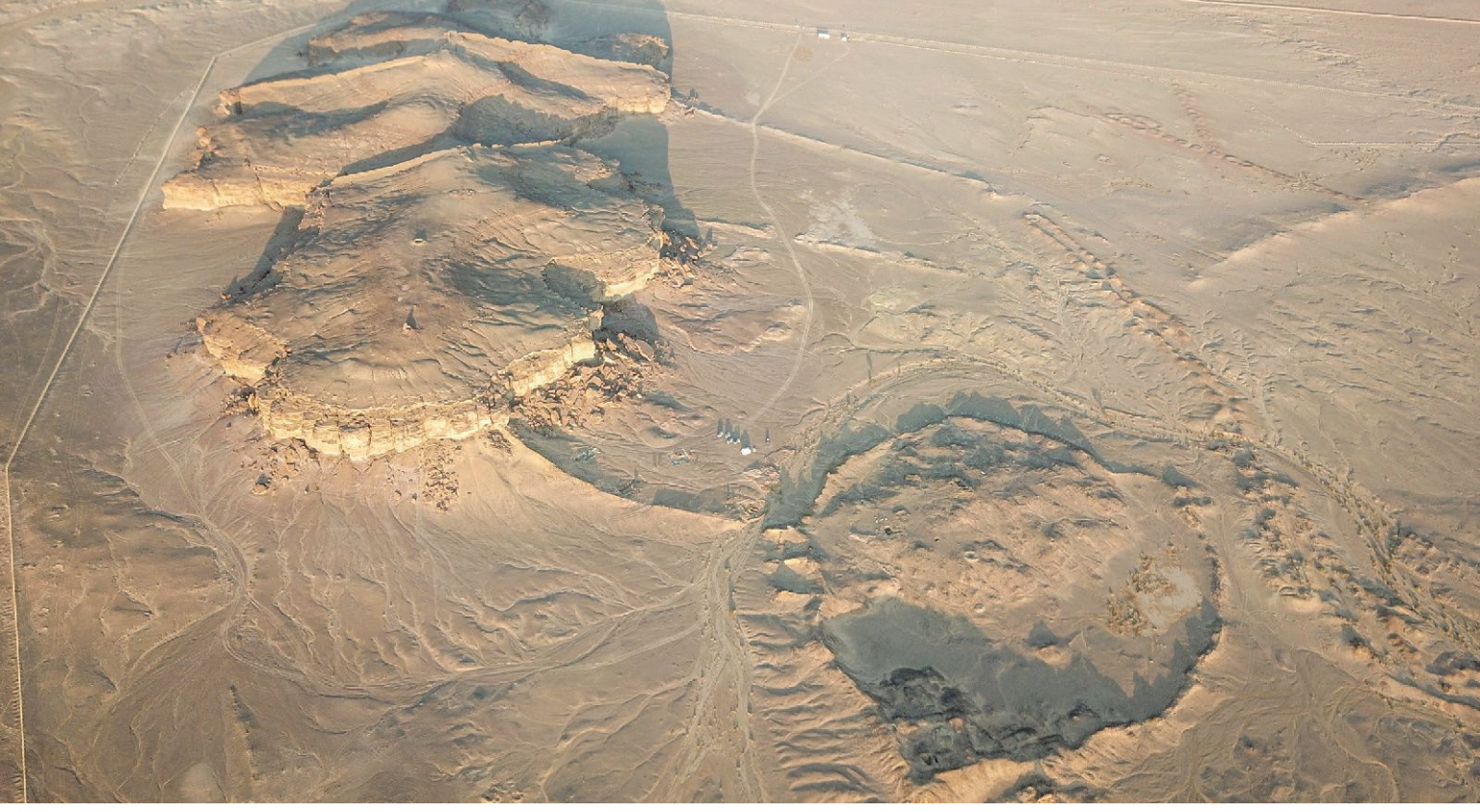
as the capital of the fabled Midianite kingdom. Others have ascribed a beautiful painted pottery found in abundance at the site—now known as Qurayyah Painted Ware (see sidebar, p. 38)—to the Midianites.[1]

The Bible gives only a vague idea of who inhabited Midian in antiquity. For the biblical authors writing in the first millennium BCE, some Midianites were merchants who operated commercial camel caravans (Genesis 37:28), while others were viewed as enemies of the Israelites (Numbers 25:16–17). Still other times

MIDIANITE CAPITAL? The site of Qurayyah, in northwest Saudi Arabia, was possibly the center of the legendary land of Midian, where biblical history situates the wilderness of the Exodus story and Moses's first encounter with Yahweh. Although the site's biblical connections cannot yet be confirmed, recent archaeological exploration has revealed an ancient desert oasis that thrived for thousands of years. Excavated buildings, water systems, and artifacts paint a picture of a vibrant urban settlement that maintained strong links with the southern Levant and the major powers of the ancient Near East. Qurayyah's majestic rock plateau (top of photo) was the focus of ceremonial and funerary activities from at least the late fourth millennium BCE.



DESERT OASIS. This bird's-eye view of Qurayyah captures many of the important elements of this age-old settlement. Formed amid dried prehistoric lakes and valleys, the site is dominated by a towering rock plateau (upper left), where archaeologists found elite graves from the late fourth millennium BCE. The settlement consisted of a fortified residential area (bottom right), an industrial district and cemetery (between plateau and settlement), and an extensive system of agricultural fields (to right of area shown). Water was provided through a network of dams and channels that collected and carried runoff from nearby mountains and rocky outcrops.

the Midianites were identified as descendants of Ishmael, the son of Abraham and his Egyptian slave Hagar (Genesis 16). Unfortunately, these contrasting views do not allow us to create a coherent historical picture of the Midianites. Instead, we focus in this article on what archaeology can reveal about the reality of ancient life in the desert land of Midian, which continued to be called Madyan well into the Islamic period.

In 2014, our team from the University of Vienna, together with colleagues from Saudi Arabia's Heritage Commission of the Ministry of Culture, began a multiyear project to study Qurayyah's history and archaeology. Our excavations, now in their eighth season, have far exceeded our expectations and given us extraordinary insights into the legendary land of Midian and this important urban oasis that was flourishing several thousand years before the Bible was even written.[2]

First, although the biblical writers may have considered this desert to be a vast "wilderness," Midian and much of North Arabia was characterized by large urban oases, mega-sites like Qurayyah—but also Tayma and Dadan (the oasis of Al-Ula) farther to the south—that had extensive connections with Egypt, the Levant, and Mesopotamia. As we'll see, Qurayyah was well integrated into the broader ancient Near East through trade and cultural connections, although the city's inhabitants maintained their own unique identity, as expressed through distinctive pottery, art, and material culture.

Second, Qurayyah's settlement history is significantly older and longer lasting than previously thought. Our excavations revealed occupation from as far back as the late fourth millennium BCE that continued largely uninterrupted until the time of the Nabateans, Romans, and Byzantines in the first millennium CE. Here we provide an overview of the site and the key discoveries.

Qurayyah, about 30 miles south of Jordan's southern border, was a large oasis located in the broad dried prehistoric lakes (playas) and valleys east of the high peaks of the northern Hejaz mountains. The site is surrounded by the high, flat-topped hills (mesas) of the Hisma plateau and the stark, picturesque desert landscape that extends north into Jordan's Wadi Rum. Lacking natural springs or easily exploitable wells, Qurayyah owed its existence to the nearby Wadi Ghubai, a 15-mile-long valley that carried seasonal runoff from the higher mountains and rocky outcrops to the west. This runoff water was harnessed and channeled to the site using dams, diversion walls, and canals, creating a vibrant oasis. The expansive and carefully planned site, which extends more than 750 acres, consisted of several parts: a towering rock plateau, a walled residential area, an industrial and funerary district, and a large agricultural zone with irrigated fields and orchards.

Qurayyah's majestic rock plateau is the site's most prominent feature. Rising nearly 175 feet above the desert floor, the central mesa features dramatic, steep sides with outcroppings of

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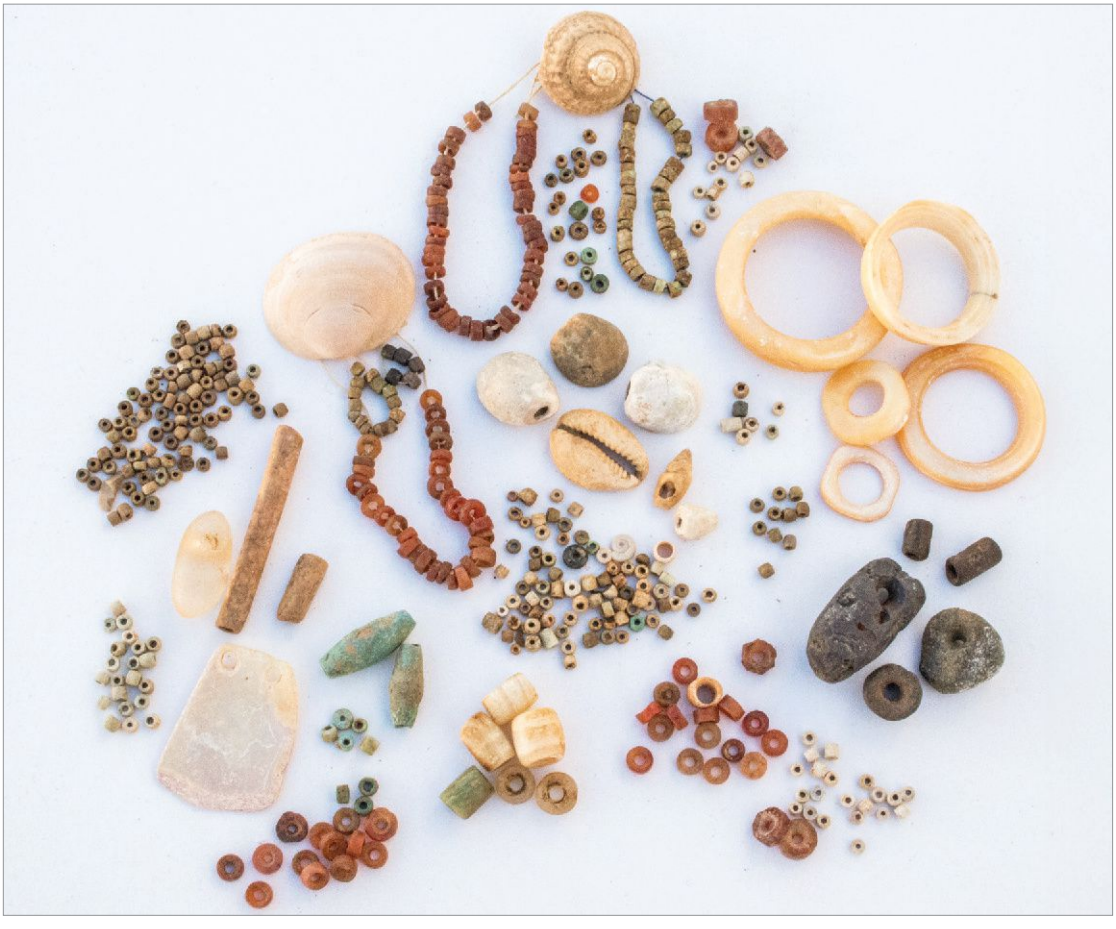
CONNECTED CULTURE. More than a dozen individuals were buried in this circular grave at the summit of Qurayyah's plateau (right). Dating from the Early Bronze Age, this grave for wealthy elites contained precious artifacts, including painted pottery and jewelry pieces crafted from valuable materials (below), such as mother-of-pearl, ivory, and lapis lazuli. Since similar pottery is known from Early Bronze Age cities in the southern Levant (e.g., Jerusalem, Jericho, Megiddo), and the precious materials were not available locally, these grave goods point to Qurayyah's early trade connections.



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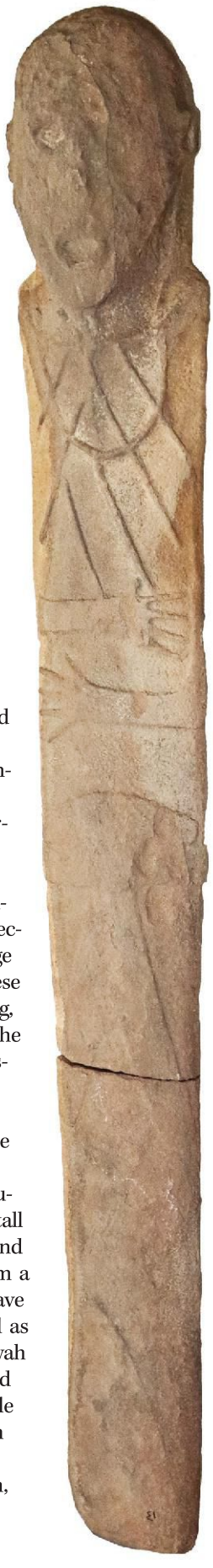

TOWERING FIGURE. Likely dating to the late fifth or fourth millennium BCE, this finely carved stela attests to Qurayyah's early ceremonial significance. The figure, which wears a diadem on the head (not visible in photo) and a double-bladed dagger suspended from a wide belt, represents a high-ranking person, possibly a deified ancestor or some other prehistoric deity. Standing 6.5 feet tall, this stela is among the tallest anthropomorphic statues found in North Arabia, where such carved stones are often found in ceremonial, ritual, and funerary contexts.

resplendent white chalk that make it visible from miles away.

Since the Early Bronze Age (late fourth millennium BCE) and most likely earlier, the plateau was the focus of ceremonial, ritual, and funerary activities. Our excavations on the plateau's summit found a magnificent circular grave that was the resting place of more than a dozen individuals, mostly women and children. They appear to have been elites, as they were interred with hundreds of beads and several unique pendants, some crafted from mother-of-pearl, ivory, and semiprecious stones, including lapis lazuli. They were also buried with pottery, including painted wares with basket-like decoration known from Early Bronze Age Jerusalem, Jericho, and Megiddo. These findings show that from its beginning, Qurayyah was closely connected to the southern Levant and part of long-distance trade networks.

Evidence of the area's ceremonial significance prior to the Early Bronze Age was found on a nearby mesa located directly across the Wadi Ghubai. On its summit stood a 6.5-foot-tall stela of a figure wearing a diadem and a double-bladed dagger hanging from a thick belt. Although similar stelae have been found across North Arabia and as far north as Transjordan, the Qurayyah stela is the tallest yet discovered, and the diadem provides an unmistakable sign of the figure's high rank or even divine status.

Beginning in the third millennium, Qurayyah's ceremonial landscape transformed into a large urban oasis. This was achieved through the construction of a large dam that controlled the Wadi Ghubai's destructive floodwaters and protected the first settlement that was built at the base of the rock plateau. The dam also allowed Qurayyah's inhabitants to create an elaborate system to capture surface runoff for both drinking water and irrigation of nearby fields.

This period saw the entire site—the rock plateau, residential area, and vast expanse of fields—enclosed by a wall that extended more than 8 miles in length. The creation of such a bounded, well-defined urban landscape in the desert is unique within the ancient Near East; there are no similar examples found in contemporary Mesopotamia, Egypt, or the Levant. Qurayyah's desert population, it seems, found new and innovative ways to exploit their arid environment to the fullest. This included developing new metallurgical industries in the last centuries of the third millennium, evidenced by the remains of copper smelting and metal production found on the summit of the plateau.

At the foot of the plateau, we excavated two long rectangular buildings used to bury dozens of individuals from the end of the Early Bronze Age to the late Middle Bronze Age (c. 21st–17th centuries BCE). The two buildings feature local North Arabian wares and thousands of stone, faience, bone, and shell beads. We also found several daggers, a long sword, and a spearhead. Intriguingly, nearly identical cooking pots and daggers were discovered in burials from Middle Bronze Age Jericho and Bethlehem, again suggesting the interconnectedness of funerary practices between the southern Levant and northwestern Arabia.

Analysis of the bones revealed a broad range of ages and dietary habits, while the presence of bronze crucibles, together with high levels of lead identified in some teeth, suggest at least some of the deceased were metalworkers, perhaps the same people who were involved in the metallurgical activities discovered on the rock plateau.

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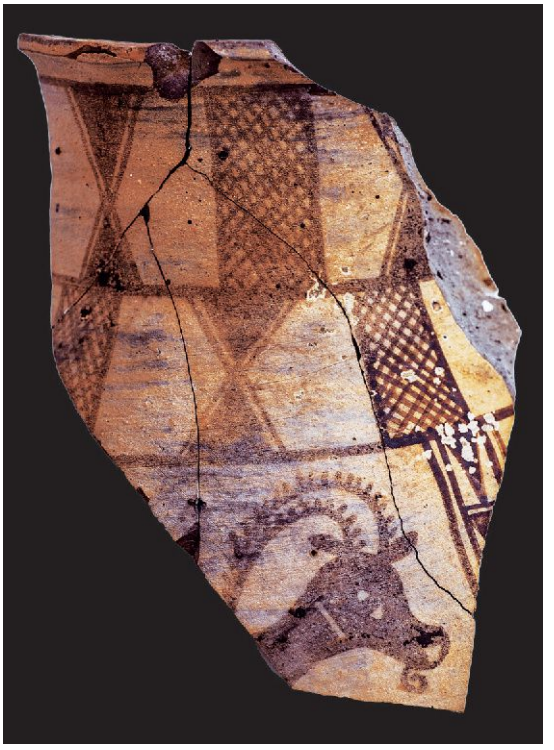

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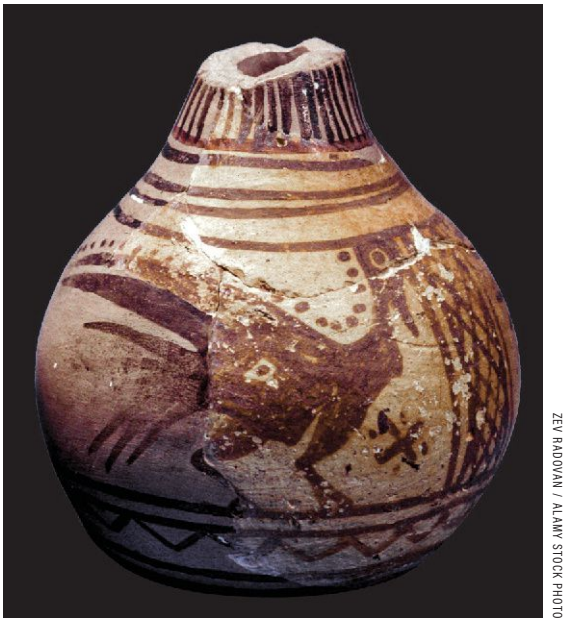

ZEV RADOVAN / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

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PRETTY POTTERY. The pottery produced at Qurayyah is traditionally known as Midianite Pottery or Qurayyah Painted Ware (QPW). The earliest type (called Standard QPW, represented by the fragment with a horned ibex surrounded by basket-like decoration [above left]), appeared in the 17th–15th centuries BCE and is similar to contemporary assemblages from the southern Levant and northern Arabia. As the pottery evolved into Classic QPW, during the Late Bronze Age, it featured a broader range of animals, including ostriches, as shown on this jug found at the site of Timna in southern Israel (above right). In the Iron Age, the camel became a favorite decorative element (right), before giving way to purely geometric designs during the pottery's final stage, which ended in the fourth century BCE.

Another funerary compound was excavated just west of the city's residential area. Dating from the 13th to 10th centuries BCE, this large multichambered complex, which measures nearly 40,000 square feet, contained the remains of several dozen individuals. In addition to a broad range of Qurayyah Painted Ware vessels, the burials had Egyptian scarabs, iron arrowheads, bracelets, bronze rings, and hundreds of carnelian, stone, faience, and shell beads.

Most remarkable, however, was the discovery of a stone relief with a depiction of the ancient Semitic god Ṣalm, whose name simply means "image." Ṣalm was widely worshiped across North Arabia (especially at the oasis of Tayma), while the biblical writers mention a Midianite king named Ṣalmunna (meaning "Ṣalm protects [from harm]") (Judges 8:5).[3] In the relief, Ṣalm is shown with a stylized, triangular-shaped bull's head, horns, and beard, with an upturned ibex visible to the right and an upturned incense burner above his head (see p. 39). Also visible on the relief are a wavy line (perhaps representing water or a snake) and a stylized human figure with upraised arms, perhaps in prayer. This extraordinary piece, which once adorned a sanctuary associated with the burial complex, testifies to the skill and artistry of Qurayyah's masons and the common artistic and symbolic repertoire they shared with the city's potters and craftspeople.

The cultural and political situation in North Arabia began to change dramatically in the first millennium BCE. Many of the region's urban oases, most notably Qurayyah, Tayma, and Dadan, which had formerly shared similar types of pottery and material culture, each began producing its own distinctive wares. In Tayma and Dadan, new alphabetic scripts were introduced to write various local dialects of ancient North Arabian, languages that eventually became precursors to Arabic. Politically, this era saw the arrival of the last Babylonian king, Nabonidus (r. 556–539 BCE), who took up residence in Tayma during the last ten years of his reign. Subsequently, the powerful local kingdoms of the Dadanites and Lihyanites emerged in the region. By the first century BCE, the area had come under the control of the Nabateans, who had their capital at the famous rock-cut city of Petra in Jordan but established an important southern outpost at Hegra, modern Medain Saleh about 200 miles south of Qurayyah.

Through all this change, Qurayyah continued to be an important regional oasis. In the city's residential area, we excavated two Iron Age houses, one of which may have served as a jewelry-making facility based on the discovery of various precious materials, including ostrich eggs, beads, and iron and alabaster pieces. Moreover, the excavations showed that Qurayyah's pottery, though still heavily painted, saw significant changes in colors, styles, and motifs. Particularly prominent are depictions of the camel, which had clearly grown in economic and symbolic importance for the peoples of ancient North Arabia during this period. Finally, in these houses we found an Egyptian amulet and several square-shaped incense burners, a clear indication of the growing importance of the South Arabian trade in frankincense, myrrh, and other spices that were brought by caravan from ancient Yemen.

Qurayyah continued to be settled through the Hellenistic, Nabatean, Roman, and Byzantine

Dating Qurayyah's Pottery

MARTA LUCIANI

Qurayyah Painted Ware designates a beautiful pottery that is typically painted in two colors with intricate geometric patterns and stylized depictions of animals. These vessels have been found as far north as Gezer in Israel and Amman in Jordan and as far south as Tayma and Al-Ula in Saudi Arabia. Researchers have long suspected that this painted pottery was exported from northwest Arabia (most likely from Qurayyah itself) to major sites in the southern Levant, especially the southern Negev copper mining site of Timna, where it was dated to the late 14th to 12th centuries BCE.

At Qurayyah, we excavated one of the site's many kilns to determine when and where this pottery was first produced. Surprisingly, the pottery we found was significantly older than the dated examples from Timna. Radiocarbon dating of the kiln's fuel materials showed that this pottery was first produced toward the end of the Middle Bronze Age and the beginning of the Late Bronze Age (c. 17th–15th centuries BCE). This earlier ware, which we now term Standard Qurayyah Painted Ware, features finely painted geometric, floral, and animal designs that tend to be limited to lion, gazelle, and ibex. Our petrographic and neutron activation analyses have confirmed that this earlier pottery was produced locally and then exported to major trade centers in the southern Levant and North Arabia.

Collection of Qurayyah Painted Ware recovered from the site's Late Bronze Age funerary complex.

From the 14th to 12th centuries BCE, Qurayyah's painted pottery showed further stylistic developments, with decoration featuring a much broader range of animals—including bulls, deer, ostriches, dogs, jerboa (desert rodents), and large lizards—as well as human figures (possibly warriors or hunters) that wear skirts and are armed with daggers. This style represents the Qurayyah Painted Ware identified at Timna and other Late Bronze and early Iron Age sites in the southern Levant and previously identified as "Midianite Pottery."

Qurayyah continued to produce painted pottery through the Iron Age (c. 11th–6th centuries BCE), with the camel gradually becoming a favorite decorative element. The last examples of Qurayyah Painted Ware date to the fourth century BCE, by which time animal and other figurative decoration had been abandoned in favor of purely geometric designs.

MIDIANITE CULT? To the west of Qurayyah's residential area, archaeologists excavated a large multichambered complex built of stone and mudbrick (top photo). Dating to the Late Bronze Age, its intact graves contained Egyptian scarabs and myriad beads made from precious materials. In an adjoining sanctuary (see arrow), a stunning stone relief was found (enhanced image above) that depicts the stylized bull's head of the god Ṣalm along with an upturned ibex (see box), an incense burner, and a possible depiction of a worshiper with upraised arms, all of which reflect cultic activity.

periods (third century BCE–sixth century CE), although its grandeur and importance waned considerably. The site features a number of prominent Roman and Nabatean building remains, and there is also a large water reservoir in the middle of the site's agricultural area. Qurayyah was likely one of the stops on the Nabatean caravan route through the Hisma, as evidenced by burial caves at the foot of the plateau where individuals were buried in a manner similar to Nabatean burials found at Hegra.

Our excavations at Qurayyah, although not yet revealing the identity of the biblical Midianites, have nonetheless shown the sophistication, ingenuity, and resilience of the ancient North Arabian people who harnessed their desert landscape to its full potential. They created a walled urban oasis that flourished in the middle of the desert for more than three millennia, while at the same time developing their own cultural and religious traditions that were distinctive yet deeply connected and engaged with the peoples of the southern Levant and the wider Near East.

[1] Abdulaziz bin Saud Al-Ghazzi, "The Kingdom of Midian," in Ali Ibrahim Al-Ghabban et al., eds., *Roads of Arabia: Archaeology and History of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* (Paris: Somogy Art Publishers, 2010), pp. 210–217; Peter J. Parr, Gerald Lankester Harding, and John Dayton, "Preliminary Survey of N.W. Arabia, 1968," *Bulletin of the Institute of Archaeology, University of London* 8/9 (1970), pp. 193–242.

[2] For a summary of recent excavations, see Marta Luciani, "Qurayyah," in Alessandra Capodiferro and Sara Colantonio, eds., *Roads of Arabia: Archaeological Treasures from Saudi Arabia* (Milan: Electa, 2019), pp. 140–155.

[3] Reading courtesy Michael C.A. Macdonald, University of Oxford.

The House of Peter
Capernaum or Bethsaida?

R. STEVEN NOTLEY

AS BAR READERS KNOW, archaeologist Mordechai Aviam and I believe the site of El-Araj, on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee near the estuary of the Jordan River, is biblical Bethsaida, remembered in the Gospel of John as the home of the apostles Peter, Andrew, and Philip (1:44).* Our excavations at El-Araj have revealed a large Byzantine basilica and monastic complex built above the remains of an earlier, Roman-era fishing village from the first century CE. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, the village later expanded to become the Roman city of Bethsaida-Julias, which existed from the first to third centuries (*Antiquities* 18.28).

We believe the site's archaeology as well as early Christian tradition and pilgrimage accounts confirm not only the site's identification with Bethsaida but, perhaps more significantly, its location as the home of the apostle Peter.[1] As we will see, this conclusion runs counter to modern claims that Peter's house was commemorated by a small fifth-century octagonal church excavated at the nearby site of Capernaum and still visited today by pilgrims and tourists.**

We begin with the archaeological finds from El-Araj that have resulted from the recent excavations conducted by Kinneret College and the Center for the Study of Ancient Judaism and Christian

* R. Steven Notley and Mordechai Aviam, "Searching for Bethsaida: The Case for El-Araj," **BAR**, Spring 2020.

** See James F. Strange and Hershel Shanks, "Has the House Where Jesus Stayed in Capernaum Been Found?" **BAR**, November/December 1982.

BIBLICAL BETHSAIDA? Archaeologists may have new evidence to identify the site of El-Araj with Bethsaida of the gospel accounts. Located by the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee near the estuary of the Jordan River, the fishing village under excavation dates to the time of Jesus. Even more important, El-Araj boasts an early Christian basilica, which reportedly grew over the original house of the apostles Peter and Andrew, who, according to the Gospel of John, called Bethsaida their home.

ZACHARY WONG, EL-ARAJ EXPEDITION

BASILICA OF BETHSAIDA. Several early Christian pilgrims to the Holy Land reported visiting a memorial basilica built over the so-called "House of Peter" at Bethsaida. At El-Araj, archaeologists have excavated a large sixth-century basilical church and an even older monastic complex that might fit the description. The basilica consists of a central nave (center of photo above) and two side aisles separated by rows of columns. The eastern apse contained the main altar space. Architectural details and the church's iconography, including chancel screen fragments and crosses impressed on pottery (right), underscore Christian worship at the site.

Origins. In 2021, we uncovered a significant Byzantine basilica that dates back to the sixth century, along with an adjoining monastic complex that may date a century earlier. The church, which measures approximately 70 by 60 feet, has a typical basilical plan with a central nave, two side aisles, and a single apse containing the main altar space. Throughout the church, we found large patches of colorful mosaic floor decorated with floral and geometric patterns as well as several Greek inscriptions: one in front of the apse, another in the center of the nave, and a third in the diaconicon (where church vessels and valuables were stored) located to the north of the apse. There were also various artifacts associated with early Christian worship, including parts of the marble chancel screen that separated the apse from the nave, and small pieces of gilded glass tesserae from an ornate mosaic that once decorated the wall of the basilica.

Around the church, we excavated a bathhouse and a number of rooms that likely served as living quarters for a monastery. A bathhouse and monastic complex were similarly found at the contemporary Byzantine church at nearby Kursi, which may have

commemorated the site of Jesus's "swine miracle" (Mark 5:1–20).* The similarities between the two sites suggest that such major centers of Holy Land pilgrimage served both practical and spiritual needs.

Clearly, the El-Araj basilica and its associated bath and monastery, like many contemporary Byzantine sacred sites, were built to commemorate places of importance to Christian pilgrims. But what biblical event or person was remembered at this site? We'll return to that question once we first examine the various textual sources that identify Bethsaida with the home of the apostles.

Although only the Gospel of John explicitly identifies Bethsaida as the home of Peter, Andrew, and Philip (see sidebar below), early Christian sources from the fourth to eighth centuries, including the church fathers Eusebius (*Proof of the Gospel* 9.8; *Onomasticon* 58.11), Epiphanius (*Panarion* 51.15.5), John Chrysostom (*Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles* 4), and Jerome (*On Illustrious Men* 1), routinely describe Bethsaida as the home of St. Peter.

* Vassilios Tzaferis, "A Pilgrimage to the Site of the Swine Miracle," **BAR**, March/April 1989.

ALL PHOTOS: ZACHARY WONG, EL-ARAJ EXPEDITION

Peter's House in the Gospels

R. STEVEN NOTLEY

Only in the Gospel of John is there a clear statement that the home of the apostles Peter, Andrew, and Philip was in Bethsaida (1:44). There is no such statement in Matthew, Mark, or Luke, which has led some scholars to identify their home with Capernaum, where Jesus enters the "house of Simon"—often interpreted as the house of Simon-Peter, the chief apostle—to heal his sick mother-in-law (Matthew 8:14–17; Mark 1:29–31; Luke 4:38–39). Indeed, it is this event that many believe is commemorated by the octagonal Byzantine church excavated at Capernaum.

However, variations in the wording of the account of the healing at Capernaum show signs of literary development between the Gospels, including a shift from the use of general to more specific names for individuals. Luke's account, for example, speaks only of the home of a man named Simon (4:38), a name that belongs to several Gospel figures (e.g., Matthew 10:4; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15). Simon—Shimon in Hebrew—was the most common name for Jewish males in the Second Temple period.

Mark's Gospel, on the other hand, specifies that upon leaving the synagogue at Capernaum, Jesus "entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John," clearly with the apostles in mind (1:29). However, the reference to Andrew may have been a later editorial addition in Mark's Gospel, as neither Matthew's nor Luke's account mentions him or James and John. It seems, rather, that Mark's additions were influenced by the appearance of Simon and Andrew together a few lines earlier (Mark 1:16–20).

If this understanding is correct, then the earlier tradition received by Mark about the house in Capernaum more closely resembles the report in Luke that simply identified the house with a man named Simon, with no explicit mention of the apostle. For its part, the Gospel of Matthew appears to follow Mark's identification of the house with Simon-Peter, but it omits Simon to speak instead of the "house of Peter" (Matthew 8:14). Given these literary developments, our only direct New Testament reference to the location of Peter's house remains John's Gospel, which placed it in Bethsaida, not Capernaum.

BPK BILDAGENTUR / BAYERISCHE STAATSBIBLIOTHEK / ART RESOURCE, NY

Jesus healing St. Peter's mother-in-law from an early 11th-century German manuscript.

BILL SCHLEGEL/BIBLEPLACES.COM

WRONG HOUSE? Following the 1920s explorations by Gaudenzio Orfali, Christian pilgrims have been visiting the octagonal church at Capernaum (now covered by a shelter; see photo at right) as the memorial church that some medieval accounts say was built over the house of St. Peter. The church consists of two concentric octagons and is paved with beautiful mosaic floors (above). Under this fifth-century church lay the remains of a fourth-century house church, which itself rests on the ruins of a village house dated to the first century CE. The church's architectural style, however, does not seem to match the early pilgrimage accounts, making the basilica found at El-Araj a better candidate for the church that Byzantine Christians memorialized as the house of Peter at Bethsaida.

We also have a number of Christian pilgrimage accounts that discuss Bethsaida and its location. The Byzantine pilgrim Theodosius, writing in 530, recounts his journey from Tiberias to Paneas (modern Banias) by way of Capernaum and Bethsaida, noting simply that Bethsaida was "where the apostles Peter, Andrew, Philip, and the sons of Zebedee were born." Since Theodosius does not mention a church, it may be that the basilica at Bethsaida was not yet built when he visited. On the

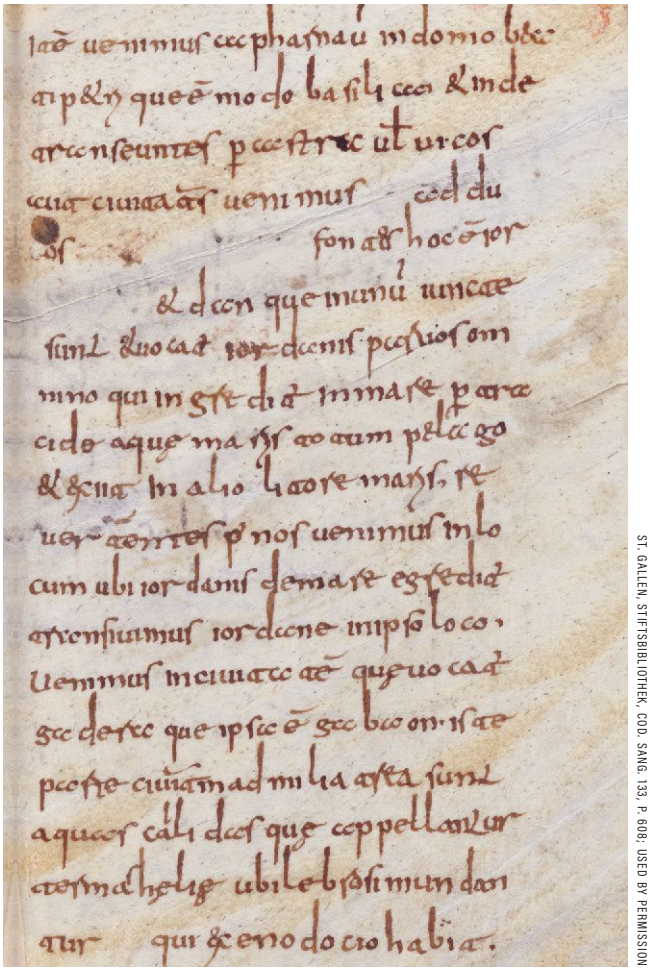
PIACENZA PILGRIM. An anonymous pilgrim from the Italian town of Piacenza reports visiting the Holy Land in the year 570. In this early ninth-century copy of the account written in Merovingian script, he says that during his travels around the Sea of Galilee, he also "came to Capernaum, to the house of Saint Peter, which is now a basilica." Although he seems to locate the church in Capernaum, he may in fact be referencing the nearby El-Araj/Bethsaida basilica rather than the octagonal church we know from Capernaum. In 725, a Bavarian bishop named Willibald is the first pilgrim who explicitly mentions a church at Bethsaida.

other hand, the presence of fifth-century coins beneath a pavement outside of the church suggests the monastery may have already been in existence.

Writing in 725, Willibald, a bishop from Eichstätt in Bavaria, is the first to explicitly mention a church at Bethsaida: "And [from Capernaum] they went to Bethsaida, from which came Peter and Andrew. There is now a church, where previously was their house." Although Willibald's itinerary around the Sea of Galilee resembles the pilgrimage of Theodosius, he additionally notes a church built over the apostles' house at Bethsaida. He also recounts that he stayed overnight in Bethsaida, which may mean that he enjoyed the hospitality of the monastery and bathhouse.

Yet we believe that there may be an even earlier reference to the Bethsaida church, namely in the itinerary of an anonymous pilgrim from Piacenza (Italy). The Piacenza Pilgrim recounts his journey in 570 around the Sea of Galilee: "Then we came to the city of Tiberias, where there are hot baths filling naturally with salt water, though the water of the sea itself is fresh. It is sixty miles around the sea. We also came to Capernaum, to the house of Saint Peter, which is now a basilica."

GARO NALBANDIAN



ST. GALLEN, STIFTSBIBLIOTHEK, COD. SANG. 133, P. 608; USED BY PERMISSION

Interestingly, the Piacenza Pilgrim's account has generally been understood as referencing not a church at Bethsaida, but rather the fifth-century octagonal martyrium church at Capernaum, first studied by Gaudenzio Orfali in the 1920s and then later excavated by the Italian archaeologists Virgilio Corbo and Stanislao Loffreda.[2] Consisting of two concentric octagons paved with beautiful mosaic floors, the church was built directly atop the remains of an earlier house church from the fourth century, which itself was built within the ruins of a small village house dated to the first century. The site's interesting archaeology, along with the testimony of the Piacenza Pilgrim, led Orfali to propose that the martyrium church had been built to mark and commemorate the house of St. Peter.

But there are significant problems with interpreting the Capernaum church as the one visited by the Piacenza Pilgrim.

First, there is the obvious architectural problem that the octagonal church found at Capernaum is not a basilica, as described by the Piacenza Pilgrim. A basilica is an oblong hall with a double colonnade. We might think that the pilgrim was simply guilty of a loose use of terms, except that elsewhere in his itinerary, when he

identifies a building as a basilica, it usually corresponds to the typical basilical plan. It is not impossible to imagine that in his account of the basilica, the Piacenza Pilgrim conflated Capernaum with nearby Bethsaida, where there is in fact a sixth-century basilica.

Second, the only time Capernaum is mentioned as the home of St. Peter in a pilgrimage account is in a purported excerpt from missing portions of the itinerary of the fourth-century pilgrim Egeria, as recorded by Peter the Deacon in the 12th century, who attributes his source to the eighth-century English monk Bede the Venerable: "Now in Capernaum there is a church from the house of the prince of the Apostles, whose walls still stand today. There the Lord healed the paralytic. There is also a synagogue where the Lord healed the demoniac, and to which one ascends many steps" (*De locis sanctis* 16.2).

Beyond the problem of the very late date for this witness, Peter the Deacon's reliability as a faithful preserver of missing portions of Egeria's itinerary has been seriously questioned. Indeed, as medievalist scholar Herbert Bloch has argued, many of Peter's writings are little more than careless excerpts from other works or even outright forgeries.[3]

There is, of course, a Byzantine church at Capernaum, but it does not appear to have been originally associated with the apostles. Epiphanius (d. 403 CE), the bishop of Salamis in Cyprus, reports that Joseph of Tiberias requested permission from Emperor Constantine to build churches in Galilee. He was permitted to build churches "in Tiberias, in Diocaesarea [i.e., Sepphoris], in Capernaum, and in the other cities" (*Refutation of All Heresies* 30.4.1). So, while this text does speak about a Byzantine church in Capernaum, there is no hint of its identification with Peter. Apostolic association may have come later, but it certainly did not exist earlier than the time of Bede (d. 735 CE) or, more likely, the medieval tradition of Peter the Deacon.

ZACHARY WONG, EL-ARAJ EXPEDITION

CASE CLOSED? This mosaic inscription written in Greek from the basilica at El-Araj commemorates a donor, "Constantine, the servant of Christ." Even more intriguing, it implores the help of St. Peter, who is designated "the chief of the apostles and the keeper of the key of heaven." This suggests the church had a special connection to the chief apostle, strengthening the claim that early Christians remembered Bethsaida (identified with El-Araj), not Capernaum, as the hometown of Peter, Andrew, and Philip.

ZACHARY WONG, EL-ARAJ EXPEDITION

HOLY GROUND. The apse in the El-Araj basilica may still be hiding the site's most exciting treasure. Recent probes beneath the floor of the apse have begun to reveal carefully preserved earlier structures. Once the ornamental mosaics are fully removed, archaeologists will have a better understanding of these enigmatic ruins. Will they find the first-century house that Byzantine tradition commemorated as the house of Peter? Stay tuned!

Given Willibald's report of the church built over the house of Peter and Andrew at Bethsaida, together with the recent discovery of the Byzantine basilica at El-Araj, I believe it is far more likely that the Piacenza Pilgrim's account references the El-Araj basilica rather than the octagonal church at Capernaum.

Fortunately, our excavations at El-Araj have finally confirmed the basilica's association with St. Peter. The large Greek medallion inscription discovered in the church's diaconicon names a local benefactor with an entreaty for intercession on his behalf from "the chief of the apostles and the keeper of the key of heaven."[4] In Byzantine writings, the title "chief of the apostles" is invariably identified with St. Peter,[5] while the inscription's reference to Peter as "the keeper of the key" clearly echoes Jesus's promise to his apostle, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 16:19).

A request for the apostle's intercession intimates his close identification with the church. Peter's association with churches in Byzantine Palestine is rare, typically occurring only at places with a connection to his appearances in the Gospels. The discovery of a petition to St. Peter in the basilica at El-Araj should remove any doubt that the church recalls the testimony of John 1:44—that the home of Peter, Andrew, and Philip was in Bethsaida. The church we have been excavating at El-Araj would then be the same one visited by Byzantine pilgrims to commemorate the home of the chief of the apostles.

In the next archaeological season, we plan to finish removing the mosaics in the church's eastern apse, where there seem to be earlier structures buried under the sixth-century church. If these ruins date to the Roman period, they may belong to the house that early Christian tradition associated with the house of Peter. We will surely keep **BAR** readers updated.

[1] For further discussion, see R. Steven Notley, "Byzantine Bethsaida and the House of St. Peter," *Novum Testamentum* 64 (2022), pp. 532–551.

[2] Virgilio Corbo, *The House of St. Peter at Capharnaum: A Preliminary Report of the First Two Campaigns of Excavations*, Sylvester Saller, trans. (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1972); Stanislao Loffreda, *Recovering Capharnaum* (Jerusalem: Custodia Terra Santa, 1985).

[3] See Herbert Bloch, "Peter the Deacon of Monte Cassino," in Berard L. Marthaler et al., eds., *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 11, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Gale, 2003), p. 206.

[4] A study of the inscription is being prepared by Leah di Segni and Jacob Ashkenazi.

[5] See, for example, John Chrysostom, *De paenitentia* 3.4; Basil of Seleucia, *Homilia in feriam v et in proditionem Judeae* 5.5; Maximus the Confessor, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 61.272.

Hard Power

The Stone Statues of Ammon

KATHARINA SCHMIDT

AMMON WAS THE NORTHERNMOST of the Transjordanian kingdoms, formed at the beginning of the tenth century BCE in the highlands east of the Jordan Valley. To the south lay Ammon's sister kingdoms, Moab and Edom. Far to the north was the kingdom of Aram-Damascus. Israel and Judah lay to the west of the Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea.

Throughout much of the Iron Age II (c. 1000–539 BCE in Transjordan), these southern Levantine kingdoms were integrated into the Assyrian Empire, the great Mesopotamian power that controlled most of the ancient Near East at the time. Assyrian domination meant that these kingdoms were part of a broader network of political, cultural, and economic interactions that extended from Mesopotamia through the Luwian-Aramean kingdoms of Syro-Anatolia and the Phoenician city-states of the eastern Mediterranean.

DEPICTING THE DIVINE. The biblical kingdom of Ammon east of the Jordan River produced a wealth of stone statuary. Several statues are believed to be deities based on their distinctive crown, which has a tall conical body and large side volutes. Similar in form to the Egyptian *atef* crown, this element was included in depictions of gods and goddesses throughout the region as early as the Middle Bronze Age (c. 2000–1550 BCE). This bust, with its piercing eyes, well-defined features, and closely cropped beard and moustache, represents an Ammonite deity, perhaps the chief god, Milkom.

ERICH LESSING / ART RESOURCE, NY

THE AMMAN CITADEL. The immense archaeological mound in the middle of modern Amman, Jordan, has yielded impressive ruins from a variety of historical periods. This view from the southeast foregrounds the mound's middle and lower terraces, where excavations revealed the remains of massive fortifications and a palace dating to the time of the Ammonite kings. Also visible are the distinctive columns of the so-called "Temple of Hercules" from the Roman period (far left of photo), beneath which are the foundations of an earlier temple to the Ammonite god Milkom. The upper terrace (upper left) is dominated by an extensive palace and administrative complex dated to the early Islamic period (seventh–eighth centuries CE).

Ancient inscriptions tell us that the people of Ammon called themselves the *bene ammon* ("children of Ammon"), a designation also found in the Book of Kings (1 Kings 11:7, 33). The Ammonites had their own language and script, which developed from Proto-Canaanite and was closely related to Phoenician, Hebrew, and Moabite. They worshiped their own chief deity, Milkom, who is mentioned in both Ammonite inscriptions and the Bible (e.g., 1 Kings 11:5, 33).

In general, Ammon's archaeology shares more similarities than differences with that of its neighbors.* Among all of these kingdoms, for example, we find fortified towers, rock-cut tombs, spherical loom weights for textile production, female terracotta figurines, and stone volutes that adorned monumental structures.

Ammon, however, has a peculiarity that is rarely observed in the other Levantine kingdoms: a large number of stone statues that were crafted between the eighth and sixth centuries BCE. At first glance, the 40 pieces of statuary are surprising, given both the kingdom's relatively small size (its territory extended only about 30 miles north to south) and

*See Joel S. Burnett, "Ammon, Moab, and Edom: Gods and Kingdoms East of the Jordan," **BAR**, November/December 2016.

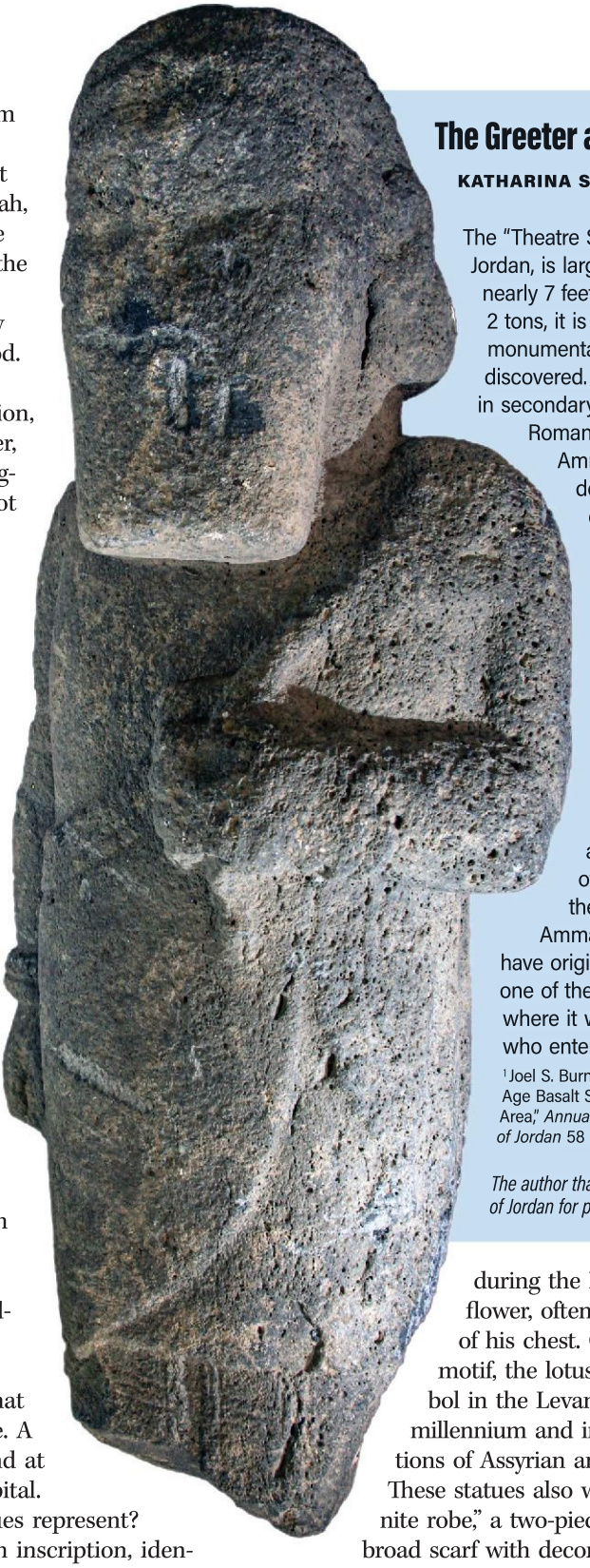
the near-total lack of statuary from neighboring kingdoms. If we look south to Moab and Edom, or west to the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, we find few examples of figurative art or stone statues, and even in the Phoenician and Luwian-Aramean kingdoms to the north, only a few statues are known from this period.

With the incredible amount of excavation carried out in the region, especially west of the Jordan River, the absence of statues in the kingdoms surrounding Ammon cannot be attributed to chance alone. It is clear that stone statuary represents a distinctive form of Ammonite artistic expression and testifies to how the Ammonites thought about the power and wealth of their rulers and the elite.

Almost all of the statues, including full figures, torsos, and heads, were found out of context as chance finds. The vast majority come from the area of the Amman Citadel, the prominent hill in downtown Amman, Jordan, that was the capital city of the Ammonites and known through much of antiquity as Rabbat-Ammon (or simply Rabbah; e.g., 2 Samuel 12:26, 29). The approximately 20-acre citadel was protected by a city wall with main gates in the north and east. Atop the citadel were discovered the remains of monumental Iron Age buildings, including a temple probably dedicated to the god Milkom and an elite residence with certain features that resemble an Assyrian-style palace. A handful of statues were also found at smaller sites surrounding the capital.

Whom do the Ammonite statues represent? Unfortunately, only one carries an inscription, identifying the figure as the Ammonite king Yerahʿazar, who likely reigned in the early seventh century BCE. Four other kingly statues can be identified based on the presence of a diadem—a popular form of royal headgear during the Iron Age—and a lotus flower, often held by the ruler in front of his chest. Originally an Egyptian motif, the lotus appears as a royal symbol in the Levant as early as the second millennium and in contemporary depictions of Assyrian and Luwian-Aramean rulers. These statues also wear the so-called "Ammonite robe," a two-piece garment consisting of a broad scarf with decorated border and a belted skirt that hangs below the knee.

More than a dozen Ammonite statues depict gods, distinguished by their headgear: a conical crown with a broad top and side volutes. This type of headgear



JANE TAYLOR / ACOR

INSET: JOEL S. BURNETT

The Greeter at the Gate

KATHARINA SCHMIDT

The "Theatre Statue" from Amman, Jordan, is larger than life. Standing nearly 7 feet tall and weighing almost 2 tons, it is the largest and most monumental Ammonite statue ever discovered. Archaeologists found it in secondary context in front of the Roman Theater in downtown Amman in 2010.[1] The statue depicts a king wearing a diadem, dressed in an Ammonite robe, and holding a lotus flower. Although such monumental royal statues are otherwise unknown in the southern Levant, they have been found in Assyrian royal cities (e.g., Nimrud) and in the Syro-Anatolian city of Carchemish, where a monumental statue of a king stood inside the city gate. As such, the Amman theater statue may have originally stood near or inside one of the gates of Rabbat-Ammon, where it would have greeted all who entered the city.

[1] Joel S. Burnett and Romel Gharib, "An Iron Age Basalt Statue from the Amman Theatre Area," *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 58 (2014), pp. 413-421.

The author thanks the Department of Antiquities of Jordan for providing access to this statue.

ERICH LESSING / ART RESOURCE, NY

ROYAL REGALIA. Just visible on the base of this small statue is an inscription identifying the subject as the Ammonite king Yerah'azar, who likely reigned in the early seventh century BCE. The statue is about 19 inches tall and bears the characteristic features of Ammonite royal iconography: a narrow band or diadem worn around the head, a lotus stalk clutched to the chest, and the distinctive two-piece "Ammonite robe" that featured a decorated scarf and belted, pleated skirt.

is reminiscent of the Egyptian *atef* crown and was used to designate Levantine deities, among them the Canaanite god El and the storm god Baal, as early as the Middle Bronze Age (c. 2000–1550 BCE). Many of the god statues have closely cropped beards and even moustaches, though others appear clean-shaven. Without inscriptions, it is difficult to identify these statues with particular Ammonite deities. Some may represent the chief god Milkom, but it is also possible that some depict the moon god Yerah, who was worshiped in the nearby temple of Rujm al-Kursi, or the god El, whose name is widely attested as a theophoric element in Ammonite personal names.

Some of the Ammonite statues are female heads. Several of these have two faces (one front and one back, Janus-style), each depicted with inlaid eyes, parted hair that extends in a curl below the ears, and adornments in the form of earrings and a necklace. The heads show remarkable similarities to female heads that appear in window frames and above balustrades in ancient Near Eastern art, especially among decorative ivories from Iron Age sites such as Samaria and Arslan Tash (see pp. 18–19). Interestingly, the double-faced heads from Ammon have peg holes on the top and bottom to attach them to decorative window balustrades, similar to those found at the Judahite palace at Ramat Rahel south of Jerusalem.* Indeed, the heads were recovered not far from the palatial residence on the Amman Citadel, suggesting they may have originally been attached to that building.

Finally, more than a quarter of the sculptures represent nonroyal men. They typically have short, curly hair, and most do not wear a beard, which distinguishes them from kings. Two heads, which come from the site of Abu Alanda about 6 miles southeast of the Amman Citadel, are nearly identical in appearance. Both were crafted with extra-long necks, suggesting they may have once been attached to full-body statues of the men they depict. These and other statues of nonroyal men could be related to mortuary or ancestor cults.

The Ammonite statues were likely commissioned by the kingdom's rulers and perhaps also members of the wealthy elite. Ammon benefited greatly from the western

* Gabriel Barkay, "Royal Palace, Royal Portrait? The Tantalizing Possibilities of Ramat Rahel," **BAR**, September/October 2006.

BOTH IMAGES: JOHANNES KRAMER / AMMONITE SCULPTURE PROJECT

STYLED STATUES. Some Ammonite statues represent women and typically have inlaid eyes as well as long flowing hair and adornments such as earrings (above left). Interestingly, several are two-sided, with "front" and "back" faces. Their fixed and standardized appearance—and the peg holes found on the top and bottom of the statues—suggests they were decorative elements attached to the window balustrades of royal buildings. By contrast, statues depicting nonroyal men are far more varied in appearance (above right), showing different hairstyles and facial expressions, and were therefore likely intended to be realistic depictions of wealthy Ammonite elites.

expansion of the Assyrian Empire in the late eighth century BCE. Whereas kingdoms including Israel and Aram-Damascus were devastated and ultimately conquered by the Assyrians following their attempts at rebellion, the kingdoms of Ammon, Moab, and Edom remained independent vassals and even benefited from the new political environment. The Ammonite kingdom in particular flourished, as evident not only by the capital's monumental palace and temple, but also by a significant increase in the number of towns and villages that were settled during this period.

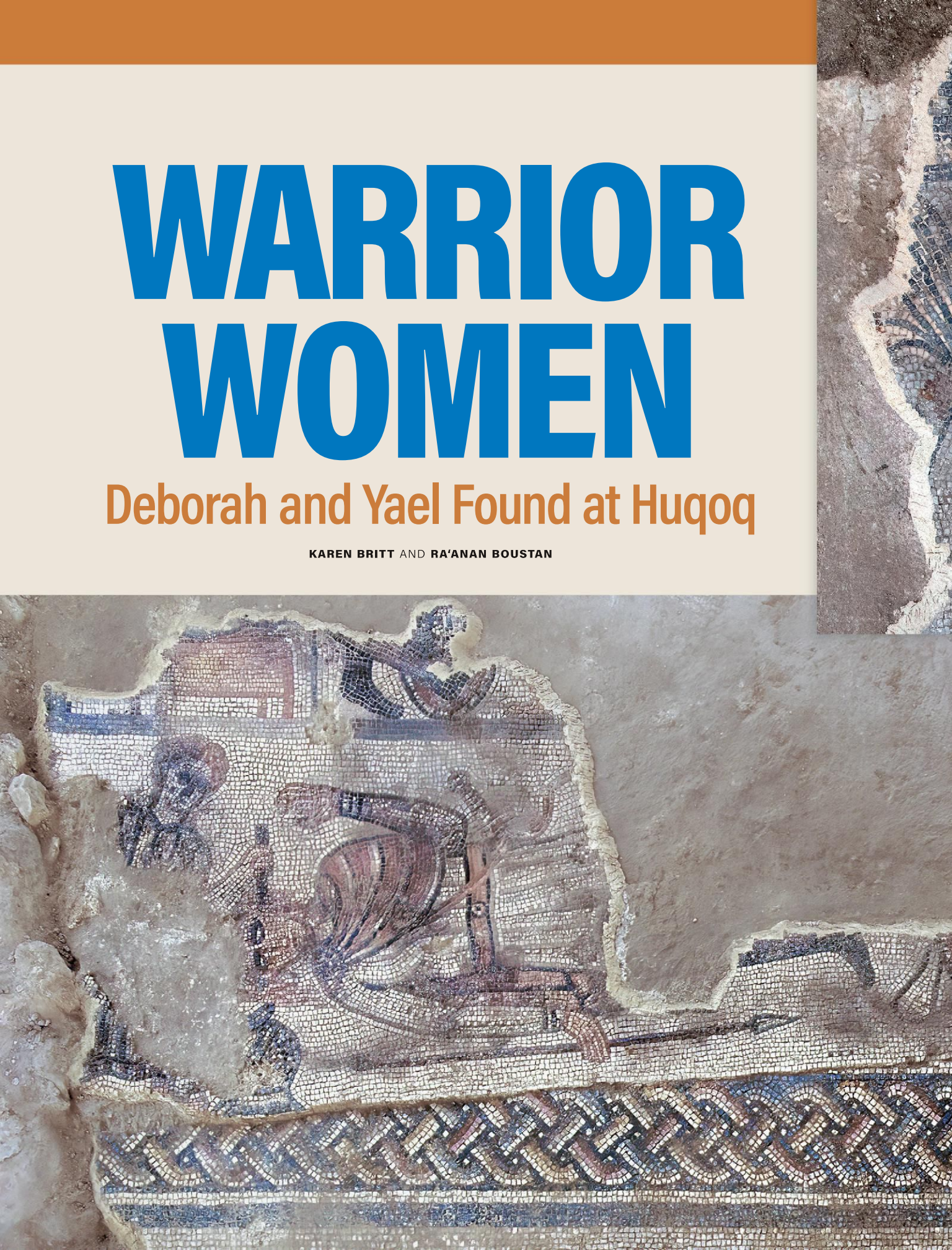
The statues were an expression of the kingdom's wealth and connections. Ammon was the only southern Levantine kingdom that never rebelled against Assyrian rule and always reliably paid tribute. It was, therefore, part of the Assyrian Empire and, as such, was able to maintain close relationships with kings and elites throughout Syria and Phoenicia. Ammon also bordered the vast North Arabian Desert to the southeast, where nomadic Arab tribes had considerable economic and military power during the eighth and seventh centuries. The Ammonite kingdom, therefore, served both as a critical buffer between Assyria and the Arabian tribes and as an important corridor for trade and commerce.

Influenced by the artistic traditions of these nearby kingdoms and peoples, the Ammonites developed their own unique monumental and figurative style that blended foreign cultural elements yet emphasized specific local characteristics and customs, such as the Ammonite dress worn by their kings and the *atef* crown donned by their gods. Their statues provide a rare and important glimpse into a society so similar to and yet so different from its neighbors.

WARRIOR WOMEN

Deborah and Yael Found at Huqoq

KAREN BRITT AND RA'ANAN BOUSTAN



UNLIKELY HEROES ARE COMMONPLACE in the Hebrew Bible. But the recent discovery of a mosaic from the synagogue at Huqoq that depicts the defeat of the Canaanite general Sisera under the leadership of the judge and prophet Deborah and his subsequent assassination by a woman named Yael (or Jael; Judges 4–5) is as stunning as it is unprecedented.

Since 2011, the Huqoq Excavation Project, directed by Jodi Magness of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, has been uncovering the remains of a monumental synagogue. The synagogue was built around 400 CE, when the Jewish inhabitants of Huqoq, a village in the Lower Galilee, were ruled by Christian Roman emperors. The synagogue was decorated with a mosaic floor depicting an array of biblical stories.* All the other biblical scenes from Huqoq center on men, whether as protagonists or antagonists. More surprisingly, the appearance of Deborah and Yael in the mosaic has no parallel in either Jewish or Christian art from late antiquity and predates other visual depictions of their story by almost a thousand years.

The mosaic raises many provocative questions: Upon what biblical and postbiblical texts did the mosaic draw for its imagery? What can the panel tell us about Jewish attitudes toward gender in antiquity? And why did this story resonate with a Jewish community in Galilee during the fourth and fifth centuries?

* See Jodi Magness et al., "Inside the Huqoq Synagogue," **BAR**, May/June 2019.

BOTH IMAGES: JIM HABERMAN

DEBORAH AND YAEL. This panel from Huqoq's synagogue depicts the events of Judges 4. In the top register (above), the Israelite commander Barak, armed with a sword and shield, stands before Deborah, who is seated under a date palm. From the biblical text, we know that Deborah summons Barak to tell him to go to war against the king of Hazor and his general Sisera. Barak asks Deborah to go with him. They successfully defeat the enemy, but Sisera escapes on foot. The heroine Yael then lures Sisera to her tent supposedly to hide him (the mosaic's poorly preserved middle register [opposite, top] shows just a fragment of this scene). Instead, when he falls asleep, she drives a tent peg through his temple. The third register of the panel (opposite) shows this final scene: Yael grasping a tent peg and hammer in her hands and a giant Sisera dead on the ground with his weapons lying around him.

SPECTACULAR SYNAGOGUE. Some of the earliest Jewish art comes from the late fourth- or early fifth-century CE synagogue at Huqoq in the Lower Galilee. Colorful mosaics cover the synagogue's floor and depict a variety of biblical and historical scenes.

The Deborah and Yael mosaic is located at the south end of the synagogue's west aisle. The panel is preserved in two sizable fragments that allow us to identify the subject matter of the scene and to provide a secure reconstruction of its narrative sequence and thematic emphases. It is divided into three registers of roughly equal size that are read from top to bottom.

In the Hebrew Bible, the story of the Israelite defeat of King Jabin of Canaan and his general Sisera is told in two distinct accounts, one a prose narrative (Judges 4) and the other a poetic composition known as the Song of Deborah (Judges 5). Although the two versions overlap in their general narrative arc, they also diverge both in terms of their thematic interests and specific details. Scholars generally agree that the narrative has its roots in early Israelite culture and that the version in Judges 5 is the older of the two.* But it must also be remembered that we are dealing with a tradition that developed in numerous stages over the centuries and took expression in many variations, only two of which were eventually incorporated into the Book of Judges.[1] The creators of the Huqoq panel could, therefore, have drawn on a broad pool of Deborah and Yael traditions, including various postbiblical retellings and interpretations of the story that were in circulation in the late Roman period.

We believe the scene depicted in the panel is more closely aligned with features of the narrative as recounted in Judges 4 in contrast to the rendition in Judges 5.

In the top register of the panel, Deborah appears under a date palm whose fronds extend over her head. The figure of Deborah is damaged; only her veiled head and upper right arm are preserved. In Judges 4:5, Deborah performs her work as judge and prophet while sitting beneath a palm tree located between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim.

This image of a commanding Israelite woman seated beneath a palm on the eve of battle would have been particularly potent in the context of a synagogue mosaic from late fourth- or early fifth-century Palestine. Synagogue-attendees might have seen in this image a powerful—and subversive—rejoinder to the anti-Judean imagery propagated by the Romans on *Iudaea capta* coins and in other mediums following the First Jewish Revolt (66–73 CE), in which a woman, who embodies the defeated Jewish people, sits in mourning beneath a palm tree, often alongside the arms or armor of the conquered.

* See Lawrence E. Stager, "The Song of Deborah—Why Some Tribes Answered the Call and Others Did Not," **BAR**, January/February 1989.

In front of Deborah stands the partially preserved figure of the Israelite commander Barak, who has arrived armed for battle. He holds a raised sword in his right hand and a shield in his left. The imagery, particularly the intensity of the protagonists' gazes, evokes the tense exchange recounted in Judges 4:8–9 between Deborah and Barak regarding his unwillingness to wage war without her help, and her warning that his reluctance will mean that the Israelite victory will not bring him glory but instead Sisera will be delivered into the hands of a woman.

Much transpires in the unrepresented interval between the episodes depicted in the top and middle registers (Judges 4:10–16; 5:12–22). Barak, accompanied by Deborah, musters an army from the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun in the north and goes to Mt. Tabor in the Lower Galilee (see p. 30). Upon hearing this news, Sisera summons his own army and meets the Israelite force. In an act that surpasses the cowardice expressed by Barak and advances the fulfillment of Deborah's prophecy, following the disastrous defeat of his forces at the Kishon River, Sisera flees on foot from the battlefield to the tent of Yael, the wife of Heber the Kenite who was on good terms with the Canaanites (Judges 4:15–17).

Despite extensive damage to the middle register, the scene appears to depict Sisera resting on a low stool in the tent of Yael. The positions of the left foot and right lower leg of Sisera indicate that the Canaanite general is depicted in profile view. His right lower leg overlaps the shield lying near his feet. All that is preserved of Yael is one of her feet, upon which she wears a shoe like the one she wears in the bottom register. From the orientation of her foot, it seems that Yael stands before Sisera, likely offering him a drink of milk, as recounted in both Judges 4:19 and 5:25.

Medieval Heroines

KAREN BRITT AND **RA'ANAN BOUSTAN**

Before the discovery of the Huqoq mosaic, the earliest known narrative representations of Deborah and Yael appeared in medieval illustrated picture Bibles and psalters, where they are depicted as heroic women engaged in acts of violence. In the Morgan Picture Bible from Paris (1244–1254), for example, Deborah is shown on horseback (below) in the thick of battle encouraging Barak and the Israelites to attack Sisera's army. In the next scene, continuous narrative (a type of pictorial representation that illustrates multiple episodes of a story within a single frame) is used to depict Yael offering milk to Sisera, killing him as he sleeps, and revealing his body to Barak.

Similarly, the earliest depiction of Yael is found in the *Speculum Virginum* ("Mirror of Virgins"), a 12th-century didactic treatise written for female monastics, where she appears alongside Judith as a moral exemplar of Humility. Rather than being a singular hero in a "historical" drama, Yael has here come to embody an abstract virtue.

GRIFFIN HIGHER PHOTOGRAPHY

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The scene in the bottom register, which is the best preserved of the three, also occurs inside Yael's tent. It depicts Yael wielding a hammer, which she uses to drive a tent peg through Sisera's temple and into the ground (Judges 4:21; 5:26–27). Sisera lies dead on his side, his head bleeding profusely, and his eyes rolled back into his head. By comparison to Yael, Sisera is a gigantic figure, perhaps reminiscent of Goliath in contemporary representations of his famous defeat at the hands of David (1 Samuel 17). Sisera's weapons are arrayed around him. The hilt of his sheathed sword protrudes from behind his left hip, while the end of the scabbard is visible beneath the back of his right thigh. Sisera's lifeless right hand loosely grasps the shaft of a long spear. A battle helmet rests near the general's head, and an oval shield lies at Sisera's feet.

The most compelling evidence for associating the Huqoq panel with Judges 4 appears in the top and bottom registers. In the top register, the depiction of a palm tree as the place of Deborah's judgment and therefore the setting for her encounter with Barak is not mentioned in the parallel poetic account in Judges 5. The death scene in the bottom register hews closely to the description in Judges 4:21 of Yael softly creeping up on Sisera as he sleeps and hammering the peg through his head into the ground. An altogether different picture of Sisera's death is evoked by Judges 5:26–27, where he collapses to the ground after the peg has been driven through his head, suggesting that he was in an upright position at the moment Yael delivered the fatal blow. In this way, the narrative depicted in the panel both begins and ends with episodes that are distinctive to Judges 4.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to assess how the imagery in the mosaic compares to other visual depictions of Deborah and Yael, as the Huqoq panel is not only the first appearance of this story in a synagogue, but also its earliest extant representation. Indeed, artistic depictions of Deborah and Yael only surface in illuminated manuscripts of the late medieval period (see sidebar, p. 57).

To glimpse views of Deborah and Yael that are closer in date to the Huqoq mosaic, we must look to literary images evoked in textual traditions. As befits a provocative tale from the heart of the Book of Judges, early Jewish writers produced myriad responses to Judges 4–5. These adaptations and interpretations range from the celebratory rendering of the narrative in Pseudo-Philo's *Biblical Antiquities* (30–34) to the treatment of Deborah and Yael in Josephus's *Jewish Antiquities*, which slights their role in the victory over Sisera (5.200–201).

Rabbinic literature exhibits an even more pronounced tendency to undermine the authority and stature of Deborah and to impugn the character and motivations of Yael (e.g., *b. Pesahim* 66b; *b. Megillah* 14a–b; *b. Yebamot* 103a–b). These sources are openly distrustful of Deborah's public role as judge, leader, and prophet. For her part, Yael emerges as promiscuous and even lascivious, her heroic deeds belittled by gendered stereotypes. The choice to place this narrative within the space of a synagogue appears to be in considerable tension with the discomfort that some late antique Jews felt about Deborah and Yael.

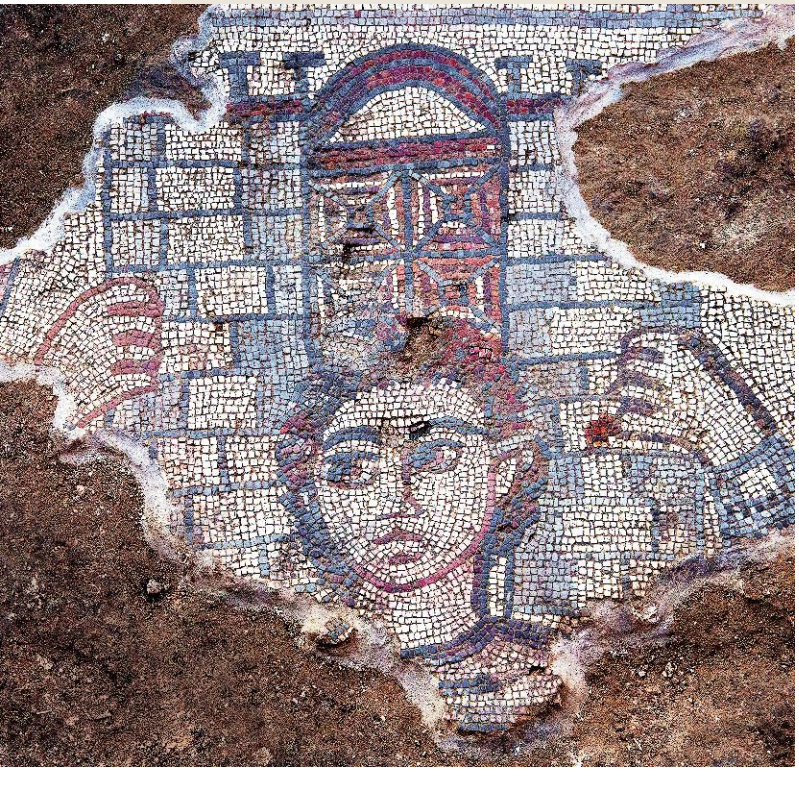
Huqoq's Judges

KAREN BRITT AND **RA'ANAN BOUSTAN**

The Deborah and Yael panel is not the first scene from the Book of Judges to be found at Huqoq: In 2012–2013, two episodes from the Samson cycle (Judges 13–16) were found in the south end of the synagogue's east aisle. This kind of symmetry between thematically related panels is characteristic of the Huqoq mosaics.

Violent conflict with foreign powers is a central theme of the Book of Judges. There are significant differences, however, in the way the stories are told in the mosaics. The Deborah and Yael mosaic depicts multiple episodes from the story arranged in horizontal registers within a single panel. By contrast, in the Samson panel, scenes that depict Samson and the foxes (Judges 15:4–5) and Samson and the gate of Gaza (see below, Judges 16:3) are placed side by side and therefore would have been viewed sequentially. These differences in representation reflect the diverse visual approaches to storytelling employed throughout the synagogue mosaics.

JIM HABERMAN



JIM HABERMAN

SONG OF THE SEA. The Red Sea panel at Huqoq's synagogue vividly depicts Exodus 15, the Song of the Sea. Pharaoh's soldiers, who were chasing the Israelites, are swallowed by flood waters. The mosaic shows them and their horses floundering and being attacked by ferocious fish. After the song, Miriam leads the Israelite women in their own celebration (Exodus 15:20–21). Thus, both the Red Sea panel in the synagogue's nave and the Deborah panel in the west aisle depict victory songs from the Bible associated with prominent women leaders.

At the same time, Judges 4–5 may have formed part of the Jewish lectionary cycles that were in use in late Roman Palestine. At least from the medieval period onward, the story of Deborah and Yael is chanted on the "Sabbath of the Song" (*Shabbat shira*) as the prophetic reading that accompanies the weekly Torah portion of *Beshallah* (Exodus 13:17–17:16) during which the "Song of the Sea" of Exodus 15 is read. Despite the absence of clear evidence for this practice from late antiquity, we might nevertheless speculate that the mosaic's story of Deborah was also meant to be viewed and understood in relation to the Red Sea panel found in the nave of the synagogue, thereby providing a visual juxtaposition of these two famous biblical "songs" of victory.[2] It is tantalizing to imagine the Huqoq community regularly commemorating the heroic deeds of Deborah and Yael in this very space.

The strong reactions that Deborah and Yael provoked among the rabbis suggest that gender was a potent theme within the Huqoq panel. The acute tensions between Deborah and Barak and between Yael and Sisera in the account in Judges 4 raised complicated questions regarding the intersection of gender, power, and violence. In this respect, the panel added yet another dimension to the broader story that the Huqoq mosaics sought to tell about the place of Jews in history.

The Huqoq synagogue mosaics communicated ideas about not only religion but also politics and power in the later Roman Empire. By situating familiar stories about illustrious figures from Israelite or Jewish history within a public building used for prayer, scriptural reading, and other communal functions, the creators of the Huqoq synagogue suffused these traditions with new life. The Book of Judges in particular may have resonated strongly with the synagogue community because they viewed their current circumstances as comparable to ancient Israel's domination by foreign powers (see sidebar, opposite). The stories represented in the mosaics were not only religiously edifying but also culturally relevant, as they provided the sense that the current tensions they were experiencing within the rapidly Christianizing Roman Empire were nothing new and could be resolved in surprising ways.

[1] See Colleen Conway, *Sex and Slaughter in the Tent of Jael: A Cultural History of a Biblical Story* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2016), pp. 1–26.

[2] The Song of the Sea and the story of Deborah and Yael are already paired with each other in several classical rabbinic texts; e.g., *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, *Shirata* 1 on Exodus 15:1; *b. Pesahim* 118b.

What Was the Star of Bethlehem?

NATHAN STEINMEYER

FOR THE PAST 2,000 YEARS, people have wondered about the identity and nature of the Star of Bethlehem. And for hundreds of years, some of the world's smartest people—including famed astronomer Johannes Kepler—have tried to use science to find the answer. Dozens, if not hundreds, of natural solutions have been put forward to account for the Nativity story in Matthew 2:1–12.* However, no matter which astronomical phenomenon is suggested, there is one massive problem: Nearly all modern science-based solutions ignore how ancient people thought about and examined the sky.

As scientific advancements have drastically changed what we know about the sky, they have also drastically altered how we think about it. There is no guarantee that a particular celestial event identified by a modern astronomer would be seen as auspicious by ancient people—much less as predicting a future king—no matter how interesting or remarkable we might find that event today. But, if modern astronomy cannot identify the Star of Bethlehem, can ancient astronomy?

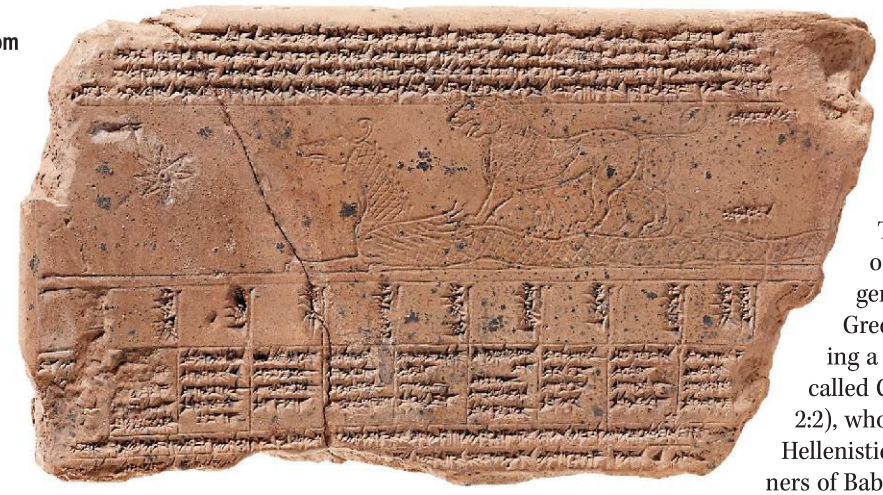
Ancient cultures throughout the Near East and Mediterranean had thriving and complex astronomical systems through which they examined and interpreted the sky. Although today these systems would more aptly be termed astral divination, in antiquity the difference between astronomy and astrology was negligible. After all, this is the reason the Magi would travel "from the East" (Matthew 2:1) upon seeing a star (see p. 26). These "wise men" did not operate according to any sort of modern principles; rather, they would have interpreted the sky in culturally specific ways, reading the sky as we would read a weather forecast today.

Although each system of ancient astronomy was unique, by the first century BCE many of them had come to prioritize highly regular and mathematically predictable events, such as lunar phases, eclipses, and the procession of the zodiac. Within Babylonian astronomy, already an ancient and revered system by the Roman period, nearly every repetitive event had its own significance, including every day, month, area of the sky, and

* See Simo Parpola, "The Magi and the Star," *Bible Review*, December 2001.

The Magi following the Star of Bethlehem, from a 13th-century stucco relief from the church of Santa Maria de Mosoll, Spain.

MANUEL COHEN / ART RESOURCE, NY.



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Babylonian zodiac from the second century BCE depicting the sign Leo.

celestial body. Yet these events were never taken on their own, and a wide range of factors could drastically impact their interpretation by astronomers—factors, such as weather patterns, that would have little or no bearing on the astronomy of today and are now irrecoverable in any case. An eclipse on a specific day, for example, may have indicated the death of a king, but the presence of clouds covering a particular side of the moon could have changed the king to which the signs referred, and thus whether it was a bad or good sign. More signs could then be layered on top of these, creating ever more complex results.

In antiquity, diagnostic manuals and charts existed for reading the heavens, such as the 70-tablet-long Babylonian text *Enuma Anu Enlil*, from which astronomers could base their interpretations. In practice, however, these interpretations were never as consistent and straightforward as one might expect. A similarly convoluted system existed in Roman astronomy. Ptolemy's *Apotelesmatika* (second century CE), for example, listed seven separate regions that could be represented by an astronomical phenomenon in Aries: Britain, Gaul, Germany, Bastarnia, Syria, Idumea, and Judea. Yet many of these regions were not agreed upon by scholars of Ptolemy's own age, which highlights the remarkably disparate range of possible interpretations.

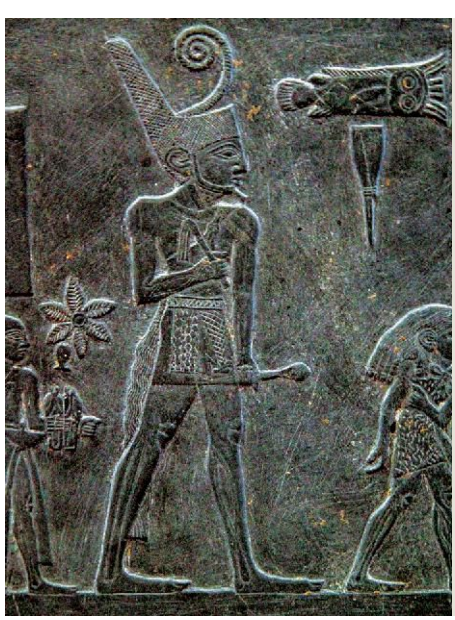
Thus, we arrive at a twofold problem. First, ancient astronomers placed critical value on many astral phenomena that fall outside the purview of modern astronomy, including things as mundane as the weather. Second, interpretations of these events could vary greatly, even between individual astronomers who could choose which phenomena they focused on and which they did not.

Unfortunately, the Gospel of Matthew is of little help in pinning down what the Star of Bethlehem may have been. Despite the interpretive efforts of numerous scholars, Matthew's description remains too vague, allowing for an incredible array of possible explanations before one even considers the many other phenomena that the ancients would have factored into their understanding of the sky.

Indeed, we cannot even be certain who the Magi were (see p. 26). While Matthew refers to them as *magoi*, a type of Zoroastrian priest from Persia, there is little evidence that such priests were common practitioners of astral divination. This word is used occasionally as a generic term for non-Greek scholars, including a group frequently called Chaldeans (Daniel 2:2), who were identified in Hellenistic times as practitioners of Babylonian astronomy.

Yet even if we could connect the Magi to Babylonian astronomy with any confidence, the earlier twofold problem remains: ancient astronomers would have considered phenomena that we are unable to reconstruct in modern times; and even if we could, we would have no way of knowing exactly how the Magi themselves would have interpreted them.

While natural and scientific solutions have become increasingly popular, they fail to account for the insurmountable fact that in order to know what the Magi saw that night more than 2,000 years ago, we ourselves would need to be able to experience and know the world as they did. Perhaps those are things best left to the imagination rather than to modern science.



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CLIP ART

Do you recognize this object?

1. Merneptah Stele
2. Arslan Tash Amulet
3. Narmer Palette
4. Mesha Stele
5. Siloam Tunnel Inscription

ANSWER ON P. 66

Artificial Intelligence and Bible Translation

JONATHAN ROBIE

IMICHAELLANE / LIGHTSTOCK

TODAY THE BIBLE is being translated into thousands of different languages. Some of these, like Chinese or Arabic, are spoken by billions or hundreds of millions of people. Others are local dialects that are known primarily in the small communities that use them. Most of this translation work is done using software designed specifically for Bible translation. Some of this software can process human language much as traditional software handles data, using a variety of techniques collectively termed Natural Language Processing (NLP).

NLP has often been done using statistical models that can run on typical computers. More advanced software, such as Google Search, Google Translate, and ChatGPT, uses complex language tools and algorithms called neural models to process and generate human language. These generally require high-end servers, and analyze vast amounts of text data to create powerful Large Language Models (LLMs) using methods that are often called "artificial intelligence" or AI. (Artificial intelligence is often loosely defined and implies human-like understanding. This article uses the terms NLP and LLM, which are more specific and precise.) LLMs have dramatically improved the power of NLP, promising new ways to make the translation process more efficient, ensure the quality of Bible translations, and help researchers create high-quality resources for Bible translators.

NLP tools can associate the words in a translation to the corresponding words in the Bible's original Greek or Hebrew, a process known as "alignment." These alignments can be used to:

- Perform many kinds of checks for translation consistency
- Associate dictionary entries, images, articles, and maps with the original text
- Create draft translations that can be used as a starting point for a translation
- Provide rich linguistic analysis of a translation and the choices made in the translation process
- Identify unclear, unnatural, or inaccurate passages within a translation
- Produce exegetical resources to support translation work

Using NLP for some of these purposes is not new. For example, Paratext, the most widely used Bible translation tool, began using NLP in 2007. Within Paratext, the "Biblical Terms" tool uses NLP to help translation teams ensure that key biblical terms like "salvation," "sanctification," and "redemption" are translated accurately and consistently throughout the Bible. Paratext also uses the alignment process to associate external resources with the original biblical text, and has an "Interlinearizer" that can provide glosses for a translation.

Researchers are now exploring new ways to leverage modern NLP. For instance, several translation organizations are exploring first drafts generated entirely with NLP. SIL International's AQuA project (www.ai.sil.org/Projects/AQuA) trains NLP models using the judgments of expert translation consultants to identify passages that are unclear, inaccurate, or unnatural. AQuA is not always

MARK 16:1 (TELUGU)	TRANSLITERATION	ANALYSIS (TRANSLITERATION)
వచ్చి	vachchi	vachchi (**came** - verb))
ఆయనకు	āyanaku	āyanaku (**to** - adposition)
పూయవలెనని	pūyavalenani	pūya (**anoint** - verb) + valē (**with** - adposition) + nē (**him** - pronoun) + ni (**for** - adposition)
సుగంధద్రవ్యములు	sugandhadravyamulu	sugandha (**fragrant** - adjective) + dravyamulu (**substances** - noun)

ChatGPT analysis of a sequence of terms from a Telugu translation of Mark 16:1: "When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him." Tables like this are very useful for translating the Bible into local languages but take considerable time to produce by hand. Using modern Natural Language Processing (NLP), they can be generated automatically.

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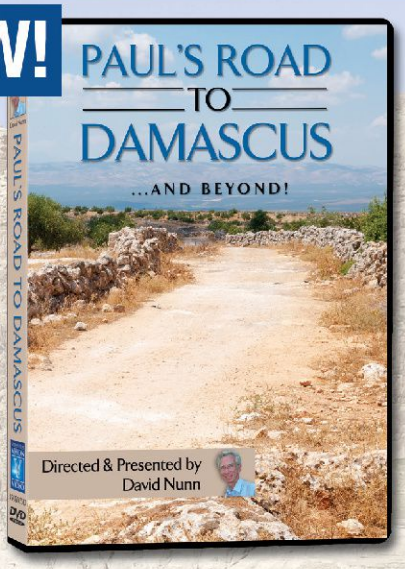

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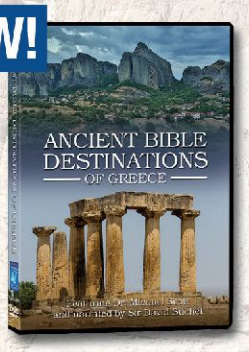

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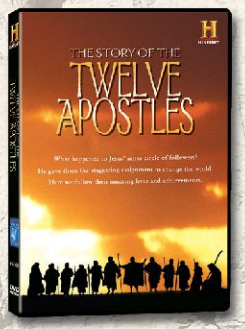

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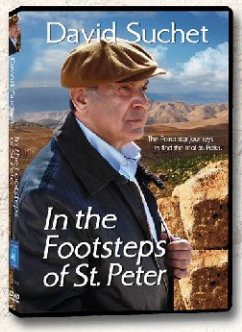

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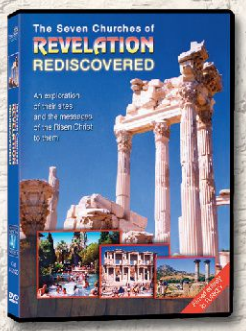

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reliable; sometimes the passages it flags are fine. But if AQuA flags a passage as problematic, then the odds are good that the passage has problems that should be discussed. Other groups are exploring a variety of ways to do linguistic analysis of translations using NLP to support Bible translation and create exegetical resources.

NLP software may improve quality and efficiency, but Bible translation is best done by human beings, using software as a tool. Producing a first draft is only about 10 percent of the work involved in creating a translation, whether that draft is produced by humans or NLP. Even if software could create a perfect translation—and it cannot—the process of translating the Bible into a local language creates a sense of ownership and community, bringing together the translation team and the group they serve, while also preparing that community to study and teach using the translation that is produced. If the group for whom a translation is intended does not feel connected to it, they may never use it.

Software and resources are best used in ways that help translation teams work together. Such teams are usually diverse, composed of people who bring different cultures, skills, knowledge, and experience to the task. Teams may include native speakers of the target language who lack training in the biblical languages and experienced scholars and translators who do not have a background in the target language.

Modern LLMs like ChatGPT are powerful NLP systems that can write essays or web page content, but they are not optimized for Bible translation. For one thing, they are not trained on trusted translation resources. But developers can create high-quality output by providing good linguistic data, commentaries, and other reliable reference works as input, configuring software so that it does not use less acceptable sources. Additionally, although such models do not have good support for most of the world's languages, an existing LLM can be "fine-tuned" for a new language, providing useful results with only a small amount of text from that language.

The translation world also faces the same challenges that other developers face in preparing LLMs for use in the NLP context. LLMs can sometimes make things up, provide wildly inconsistent answers, or provide answers in forms that are hard to use. Together with the rest of the software world, we are learning how to overcome these challenges in Bible translation.

Above all, while NLP can rapidly create results that are often good, these results still need to be verified and edited by human beings before they can be considered trustworthy. If this is kept in mind, NLP can be used in a wide variety of ways to improve the quality of Bible translation and make it more efficient. This article only scratches the surface; the entire field of NLP is progressing very rapidly, and so are the applications to Bible translation. The possibilities are vast, and we are only beginning to explore them.

Were There 12 Tribes of Israel?

ANDREW TOBOLOWSKY

THE AUTHORS of the biblical books of Genesis through Kings tended to define Israel as a community of 12 tribes. The tribal ancestors—the 12 sons of Jacob—are the protagonists of the second half of Genesis, and the tribes take center stage in most of the other books in this group. The conquest of Canaan (Joshua 13–19), the split of the United Monarchy into Israel and Judah (1 Kings 11–12), and even the Assyrian conquest of Israel in 722 BCE (2 Kings 17) are all described in tribal terms. Judges 5, which may well be the oldest text in the Hebrew Bible, is a poem describing a conflict between a number of the tribes and an invading Canaanite army. Thus, some version of the tribal tradition existed very early.

But were there actually 12 tribes of Israel? That is a difficult question to answer.[1]

For one thing, although some biblical authors seem focused on details of tribal Israel, others hardly seem interested. There are at least 19 descriptions of the tribes between Genesis 29 and Judges 5, but in later biblical books, there isn't even a complete account of which tribes lived in which of the two kingdoms, Israel and Judah. Outside of Ezekiel 48, most of the prophets never mention the tribes.

In the same vein, Judges 5, often called the Song of Deborah, may prove the early origins of the tribal tradition, but it does not mention all 12 of the familiar tribes.* It is missing Judah, Simeon, Levi, and Gad. And it refers to certain groups that are elsewhere treated either like subtribes (Machir and Gilead) or not mentioned at all (Meroz), without distinguishing them from the tribes. There may be other early tribal lists (e.g., Genesis 49), but they were likely edited later on in various ways. It is

* Lawrence E. Stager, "The Song of Deborah—Why Some Tribes Answered the Call and Others Did Not," **BAR**, January/February 1989.

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The 12 tribes of Israel are represented with symbols on this modern street mosaic from Jerusalem's Jewish Quarter. Starting at the top and moving clockwise, they symbolize: (1) Rueben: rising sun, (2) Simeon: city, (3) Levi: high priest's breastplate, (4) Judah: lion, (5) Zebulun: ship, (6) Issachar: donkey, (7) Dan: scales, (8) Gad: military tent, (9) Asher: olive tree, (10) Naphtali: doe, (11) Joseph: wheat, and (12) Benjamin: wolf.

very hard to know what they prove and don't prove.

Meanwhile, outside the Bible, there is hardly any evidence at all. There may—or may not—be a reference to the tribe of Gad in the Mesha Stele, a ninth-century BCE Moabite inscription describing a conflict between King Mesha of Moab and the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. But that would seem to be it. We have a large number of Israelite and Judahite personal names preserved in various inscriptions,* but I am not aware of even one that describes an individual as a member of a tribe.

In short, we have a situation where the intense focus on the tribes throughout biblical history stands in some tension with both their absence from other biblical compositions and outside evidence. At the same time, there are a few things we can say with confidence. First, it seems clear that there were *some* tribes in early periods. Second, it is even more clear that a few tribes were still important in the region of Judah after the Babylonian Exile in the sixth century BCE, namely the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and Levi. Two of the latest books in the Hebrew Bible, Ezra and Nehemiah, describe these tribes as the first three to return from exile (Ezra 1) and, later, as Jerusalem's residents (Nehemiah 11–12). Even in the New Testament, Paul, who lived in the first century CE, repeatedly describes himself as a member of the tribe of Benjamin (Acts 13:21; Romans 11:1; Philippians 3:5).

In addition, there may still have been tribes in the region of Israel—as opposed to Judah—even in later periods. Second Kings 17, the most detailed biblical account of the aforementioned Assyrian conquest, claims that all the tribes living in Israel were taken away to Assyria. Yet other biblical texts, such as 2 Chronicles 30, suggest the survival of Israelite tribes in the region, and the archaeological evidence is increasingly on that side. The people known to history as the Samaritans are likely the descendants of these Israelites who were not exiled, as they themselves have always claimed. They have a long history of identifying with the tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Levi, which survives to this day.

So were there actually 12 tribes of Israel? Broadly, I think probably not. I would suggest that the tradition of the 12 tribes was invented in Judah, sometime after the Assyrian conquest of Israel, by expanding a more ancient Israelite tribal tradition, like Judges 5, into a form that included Judah itself. This might have happened for many reasons, including a desire to incorporate Israelite refugees into Judah, to claim greater prestige, or even to claim some former Israelite territory. It was likely also accompanied by the switch

* See Mitka R. Golub, "What's in a Name? Personal Names in Ancient Israel and Judah," **BAR**, Summer 2020. Golub analyzes about 950 names preserved in inscriptions from the Iron Age.

CLIP ART (SEE QUIZ ON P. 61)

Answer: 3 Narmer Palette

PHOTOS: ÁNGEL M. FELICÍSIMO / CC BY 2.0

Narmer is widely considered to be the founder of ancient Egypt's First Dynasty. This palette, dating to c. 3100 BCE, depicts his unification of Upper and Lower Egypt. On one side (see left image), he is depicted with the flat crown of Lower Egypt, while on the other (right) he wears the tall, bulbous crown of Upper Egypt and stands in the "smiting stance" that would become a widespread indicator of power in later Egyptian iconography.

The palette is also significant because it provides one of the earliest glimpses of hieroglyphic writing. Centered along the top edge of each face is a square enclosure called a *serekh* (literally "palace façade"), a precursor to the later cartouche design used to isolate royal names from what surrounds them. This *serekh* contains two glyphs, a catfish and a chisel, which are read together as Narmer, the king's name. These two symbols also appear next to the king himself, without the *serekh*, on the face shown at left.

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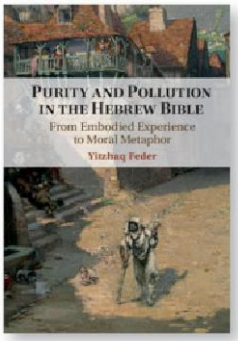
BEST BOOK ON THE HEBREW BIBLE

Purity and Pollution in the Hebrew Bible



FROM EMBODIED EXPERIENCE TO MORAL METAPHOR

YITZHAQ FEDER
(Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2021)

Where did the Hebrew Bible's concepts of purity and pollution originate, and how did ancient Israel think about these ideas? In this insightful book, anthropologist and biblical scholar Yitzhaq Feder builds upon previous scholarship and offers a nuanced way forward by synthesizing what are typically opposing views on purity and pollution. His explanations of the linguistic and historical issues involved are clear and accessible, and his engagement with both biblical and extrabiblical sources is thorough and careful. All the while, Feder never loses sight of the significance his research holds for better understanding the Hebrew Bible.

— JUDGES —

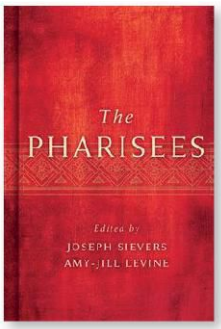
ELIZABETH BACKFISH
William Jessup University

STEED DAVIDSON
Society of Biblical Literature

AMY-JILL LEVINE
Hartford International University for Religion and Peace

BEST BOOK ON THE NEW TESTAMENT

The Pharisees



EDITED BY JOSEPH SIEVERS AND AMY-JILL LEVINE
(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021)

The Pharisees is a landmark volume that tackles a longstanding problem in the field of New Testament studies by bringing together a broad variety of scholars with a stunningly wide breadth of expertise—including literary and archaeological perspectives, Jewish and Christian contexts, and ancient and modern purviews. The negative portrayal of Pharisees in the New Testament and its effects on the history of anti-Semitism have been long noted, including in relation to a difficult legacy of anti-Judaism that has been shaped by the academic study of the New Testament. This volume addresses the problem head-on, updating our historical understanding of this group in the light of new data and approaches.

— JUDGES —

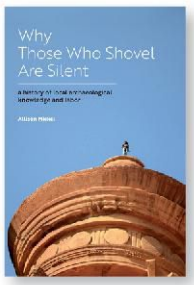
ANNETTE YOSHIKO REED
Harvard Divinity School

JORDAN RYAN
Wheaton College

ROBYN FAITH WALSH
University of Miami

BEST BOOK ON ARCHAEOLOGY (TIE)

Why Those Who Shovel Are Silent

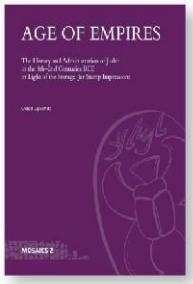


A HISTORY OF LOCAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE AND LABOR

ALLISON MICKEL
(Louisville: University Press of Colorado, 2021)

Allison Mickel's book sheds light on an aspect of archaeology that rarely receives attention: the role of the local community in the research process. By combining ethnographic research with a study of the practice of fieldwork, Mickel draws attention to the unique knowledge that local laborers possess and allows their voices to be heard.

Age of Empires



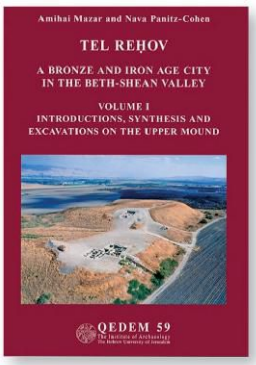
THE HISTORY AND ADMINISTRATION OF JUDAH IN THE 8TH–2ND CENTURIES BCE

ODED LIPSCHITS
(University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2021)

Age of Empires covers the phenomenon of stamped storage jar handles in the Kingdom of Judah and its role in the administration of the kingdom for 600 years. It examines the archaeological remains and explores the function of these jars in the political and economic life of Judah.

HERSHEL SHANKS AWARD FOR BEST DIG REPORT (TIE)

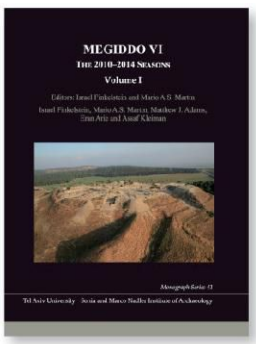
Tel Reḥov



A BRONZE AND IRON AGE CITY IN THE BETH-SHEAN VALLEY, VOLS. 1–5

AMIHAI MAZAR AND NAVA PANITZ-COHEN
(Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2020)

Megiddo VI



THE 2010–2014 SEASONS

EDITED BY ISRAEL FINKELSTEIN AND MARIO A.S. MARTIN
(University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2022)

The five-volume *Tel Reḥov* report, covering all 11 seasons of the project (1997–2012), and the three-volume *Megiddo VI* report, covering the seasons from 2010–2014, are extremely comprehensive. Each includes chapters on stratigraphy, architecture, pottery, other artifacts, and scientific analyses. The new information, analyses, and interpretations expand our understanding not only of the sites themselves but the very fabric of the ebb and flow of history in this region, especially during the Bronze and Iron Ages.

— JUDGES OF THE ARCHAEOLOGY BOOKS —

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ERIC H. CLINE
George Washington University

DEBRA FORAN
Wilfrid Laurier University

For full descriptions of these awarded works, as well as books that received honorable mentions in this year's competition, visit biblicalarchaeology.org/pubawards23

IMAGE COURTESY DALLAS MUSEUM OF ART

Snake

Snakes live in almost all environments and thus appear in all ancient cultures, albeit with different connotations. Belonging to the taxonomic order *Serpentes*, dozens of snake species live in the southern Levant, and it is often difficult to distinguish them in ancient written sources and artistic representations.

In the Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, a serpent steals from Gilgamesh and eats the magical herb that could grant immortality. Several Near Eastern gods are associated with snakes, which generally connote danger or the strength to overcome it. In Canaanite religion, the serpent was associated with the god Baal, whose wife Asherah was sometimes depicted with snakes. In Arabia, the snake was a symbol of the sun. In Egypt, snakes could be either beneficial or harmful, as the giant snake Apep could devour a soul in the underworld, but the cobra was associated with the tutelary goddess of Lower Egypt, Wadjet, who served to protect the pharaoh.

Several iconic stories in the Hebrew Bible feature snakes, mostly under the generic name *nahash*. In the story of creation, a snake convinces Eve to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, resulting in the first couple's expulsion from Eden (Genesis 3). At Yahweh's command, Moses and Aaron perform miracles before Pharaoh that include turning a walking stick into a snake that devours the snakes produced by Egyptian magicians (Exodus 7:8–13). During the Exodus, Yahweh sends venomous snakes to punish murmuring Israelites, but then instructs Moses to make a serpent of bronze by the sight of which people are healed (Numbers 21). More poisonous snakes appear in Psalm 58:4 and Proverbs 23:32.

Contrary to the overwhelmingly negative representation of snakes in the Bible, some ancient mythologies offer a more positive view. In the Greco-Roman world, the snake was an attribute of Asclepius and a symbol of life and health. The Rod of Asclepius (*caduceus*), which depicts a snake winding around a pole, is today a medical symbol. From classical antiquity come armlets in the shape of snakes that include this gold example from the first century CE, now in the Dallas Museum of Art.

The New Testament reuses the Exodus snake story to draw a link between the healing powers of the brazen serpent and the redeeming effects of Jesus's crucifixion (John 3:14–15). To illustrate the Christian teaching about Jesus's redemptive sacrifice, Christian iconography portrays Mary the mother of Jesus as crushing the snake's head under her feet, in reference to Genesis 3:15: "He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel." In the Book of Revelation, "that ancient serpent," this time identified with Satan, is bound for a thousand years (12:9) and then finally destroyed (20:10).

of the tribe of Benjamin from Israel to Judah, which would explain why 1 Kings 11–12 seems to go back and forth on the number of tribes—one or two—in the Kingdom of Judah.

Ultimately, then, we should probably think of the 12 tribes tradition as an idealized vision of Israelite identity that developed some time after the heyday of Israel's—and not Judah's—tribes. This idealized vision may well have been considerably more important to the biblical authors, writing in the sixth through fourth centuries BCE, than to any historic tribe, judging from the lack of epigraphic evidence. Then again, we must have some explanation for the survival of at least a handful of tribes into the late eras of biblical composition and even into the time of the New Testament.

Still, it is the role of the 12 tribes as the paradigmatic vision of a unified Israel, and not any historical importance they may have had, that best explains the ongoing fascination with the tribes and the search for those that are "lost." Indeed, in the first century CE, the Jewish historian Josephus already understood the lost tribes of Israel as an immense multitude across the Euphrates (*Antiquities* 11.133). Second Esdras, a book of the Apocrypha from around the same time, features a vision of the tribes returning to Israel at the end of days. The Jerusalem Talmud and *Genesis Rabbah,* likely from the late fourth and fifth centuries, offer similar accounts of the lost tribes.

In the long run, then, actual tribal identifications faded in the Jewish diaspora. But the idea of the 12 tribes as the real Israel—and an Israel that would be restored—survived. There are even those groups, all around the world, who claim to be one or more of the tribes of Israel, and there have been for quite some time. Identifying with the tribes has long served as a way of claiming some part of ancient Israel's legacy from somewhere else, a little later on. And the Judahites might have done it first. ◙

[1] See Andrew Tobolowsky, *The Myth of the Twelve Tribes of Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2022).

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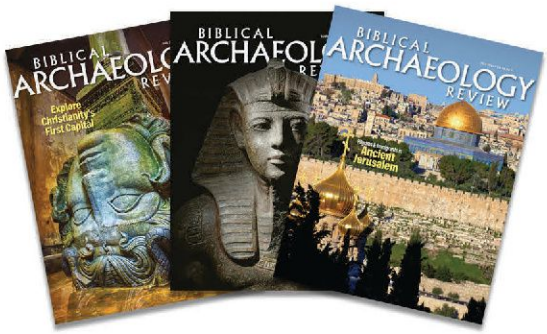

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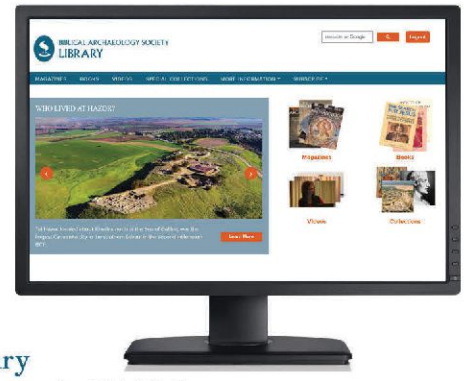

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Ra'anan Boustan (p. 54) is a research scholar in Judaic Studies at Princeton University and the site historian at the Huqoq Excavation Project.

Karen Britt (p. 54) is Assistant Professor of Art History at Northwest Missouri State University and serves as the mosaic specialist at the Huqoq Excavation Project.

Lacy K. Crocker Papadakis (p. 18) is an Affiliate Clinical Professor at Baylor University and a lecturer at the University of Miami. Her research focuses on the relationship between ancient Near Eastern literature and archaeology.

Christopher A. Frilingos (p. 26) is Professor of Religious Studies at Michigan State University. He writes and teaches about biblical literature and early Christianity.

Igor Kreimerman (p. 14) is Senior Lecturer in the Institute of Archaeology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and Director of the Selz Foundation Hazor Excavations in Memory of Yigael Yadin.

Marta Luciani (p. 32) is Associate Professor of Near Eastern Archaeology and Cultural History at the University of Vienna, Austria. She directs the archaeological project at Qurayyah in Saudi Arabia.

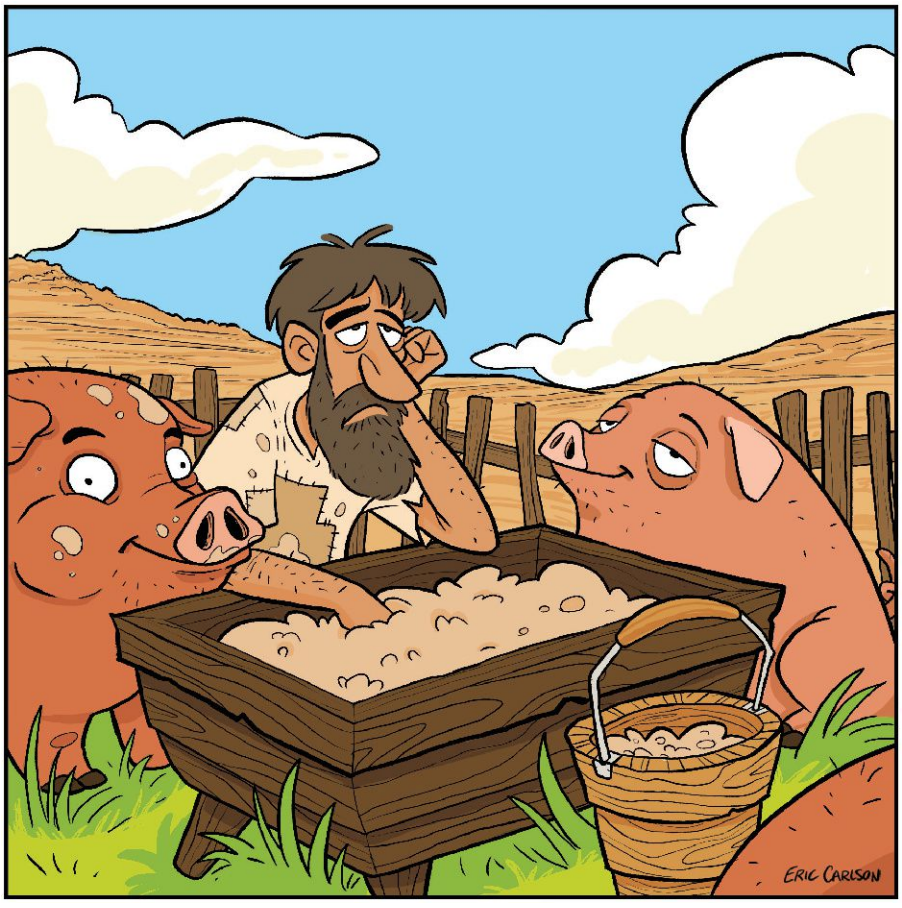
R. Steven Notley (p. 40) is a scholar of New Testament and Christian Origins. He serves as the Academic Director of the El-Araj Excavation Project.

Jonathan Robie (p. 62) is Senior Research and Development Fellow at Biblica, Inc. He works at the intersection of computer science, biblical studies, and Bible translation.

Katharina Schmidt (p. 48) is Professor at the University of Münster and Scientific Consultant at the German Archaeological Institute. Her research focuses on the Bronze and Iron Ages in the eastern Mediterranean and Mesopotamia.

Jennifer Tobin (p. 22) is Associate Professor Emerita of Classics at the University of Illinois Chicago. She specializes in Roman art and archaeology and ancient Anatolia.

Andrew Tobolowsky (p. 65) is Associate Professor of Religious Studies at the College of William & Mary. His research focuses on the Hebrew Bible and the history of ancient Israel.



ERIC CARLSON

"This little piggy should have stayed home."

JULIA STRAMER
HAZELTON, NORTH DAKOTA

Thank you to all those who submitted caption entries for our Summer 2023 cartoon (left), based on Luke 15:15–16: "So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that region, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, and no one gave him anything." We are pleased to congratulate Julia Stramer of Hazelton, North Dakota, who wrote the winning caption, and our runners-up:

RUNNERS-UP

"Should I eat slop, or go back to Pop?"
DIRK MROCZEK
SOUTHPORT, NORTH CAROLINA

"This is what I get for going hog wild!"
NOLAN GREEN
JACKSONVILLE, TEXAS

HONORABLE MENTIONS

"I'm sure there's a pearl in here somewhere..."
JOHN MCDONNELL
WAUSAU, WISCONSIN

"I dine with swine, while at home they're drinking wine."
LEE ELLISON
MOSELEY, VIRGINIA

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 Acts 9:25: "But [Paul's] disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket." Submit it via our website at **biblicalarchaeology.org/captioncontest.**

Please include your name and address. The deadline for entries is **February 15, 2024**. 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

Acts 9:25

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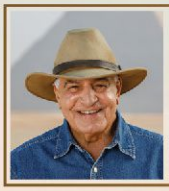

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