



NEW MUSEUM EXHIBIT: THE IVORY COMB

A new exhibit, titled “The Ivory Comb: Lice and Literacy at Lachish,” is scheduled to open to the public on January 27, 2025, in the Lynn H. Wood Archaeological Museum on Southern Adventist University’s campus. On display is a rare ivory comb inscribed with the oldest known complete alphabetic sentence found in ancient Canaan: “May this tusk root out the lice of the hair and the beard.” Featured in *The New York Times* and *Smithsonian* and on *CNN* and *BBC*, it was named the number-one discovery in biblical archaeology by *Christianity Today* in 2022.

This will be the only viewing in the United States of the linguistically significant artifact before it returns to Israel permanently. It will be included within the current special exhibit focusing

on the university’s excavations that took place from 2013 to 2017 at Lachish, the royal city that was second only to Jerusalem in ancient Judah. Over 250 staff and students from Southern Adventist University excavated Lachish, together with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, in what was one of the largest excavation projects in the Middle East.

The comb was found by Southern Adventist University archaeologists on the first day of excavation in 2016 in the corner of a square. Initially believed to be a bone, it was carefully placed in a bag designated with the locus and bucket number for later analysis by square supervisor Katherine Hesler, an archaeology student at Southern at the time. That same afternoon, the expedition’s zooarchaeologist, Edward Maher, identified the object as a comb made of elephant tusk ivory. It was gently cleaned and placed in an object box and given its own number. Like many objects, it was sent to Jerusalem, where it remained for post-processing.

Five and a half years later, the comb was being analyzed in Jerusalem for head lice by Madeleine Mumcuoglu, a research associate at the Hebrew University. Under microscopic inspection, the remains of a head louse nymph were discovered. The next step



The Ivory Comb Photo Credit: Dafna Gazit, Israel Antiquities Authority

was to take general photographs of the comb. At that point, Mumcuoglu found scratches that looked like an inscription. Her suspicion was confirmed by epigrapher Daniel Vainstub of Ben Gurion University of the Negev.

An article was published in the *Jerusalem Journal of Archaeology* in 2022 and presented at the American Society for Overseas Research in Boston by Mumcuoglu and Michael G. Hasel, director of the Institute of Archaeology at Southern. With the announcement, media from around the world celebrated the discovery of the world’s oldest complete sentence using an early form of the alphabet dating to 3,700 years ago!

“It was the invention of the alphabet that was the first major transformation in written communication—equivalent to the invention of the printing press or the internet,” suggested Hasel. “Before this time, you had to study and learn hundreds
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Michael Hasel and Katherine Hesler excavate in area where comb was found in 2016. Photo credit: Zachary Kast, Fourth Expedition to Lachish

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of Egyptian hieroglyphs in pictorial form. But now, with between 21 and 30 letters, you could make thousands of words.” Billions of people still use this invention today.

The exhibit will debut with a celebratory opening banquet, featuring presentations by Michael G. Hasel,

Orit Shamir from the Israel Antiquities Authority, and other special presenters. On January 27, a symposium held at Southern Adventist University will be open to the public, featuring internationally recognized scholars Yosef Garfinkel, Daniel Vainstub, and Christopher Rollston, among others.

The ivory comb, which will travel from Jerusalem courtesy of the Israel Museum and the Israel Antiquities Authority, will remain on display from January 27 to May 2, 2025. We invite you to relive this moment in history that determined the destiny of Israel’s future. ✍

INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON THE IVORY COMB DISCOVERY

An international symposium titled “The Ivory Comb: Lice and Literacy at Lachish” will be held from 5:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. on Monday, January 27, 2025, in the Lynn Wood Hall Chapel at Southern Adventist University.

The symposium, which is open to the public, will give scholars from Israel and throughout the United States an opportunity to provide papers on the remarkable discovery of the ivory comb at Lachish by Southern Adventist University archaeologists and colleagues from the Hebrew University and Ben Gurion University.

Speakers will include recognized experts Yosef Garfinkel (Hebrew University), Edward Maher (Northeastern Illinois University), Daniel Vainstub (Ben Gurion University), Madeleine Mumcuoglu (Hebrew University), and well-known epigrapher Christopher Rollston (George Washington University), among others. They will give careful attention to the history of Canaanite inscriptions at Lachish, the archaeological context of the comb, the material used for the comb and inscription and its possible origin, the discovery of the comb inscription, the decipherment of the

inscription, the significance of the alphabet and communication, and the implications of this discovery for the history and development of writing and ancient texts.

Participants will learn about the moment of discovery and the subsequent scientific analysis and reading of the ancient script. In addition, they will explore the implications for development of the alphabet still used by billions of people around the world today.

A light reception will follow at the Lynn H. Wood Archaeological Museum, which will be open to visitors following the symposium. ✍

INSTITUTE MILESTONES AND TRANSITIONS



In January 2024, Matthew T. Bronson joined the teaching faculty at Southern Adventist University. He grew up in the agricultural town of

Salinas, California, and began attending Southern in 2012 as an archaeology (Near Eastern emphasis) and biblical studies major. After participating in Southern’s Soul-winning and Leadership Training (SALT) program, Bronson pursued several other ministry

opportunities, including a student missionary year in Eastern Peru. Next, he grew in knowledge and ability at SOULS West, a two-year evangelism training school, where he led literature evangelism programs and conducted Bible work throughout the Pacific Union Conference. After four years of such work for the Adventist Church, he returned to finish his studies in archaeology and biblical studies at Southern Adventist University.

From 2019 to 2021, Bronson worked as a pastor for the Pennsylvania Conference, mostly during the COVID-19 pandemic. During that time, he was able to complete a master’s degree in biblical studies from Liberty University and felt God’s call to return to the study of archaeology as it relates to the Bible. He

was accepted into the doctoral program of the Lanier Center for Archaeology at Lipscomb University in 2021 and has since completed his coursework and passed his comprehensive examinations. He has participated in excavations at the sites of Tel Lachish and Tel Burna, both in Israel.

Bronson is currently in the process of completing his dissertation, which centers on Israelite fortresses. Since his arrival at Southern, he has taught Hebrew, Archaeology and the Old Testament, and Last-Day Events. “Since my first excavation a decade ago,” Bronson recounted, “I have loved how archaeology makes the world of the Bible come alive. It’s very satisfying to now seek to inspire others in the classroom to have this same experience.” ✍

PUBLIC ARCHAEOLOGY SEMINAR: ASTONISHING DISCOVERIES IN THE LAND OF THE BIBLE



From September 11 to 15, 2024, the Georgia-Cumberland Conference (GCC) of Seventh-day Adventists presented a public seminar on biblical archaeology, in conjunction with members of Southern's Institute of Archaeology. These exciting meetings provided the Greater Chattanooga area with a window into the latest discoveries relating to the biblical world.

Astonishing Discoveries ran for five consecutive days, with each multimedia presentation offered three times in a row. The first session of each day featured Ron Clouzet, DMin, pastor of the East Ridge SDA Church, and Matthew Bronson, PhD ABD, assistant professor at the Institute of Archaeology. Michael Hasel, PhD, joined Clouzet to present the second and third daily sessions. More than 250 guests who were not affiliated with the Institute, GCC, or Southern Adventist University attended each of the five nights.

On the first night, the presenters set the stage by relating connections between the Bible and the world of ancient Egypt. They also reviewed famous Egyptian sites, such as the Pyramids of Giza and the temple at Deir el-Bahri, as well as some well-known events in the history of Egyptology, such as the discovery of King Tutankhamun's tomb and the decipherment of the hieroglyphic writing system. Most importantly, they

introduced the audience to the way archaeology highlights the biblical account of Moses and the Exodus.

The second day of presentations explored ancient Mesopotamia—Israel's neighbors to the east—from Abraham's Ur to Daniel's Babylon. The message demonstrated how a study of the ancient world forcibly strengthens one's confidence in the prophecies of the Bible.

Both the third and fourth nights served to briefly introduce the attendees to over a millennium's worth of archaeology in the land of Israel, primarily from the time of David through the time of Christ in the New Testament period. This allowed the presenters to share some of the experiences of the Institute's excavations at the sites of Khirbet Qeiyafa and Tel Lachish and the ways the new data intersect with, and ultimately corroborate, the biblical accounts. It also afforded them the chance to share how archaeology led to other discoveries, including the Dead Sea Scrolls, that have helped instill confidence in the accuracy of biblical manuscripts. Whether it was the site of Jericho, famed for its walls that tumbled down flat, or the site of Nazareth where Jesus grew up, exciting context for historical events and individuals was on display—as were several authentic artifacts! The final night of the series

concluded with an archaeological look at the seven churches of Revelation and the ways historical sources and archaeological excavation can work together to shed light on the individual message to each.

One of the primary goals of sponsoring such a seminar was not only to share valuable information with the local community but also to directly increase interest in upcoming prophecy seminars. The audience attending these meetings on a nightly basis was able to learn about archaeology and the ancient world and to catch glimpses of Bible prophecy. These attendees were then invited to a subsequent seminar that would follow much the same format, but with biblical prophecies as the primary subject.

After a similar series of meetings that took place in 2022, with archaeology-related presentations preceding a monthlong seminar on Bible prophecy, several people dedicated their lives to God, and more than 10 percent made their decisions specifically because they had attended the archaeology presentations! All of this serves as a reminder that the mission of the Institute of Archaeology is focused not merely on *antiquity* but also on *eternity*. ✍️

NOTLEY MUSEUM LECTURE



R. Steven Notley, dean of Religious Studies at Pillar College in Newark, New Jersey, visited Southern Adventist University on October 21 to present the first museum lecture of the Fall 2024 semester. His presentation, “Finding the Last Lost City of the Gospels,” concentrated on the excavations at the site of el-Araj, situated at the edge of the ancient northeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee.

As one of the principal investigators at the site, Notley was able to relate firsthand information from both his experience as an excavator and his expertise as a historical geographer. He is former founding chair of the New Testament Backgrounds program at Jerusalem University College and distinguished professor of New Testament and Christian origins on the New York City campus of Alliance University.

Notley presented a strong case that el-Araj should be identified as the biblical city of Bethsaida—the home, according to the New Testament, of Jesus’ disciples Peter, Andrew, and Philip. Approximately three kilometers further to the north and east sits another contender for identification as Bethsaida, locally called et-Tell. This site, Notley argued, is too far inland to be a fishing village as described in the Gospels; el-Araj, more satisfactorily, would have straddled the coastline and featured evidence of lead fishing weights.

After reviewing several historical sources, including the New Testament and the writings of Josephus plus several Byzantine pilgrims, Notley suggested that el-Araj alone matched historical descriptions. Furthermore, an eighth-century bishop, Willibald, wrote of a church in Bethsaida said to have been built over the home of Peter and Andrew. The excavators of el-Araj believe they have uncovered, beneath the remains of a sugar-producing operation from the Crusader period, the remains of several Byzantine basilicas. The oldest example dates to the second and third centuries and was founded above first-century housing. Evidence for their identification as Byzantine churches includes beautiful mosaics and an apse facing the east, which are characteristic for the period.

Is this the location of the house of Andrew and Peter? If the identification of the site and the tradition of ancient travelers is correct, there is certainly a chance! ✍️

BRONSON MUSEUM LECTURE

On November 18, 2024, Matthew Bronson, an assistant professor in Southern’s own Institute of Archaeology, presented the lecture “The Heartland of Judah: Excavations at Biblical Libnah.”

At least one museum lecture each year is normally dedicated to sharing findings from Southern’s previous dig season. But since no regular excavation has been possible since the Middle East crisis began on October 7, 2023, Bronson shared from his most recent participation in the excavation project at Tel Burna, a site located in the Judean lowlands to the north and within sight distance of Lachish. He described how the site is associated with the biblical city of Libnah. Not only does the site’s location match the geographical data found in the Bible, but some of the oldest maps of the region available read Bulnah in place of “Burna,” which is likely a corruption of a thirteenth-century word reading Lubnah, itself a corruption of “Libnah.”

Bronson’s presentation recounted each

mention of Libnah in Scripture, including the fighting that took place there during Joshua’s conquest of Southern Canaan, its designation as a Levitical city in Judah, and a brief mention in conjunction with Sennacherib’s war against Hezekiah. The city was furthermore described as the birthplace of Hamutal, the wife of Josiah and a queen of Judah.

Archaeologically, the site now known as Tel Burna was occupied during the Middle and Late Bronze Ages, which would correspond to the taking of Libnah by Joshua. A cultic area located on a “shelf” adjacent to the mound preserved rare finds, such as fragments of a ritual mask and large storage jars from Cyprus that date to the Late Bronze Age. Although the survey discerned no architectural finds from Iron I, it did feature pottery from this period. Sometime in the tenth-century BC, a destruction took place that may correspond to the campaign of Shishak mentioned in both 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles. After the site’s destruction, it was strongly fortified—



perhaps by Rehoboam, the son of Solomon. An additional destruction layer relates to the 701 BC campaign of Sennacherib, the Assyrian king whom the Bible says moved to Libnah as soon as he was finished with Lachish.

Bronson’s presentation provided an engaging parallel to the work accomplished by Southern Adventist University in the five-year excavation project known as the Fourth Expedition to Lachish. ✍️

TRIBUTE TO DOCENTS AND FRIENDS OF THE MUSEUM

Over the last 25 years, the Lynn H. Wood Archaeological Museum has opened to the public seven days a week, thanks to dedicated docent volunteers who have devoted time and energy to bringing the artifacts to life for thousands of visitors of all ages. Recently, the cover story of Southern's magazine, Columns, highlighted our docents for their service to the university and the community.

During the past several years, some of our dear friends have passed on and await the coming of their Lord. We wish to remember these special individuals for the joy, insights, and many gifts they have shared with us for so many years.

JOHN AND HELEN DURICHEK

“Steadfast” is the word that comes to mind for John, who started volunteering as a docent when the museum opened in 2004. As associate vice president for finance at the university, Helen Durichkek, his wife, had been instrumental in planning and founding the museum. John and his brother, James, known as the “sons of thunder,” served together for a period of almost 20 years. John, who had been a high school teacher and university professor, brought the joy of teaching to his work as a docent, both in giving tours and engaging visitors. Due to health issues, John “retired” a second time and passed away a few years later. James is still serving as a docent today, and while we miss seeing the brothers together, we know that the great reunion day is coming soon.



JAMES AND RAE RITA PEEL

The word “faithful” describes the service of James and Rae Rita, who served as docents at our museum for six years and always welcomed visitors with their smiles. As a retired pastor and evangelist, James shared from his vast knowledge of the Bible. Rae Rita, who had a Jewish background, brought her interest in the land of Israel to the forefront as she engaged with students and young people. During special events, she was always willing to play the piano and brought the joy of music to people's hearts. Both passed within a year of each other after brief illnesses. Their commitment to one another spanned a marriage of 64 years.



RITA VITAL

“Vibrant” is a word that fits the life of Rita Vital, who brought a wealth of experience from her volunteer work for a multitude of different urban ministries, most notably the van ministry in New York City and public health work in Boston. Rita was always a positive force, full of ideas for marketing and expanding the influence of the museum. She did not hesitate to mention these ideas to museum staff, who implemented many of her suggestions. She also audited a number of archaeology classes and employed her knowledge to bring new insights to the various exhibits. Her dedication spanned the years 2004 to 2020, when it became more difficult for her to walk. Her warm, infectious personality is greatly missed.



LANIER CENTER HONORS WILLIAM G. DEVER



The Lanier Center in Houston, Texas, sponsored a symposium titled “Paradigm Shift or Pitfalls: Does Biblical Archaeology Have a Future?” An international group of 26 scholars, representing an illustrious “Who’s Who” in archaeology, were invited to present papers on the subject in honor of William G. Dever’s 90th birthday.

Dever is widely recognized as North America’s leading Near Eastern archaeologist. During his illustrious career, he served as director of the Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology of Hebrew Union College, then as director of the W. F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research in Jerusalem. He also directed the American-led excavations at Tel Gezer from 1964 to 1990. In 1975, Dever took on responsibilities as head of the University of Arizona’s Near Eastern Studies Department, serving as professor of Near Eastern archaeology and anthropology until his retirement in 2001. Over the course of his career, he published more than 40 books and 500 peer-reviewed journal articles, becoming by far the most-published individual in his field during the last 60 years.

At the symposium, scholars from Israel, Jordan, Cyprus, Germany, and the United States addressed an issue that has been at the core of Dever’s research: the relationship between the Bible and archaeology. The group included three

former presidents of the discipline’s premier professional society, ASOR, and the director of the American Center of Research in Jordan. Papers ranged from “Egyptology’s Place in Biblical Archaeology” (by James K. Hoffmeier of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) to “Biblical Archaeology: Do Biblical Scholars Care?” (by Susan Ackerman of Dartmouth College). Ackerman pointed out that critical biblical scholarship has moved beyond the tenth century and that history is no longer at the core of the discipline, as new synchronic approaches to the text have eclipsed biblical history and archaeological discussion. Thomas Davis of Lipscomb University argued for the role of faith in the scientific discipline of archaeology in his paper “The Future of New Testament Archaeology.” Several scholars indicated that their programs at major research universities will be at risk of closure upon their imminent retirements. Discussions were broad and rigorous.

On Saturday night, Dever gave the plenary address, focusing on the core of the main question of the symposium: What is the future of biblical archaeology, as elite archaeology programs are shutting down in America and the West? Dever gave a perspective from his 65-year career, arguing that mainstream programs have failed to replicate themselves, citing the closure of programs at Johns Hopkins, Harvard, Arizona, and Duke, among others. He attributed their demise to an inability to secure funding, a shrinking of the humanities, and the basic failure of the discipline to create a core *raison d’être* for its existence. He noted how Christian institutions have much more effectively engaged the public

interest and gave several examples of their success, citing Lipscomb University as the burgeoning center for graduate work in the field and singling out Southern Adventist University for its work on the early history of Judah’s kings Saul, David, Solomon, and Rehoboam. By placing the Arizona collection, his own professional library, and his legacy at Southern 25 years ago, Dever provided the impetus for establishing a new program.

The Lanier Center in Houston is an organization dedicated to fostering the integration of history in biblical studies by creating a research environment for scholars and the public to engage in



core questions. Symposium participants expressed gratitude to the center for sponsoring the gathering and specifically thanked founder Mark Lanier, a successful attorney, for his vision and support of the dialogue between biblical studies and archaeology. 🍷



UPCOMING EVENTS

SYMPOSIA AND CONFERENCES

November 20-23, 2024

American Society of Overseas Research (ASOR) Annual Meetings

Boston, Massachusetts

January 27, 2025

Ivory Comb Symposium

Lynn Wood Chapel from 5:30 to 9:00 p.m

Including William G. Dever, Yosef Garfinkel, Katherine Hesler, Edward F. Maher, Madeleine Mumcuoglu, Daniel Vainstub, Christopher Rollston, and Michael G. Hasel

NEW EXHIBIT

January 27 to May 2, 2025

The Ivory Comb: Lice and Literacy at Lachish

Lynn H. Wood Archaeological Museum
Southern Adventist University

DIG SIGHT

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