



# Can You Dig It?

## The Madaba Plains Project and Adventist Archaeologists

*By Larry G. Herr*

**I**n July, Adventist archaeologists discovered a 3,500-year-old temple from the late Bronze Age at Tall al-'Umayri just south of Amman, Jordan. The walls and cultic shrine of a temple dating from about 1,500 B.C. were uncovered by participants in the Madaba Plains Project.

Working in cooperation with the Department of Antiquities of Jordan and its director-general, Fawwaz al-Khraysheh, the excavators found an antechamber east of a large main room. Two other rooms were attached on the southern side. Dig leaders said the discovery is particularly exciting because the Late Bronze Age has yielded few structures of any kind in the central hills of Jordan and because it is one of the best preserved buildings and areas of worship that has been found.

### The Madaba Plains Project

The Madaba Plains Project is an outgrowth of the Andrews University Heshbon Expedition, which started in 1968 when Siegfried Horn began excavations at Tall Hisban (biblical Heshbon). However, it more accurately dates from 1978, when plans for an expanded project were conceived by a team of archaeologists from Andrews University.

The project's founders were Larry Geraty, Øystein LaBianca, Larry Herr, and three graduate students: Larry Mitchel, Bjorner Storfjell, and Jim Brower. The team originally chose to excavate the largest tell site south of Amman, Tall Jalul, located in the rich agricultural plain south of Tall Hisban and east of the modern city of Madaba.

Geraty and his team set the first season of excavations for 1982. Operations were already under way when the Jordanian government denied an excavation permit. It did not give any reasons, but the problems apparently involved political, military, social, and tribal factors.

The focus then shifted to a smaller site north of Jalul, in the hills overlooking the Madaba Plain at Tall al-'Umayri. Excavations there began in 1984, with Geraty and Herr as directors, and with LaBianca as survey director. Ten seasons of excavation at 'Umayri have followed. The site has produced an excellent record that spans the period

between ca. 3500 and 400 B.C., with artifacts also from occupations after that time.

In 1992, the project finally received permission to begin excavations at Tall Jalul and a small team began work under the direction of Randall Younker and David Merling, both of Andrews University. This team has since expanded in size and conducted excavations for five seasons. So far, its discoveries date from the Iron 2 and Persian Periods (ca. 1000 to 400 B.C.), most notably a well-preserved Ammonite house with a mysterious cave underneath.

In 1997, LaBianca renewed excavations at Tall Hisban, this time with a declared interest in later periods, especially the Islamic Age. LaBianca wanted to examine correspondence between modern and ancient ways of life and enlisted the aid of an Islamicist, Bethany Walker of Grand Valley State University. Together, they have discovered a provincial city that flourished during the Mamluk Sultanate of Egypt.

These three smaller projects currently make up the larger Madaba Plains Project. Until 1998, they operated together, making the Madaba Plains Project by far the largest archaeological endeavor in Jordan. Since then, they have worked separately due to pressures of size and complexity. At present, they operate independently in the field while still sharing some specialists, ideas, and resources.

## Adventists in Archaeology

The Madaba Plains Project offers a glimpse into the extensive involvement of Adventist professionals in Middle East archaeology.

The most important (and only comprehensive) international professional organization for archaeologists specializing in the Middle East is the American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR). With 1,150 members, it is designed especially for Americans and Canadians, but it also has members in Europe, the Middle East, Australia, and southern and eastern Asia. Almost every Adventist archaeologist working in the Middle East is a member of this organization.

ASOR has an administrative office at Boston University, a publications office at Emory University, in Atlanta, Georgia, and is affiliated with overseas centers in Jerusalem; Amman, Jordan; and Nicosia, Cyprus. In addition, it operates three separate committees for archaeology in Baghdad; Damascus, Syria; and Saudi Arabia.

The president of ASOR is Lawrence Geraty, cur-



*From left: Larry Herr and Doug Clark, the dig directors in discussion with Samiyeh Khouri, Department of Antiquities representative; John Lawlor, Field A supervisor, and Christine Shaw, a square supervisor, about the daily progress made in Field A.*

rently of La Sierra University. He works together with the chair of the board, raising funds, conducting public relations, and instituting special academic events and policies. ASOR's executive director is Douglas Clark, formerly of Walla Walla College. From his office in Boston he oversees the day-to-day operations of the organization, including personnel, a large budget, an annual meeting, public relations, and relations with other archaeological organizations.

Three operating committees oversee the basic activities of the organization, which include publications, the annual meeting and programs, and archaeological policy. Larry Herr, currently of Canadian University College, chairs the Committee on Publications, overseeing the operation of the Atlanta office and production of the organization's three academic journals, as well as four longstanding scholarly book series.

Until a year ago, Edward Lugenbeal of Atlantic Union College served as treasurer of the organization. Of its top eight positions, three are held by Adventists; when Lugenbeal was treasurer, it was four.

Other Adventists serve the organization in other



ways. Randall Younker chairs the nominating committee, which places academics on the board and manages elections of chairs for the operating committees. In addition, Younker serves on the board, as does Øystein LaBianca, who is also a member of the Individual Members Coordinating Committee. Furthermore, Michael Hasel of Southern Adventist University sits on the Agenda Committee.

Several Adventists are also active in the Near East Archaeological Society, which is comprised of archaeologists from evangelical backgrounds. The society runs an annual

meeting and publishes an academic journal once a year. David Merling serves as president of this organization, and Paul Ray, also of Andrews University, edits the society's journal, the *Near East Archaeological Society Bulletin*.

## Adventist-Archaeology Connections

What accounts for the acceptance of Adventists in archaeological circles? The most important factor is the integrity, enthusiasm, prolific writing, and strong church loyalty of Siegfried Horn, the first serious Adventist to combine

excavation with biblical studies, languages, and ancient history, and to gain access to a large Adventist audience by popular and professional writing and lecturing. Horn was the godfather and catalyst of Adventist archaeology.

Horn enjoyed a reputation of determination and integrity among peers. His seriousness and the success of his project at biblical Heshbon, which the archaeological world received very well, demonstrated that Adventists could do archaeology on a professional level. This accomplishment overcame the suspicions of many who were initially concerned that Horn's religion would bias his science. Unquestioned acceptance of Adventist archaeologists today is

### Adventist Archaeologists

Name	Type of Activity	Excavation Site	Active Dates	Institution
Lynn Wood	Biblical archaeology	Tannur, Khalayfi	1930s-50s	Potomac Seminary
Edwin Thiele	Biblical chronology		1940s-60s	Andrews University
Siegfried Horn	Excavation director	Hisban, Shechem	1950s-80s	AU Seminary
Julia Neuffer	Researcher	Hisban (1 season)	1950s-70s	<i>Review and Herald</i>
Kenneth Vine	Excavation, researcher	Caesarea	1960s-1980s	La Sierra University
Douglas Waterhouse	Biblical archaeology	Hisban	1960s-1980s	Andrews University
Larry Geraty	Excavation director	Hisban, 'Umayri, other	1970s-present	AU Seminary, La Sierra
Bill Shea	Biblical archaeology	Hisban	1970s-present	AU Seminary
Paul Bork	Excavator, tour leader	Gezer	1970s-1990s	Pacific Union College
Ed Lugenbeal	Anthropological excavation	Hisban pottery, other	1970s-present	Geoscience, AUC
Udo Worschech	Excavation director	Hisban, Balu	1970s-present	Friedensau Adventist University
Larry Herr	Excavation director	Hisban, 'Umayri	1970s-present	Canadian University College
Øystein LaBianca	Excavation director	Hisban, 'Umayri	1970s-present	Andrews University
Douglas Clark	Excavation director	Hisban, 'Umayri	1970s-present	Walla Walla College, ASOR
Bjornner Storfjell	Field supervisor	Hisban, 'Umayri	1970s-present	AU, Heyerdahl Museum
Glenn Hartelius	Excavator, researcher	Caesarea	1970s-1980s	La Sierra University
Larry Mitchel	Field supervisor	Hisban, 'Umayri	1970s-1980s	Pacific Union College
Lloyd Willis	Biblical archaeology	'Umayri	1980s-present	Southwestern Adventist University
Randall Younker	Excavation director	'Umayri Jalul	1980s-present	AU Seminary
David Merling	Excavation director	'Umayri Jalul	1980s-present	AU Seminary
Todd Sanders	Excavator	'Umayri	1980s-1990s	Harvard University (student)
Bogdon Dabrowski	Excavator	'Umayri	1980s-1990s	Adventist Seminary, Poland
Yvonne Gerber	Excavator, pottery specialist	Petra	1990s-present	University of Basel
Gotthard Reinhold	Excavator, researcher	'Umayri	1980s-present	Independent
Friedbert Ninow	Asst. excavation director	Balu	1980s-present	Friedensau Adventist University
Jim Fisher	Field supervisor	'Umayri Jalul	1980s-present	Andrews University
Paul Gregor	Field supervisor	Jalul	1990s-present	Northern Caribbean University
Jürg Egger	Excavator, iconography	'Umayri	1990s-present	Fribourg University
Jennifer Groves	Field supervisor	Jalul	1990s-present	Andrews University
Paul Ray	Field supervisor, publishing	Hisban, Jalul	1990s-present	Andrews University
Michael Hasel	Field supervisor	Jalul, Migne, Gezer	1990s-present	Southern Adventist University
Chang-Ho Ji	Survey and excavation director	Dhiban, Ataruz	1990s-present	La Sierra University
Connie Gane	Field supervisor	Jalul	1990s-present	Andrews University
Kent Bramlett	Field supervisor	'Umayri	1990s-present	Walla Walla College
Rhonda Root	Art	'Umayri	1990s-present	Andrews University
Jong Keun Lee	Archaeological survey	Dhiban, Ataruz	2000s-present	Sahmyouk University
Robert Bates	Excavator	Jalul	2000s-present	Andrews University
Efrain Velazquez	Excavator	Jalul	2000s-present	Antillian Adventist University
Ruben Tenorio	Excavator	Jalul	2000s-present	Montemorelos University
Duksoo Ahn	Excavator	Jalul	2000s-present	Sahmyouk University
Patrick Mazani	Excavator	Jalul	2000s-present	Solusi University

Many more Adventists have worked on archaeology expeditions than are included in this list. Digs require a variety of specialists, workers, and administrative personnel who are not named here. The list does not include scores of others who are professionals in related fields who use the results and finds of archaeology in their disciplines, such as biblical studies, ancient languages, church history, and art history. They are "part-time arm-chair archaeologists." The list gives a chronological picture of the people who have concentrated their work in the world of the ancient Near East.

## Archaeology Web Sites

Project	Web site
Andrews University Expedition to Heshbon	<a href="http://www.madabaplains.org">www.madabaplains.org</a>
Balua Excavation Project	<a href="http://www.thh-friedensau.de/deutsch/forschung/moab/start.html">www.thh-friedensau.de/deutsch/forschung/moab/start.html</a>
Madaba Plains Project—Hisban	<a href="http://www.madabaplains.org">www.madabaplains.org</a>
Madaba Plains Project—Umayri	<a href="http://www.wwc.edu/mpp">www.wwc.edu/mpp</a>
Madaba Plains Project—Jalul	<a href="http://www.madabaplains.org">www.madabaplains.org</a>
Khirbat Mamariyeh/Wadi Mujib Project	<a href="http://www.afet.de/etm/08_1/fagat.htm">www.afet.de/etm/08_1/fagat.htm</a>

largely due to Horn's professionalism.

Horn's influence has also been felt among the laity. Horn appeared on the scene in the mid-twentieth century, just as the Western world was in the throes of enthusiastic positivism regarding the relation of archaeology to the Bible. Some believed that archaeology "proved" the Bible; others saw it as strongly supporting Scripture; and others believed that archaeology illustrated it. Horn spoke to this positivism through a book written for Adventists titled *The Spade Confirms the Book*, which was translated into several languages.

For many Adventists, archaeological evidence that Horn and other professionals offered in support of the Bible bolstered beliefs that scriptural prophecies are true. Thus, archaeology helped ground-level evangelism, and it became the major reason why so many Adventist evangelists today still use archaeology as an entering wedge. For many years, in fact, *Ministry* magazine included a monthly article on archaeology, which Lawrence Geraty edited.

Horn was not the only Adventist participant in the Biblical Archaeology movement, which was spearheaded by the great orientalist William Foxwell Albright, who is generally regarded as the single greatest mind in the discipline. Albright was the long-time director of the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem and a professor at the Johns Hopkins University. Horn studied under Albright for a year.

Two other notable Adventist students of Albright are Alger Johns and Leona Running, the latter of whom for many years taught Hebrews and biblical languages in the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University. As a student, Running worked as Albright's research assistant and later authored a biography of him.

Horn's heirs have built on these foundations. Horn's initial successor at Andrews University, Lawrence Geraty received his doctorate at Harvard University, as did Larry Herr. This has facilitated connections with other professionals in the field. Added to this is Geraty's uncanny

ability to facilitate and encourage teamwork and excellence among those who work with him, regardless of intellectual predisposition or ideological persuasion.

The result has been a team of specialists with a strong sense of identity, mutual encouragement, and willingness to debate. Among its members

are Herr, LaBianca, Douglas Clark, and scores of Adventist and non-Adventist alumni from Andrews University and the Heshbon and the Madaba Plains Projects.

## Supporting Operations

Adventist archaeologists have benefited from generous support. The General Conference and the North American Division have given a few small grants, but by far the bulk of support has come from generous church members and the Church's educational institutions, especially Andrews University. Andrews University supported the Heshbon Expedition in its entirety and built up the Institute of Archaeology and the Horn Archaeological Museum on campus. In addition, it supports a major publishing department, which helps to spread word of the accomplishments of Adventist archaeologists.

Additional institutions joined in to support the Madaba Plains Project as the number of Adventist archaeologists, many educated at Andrews University, grew during the 1970s and 1980s. These now include Canadian University College, La Sierra University, Pacific Union College, Union College, and Walla Walla College. Other institutions, such as Atlantic Union College, are temporarily affiliated. Each college or university contributes to the project by providing consortium payments, research assistants, high-tech equipment, lab space, and research time for faculty.

Additional details about Adventist archaeologists and the Madaba Plains Project can be found online at <[www.madabaplains.org](http://www.madabaplains.org)> and the 'Umayri site at <[www.wwc.edu/mpp](http://www.wwc.edu/mpp)>.

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