

**DISCUSSED:** Adventist archaeology, Madaba Plains, fiftieth anniversary, central Jordanian highlands

*Panorama of Tall Hisban from the northeast. This view captures well the agricultural surroundings of the Madaba Plains as well as the site's size and elevation above the countryside. (Photo: S. Ullom)*



# ARCHAEOLOGY

## The Madaba Plains Project Comes of Age: MPP@50

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*Hellenistic Pottery Assemblage from an agricultural complex dating to around 150 BC. Included among the artifacts are some made by hand, some on a wheel, and some by means of a mold. (Photo: D. Clark)*



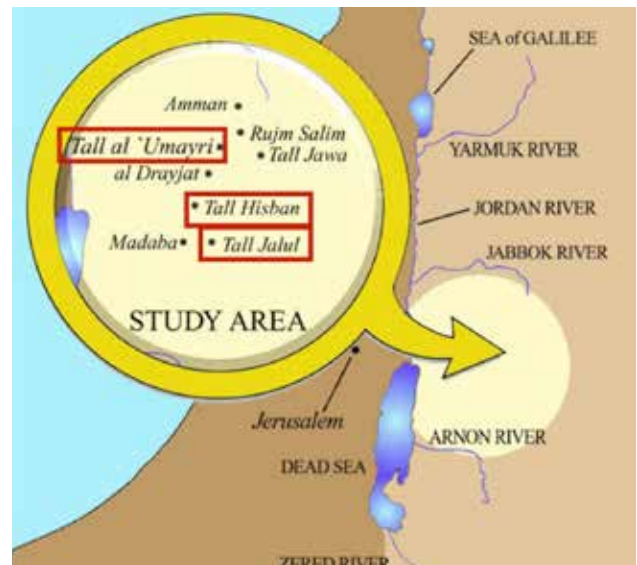
*Welcome to archaeology. At the beginning of every excavation season, members of the team are introduced to the major features of the site in order to provide background for their work and allow them to sense how their contributions will add to our understanding of the history and culture of the tell. (Photo: J. Logee)*

**H**istory in the making happened on the fifth of June 1967: auspiciously, Adventist archaeology in the Middle East was about to begin at Tall Hisban (biblical Heshbon),

Jordan. Also dawning on June 5, 1967 was the first day of the Six-Day War between Israel and its Arab neighbors, forcing a change in plans for everyone. The latter canceled out the former, pushing the start date for Siegfried Horn and company to July 15, 1968.

This fateful delay of more than thirteen months has emboldened MPPites to schedule thirteen months of festive events to celebrate what is a rare accomplishment in any field or discipline, let alone the mounting of a cumulative total of fifty-eight archaeological expeditions over five decades in what some would consider a pretty rough neighborhood. As the celebration schedule emerged, we found ourselves thinking big—beginning at the end of September 2017 at Andrews University’s Homecoming Weekend and ex-

tending the celebrations through early November 2018 at the tenth annual Archaeology Discovery Weekend



*Regional map, indicating the three major MPP sites. Also excavated by MPP were Rujm Salim, Tall Jawa, and al-Drayjat. (Illustration: Madaba Plains Project)*

at La Sierra University (see <https://lasierra.edu/cnea/discovery-weekend/>). Various publications, tours, and homecoming events created a busy schedule through the year.

The celebratory events also indicate something else. Reviewing all of these activities, one gets the distinct impression that fifty years of archaeological endeavors can be reduced almost entirely to left-brain analysis: lectures, presentations, publications. This assessment would not be mistaken, as the Madaba Plains Project has produced scores of volumes, hundreds of articles, and thousands of presentations of one kind or another around the world (mostly at national and international conferences, but also popular and church presentations too), all deriving from year after year, decade after decade of hard work under trying conditions in a foreign land.

So, rather than repeat information one can readily find in the sources noted elsewhere (especially see the summary in the summer issue of the American Center of Oriental Research Newsletter—<https://www.acorjordan.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/ACOR-Newsletter-Vol.-29.1-1.pdf>), MPP directors, with support from the *Spectrum* magazine editor, felt it was time for something different, something more right-brain in orientation, something artsy: hence, poetry, paintings, pictures, and stipple drawings, nearly all submitted by the artists as their own top choices. These have been arranged to provide 1) a modern setting (the geographical, chronological, scientific, and human contexts of our work over fifty years) in order to orient ourselves to the Madaba Plains Project, as well as 2) evidences of ancient daily and religious life



*Iron Age zoomorphic figurine—head of sheep. Whether these ceramic animal figures were utilized in religious services or served as toys is a debated question. They are ubiquitous. (Drawing: K. Reed)*

found in situ. Images are identified by contents and artists and, with some, the excavation site. However, site identification for most is left out in order to give an impressionistic, MPP-wide sense of five thousand years of history and culture in the central Jordanian highlands.

It is impossible in a collaborative collection of artworks like this one, covering a half century of intense labor and creative expression, to do justice to everything produced since the late 1960s by the Madaba Plains Project. What appears here seeks to capture what artists have done and is only partially representative of the long-term engagement and innovative investment made by a cumulative two thousand directors, specialists, students, volunteers, and local laborers in an effort, through modern methods of investigation and recording, to resurrect the ancient past.

*Special thanks to Adventist colleges and universities which, among other institutions of various kinds, have played a sponsorship or supportive role in this endeavor over the years: Andrews University and La Sierra University (primary sponsors), along with Burman University, Pacific Union College, Southwestern Adventist University, and Walla Walla University. We also want to express appreciation to the Department of Antiquities of Jordan and the American Center of Oriental Research in Amman.*



*At work by sunrise. Archaeologists love photos of their work in the rising (never the setting) sun. Work typically begins just before the sun comes up in order to capture early photos without shadows. (Photo: S. Ullom)*



## Tall Hisban

Excavations at the site have uncovered traces of a long succession of imperial powers that have influenced the material culture and daily life at Hisban over time, including the Assyrians, Neo-Babylonians, Ptolemaic Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Umayyads, Abbasids, Ayyubids, Mamluks, Ottomans, and British.

Occupation — Early Iron Age through Modern times (ca. 1100 BC to the present)

Excavations — 1968–1978 and 1996 to present



(Photo: MPP-Hisban)

## Tall al-'Umayri

Excavation results include an Early Bronze Age dolmen with 25–28 preserved secondary burials; a massive Middle Bronze Age defense system; a Late Bronze Age Temple Complex; an Early Iron Age neighborhood, including a “four-room” house; a Late Iron Age administrative building; and Hellenistic and Byzantine farmsteads.

Occupation — Bronze and Iron Ages (ca. 3000–500 BC with limited Greek, Roman, and Byzantine remains)

Excavations — 1984 to present



(Photo: M. Ullom)

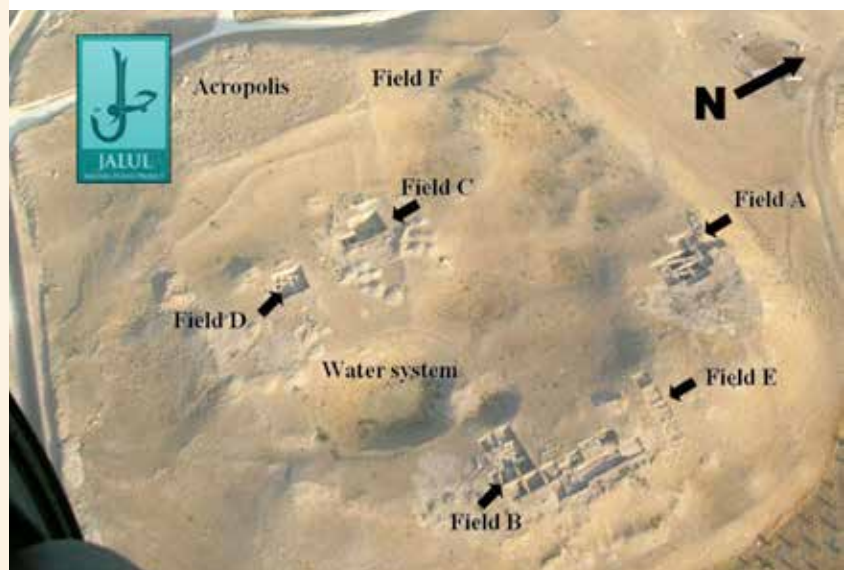
## Tall Jalul

Excavations at Jalul have revealed control by numerous local and international political entities throughout its history. Jalul may have been the ancient Levitical city of Bezer during the earlier part of the Iron Age until competing local powers (Moab and Ammon) took over. Adjacent to the south was the “Islamic Village.”

Occupation — Bronze and Iron Ages through the Ottoman Period (ca. 3000 BC to the beginning of the twentieth century)

Excavations — 1992 to present

Visit [www.madabaplains.org](http://www.madabaplains.org)



(Photo: MPP-Jalul)





*Team photos (top to bottom) at Hisban (2004),  
ʿUmayri (2008), Jalul (2007)*

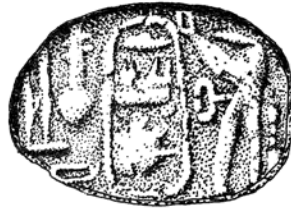
*The original excavations at Hisban (1968–1976 and 1978) drew 343 foreign participants and later phases (1997–2018) an additional 496. ʿUmayri (1984–2016) boasted 1,086 foreigners and Tall Jalul (1992–2017) saw 502 foreign participants on excavations since its inception. These 2,427 foreigners hailed from every continent except Antarctica. In addition, hundreds of local laborers, some third-generation descendants of original workers, did the heavy lifting over the past five decades. Collaboration between foreigners and locals has added a rich level of social depth and cultural understanding to these projects not otherwise attainable.*







*Tall al-'Umayri from the air, 2016. One of the important ways to record archaeological research involves aerial photos taken every few seasons by photographers working with the University of Oxford-based Aerial Photographic Archives for Archaeology in the Middle East. (Photo: APAAME, Robert Bewley)*



*Iron Age stamped jar handle with cartouche of Pharaoh Thutmose III, a 15th-century BC pharaoh of Egypt some associate with the biblical exodus. He made numerous military excursions into the area of Israel/Palestine. (Drawing: R. Root)*

## DIGGING AT 'UMAYRI (a poem of fragments)

BY JOHN MCDOWELL

1

Follow the airport road—  
south of Amman, a hill,  
a “tall” rises beyond a Bedouin tent,  
with TV antenna and camels.

2

Guffa by recorded guffa we haul  
trowel-scraped dirt  
to the sift  
eyes peeled within billowing dust...

3

Each day before the sunbaked afternoon  
bears too heavily  
ashen-faced, exhausted we load  
buckets of sherds and tagged objects onto the bus  
—to camp, a quick shower, and food  
before the ritual washing  
the day's collection, the sorting: pottery (plentiful,  
fragmentary time markers)—perhaps some bone,  
a spindle whorl, a basalt grinding stone.

4

Back on site: plenty of walls,  
surfaces, doorways—the real joy:  
a seal, a shrine door,  
once, Carolyn, in her square, slowly uncovered  
a cultic niche, with bowls, chalice, crude unfired figurines,  
and five standing stones all in situ. In the room  
also an altar, the floor strewn with  
animal bones—palace or temple:  
What were they thinking?  
Surely, a story of prayer

—surely, among others, prayers for protection.  
The ramp and fortifications lend evidence.  
But it wasn't enough—whither Late Bronze or  
Early Iron, arrows flew and fire came, God  
or gods ordained.

(The four-room house preserved  
because it collapsed—see: remains  
of burnt timbers.)

5.  
Is this really a “game of Clue on steroids”?

6.  
We joke. Eat sweet watermelon, spit seeds  
as far as we can.

7.  
Brush the dirt  
clean, carefully  
(at the end of every day).

8.  
Photograph. Note  
even the color of the dirt.  
Mostly the missing  
sprayed out in layers.

9.  
Allow for difficult changes. (This  
is history's lost and found.)  
(They did not think of us or what they left  
as we wish to think of herding goats into this courtyard.  
Shall we name the five who perished  
The House of Berekyahu?)

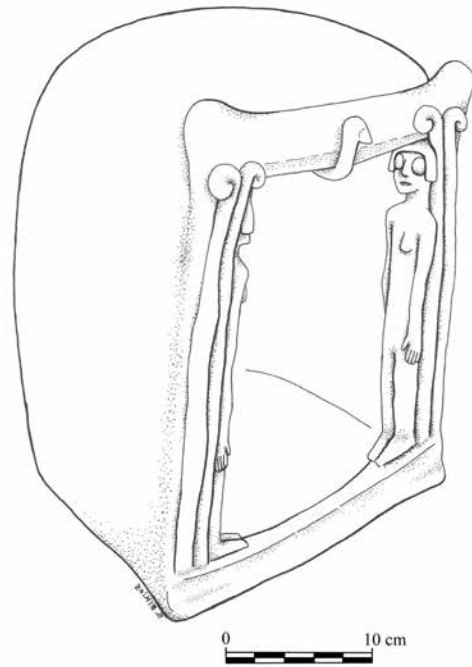
10.  
Some instinct to discern—once  
on the back of small seal—almost missed  
a partial fingerprint...  
Oh, Lord, how do we praise  
the survival  
of the unintentional—  
sifted back 3,000 years  
to (our) human touch?

11.  
Bless our digging, this destruction:  
the unburied, the journey  
unweaving the knotted weave  
of our humanity.

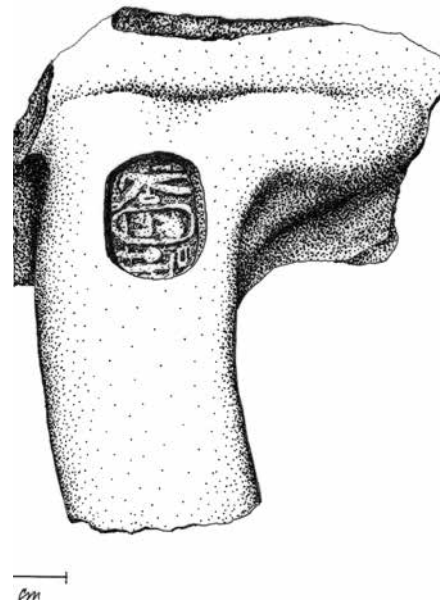
12.  
How did they do it—day by day?  
Then, unexpected  
a hearth unearthed  
and the vault across centuries  
concentrates, wobbles a bit, like sunlight  
through a lens to the pinpoint of being  
a mother cooking a meal for her children,  
(see the fire's ash?) then  
the world ends. We arrive at bedrock.  
Shall we then be blest?  
Insha 'allah.

Poem notes:

- A “guffa” is “bucket” made of recycled tires used for hauling dirt from a dig square to the sifter.
- Insha 'allah: Arabic for “Hopefully, if God wills.”

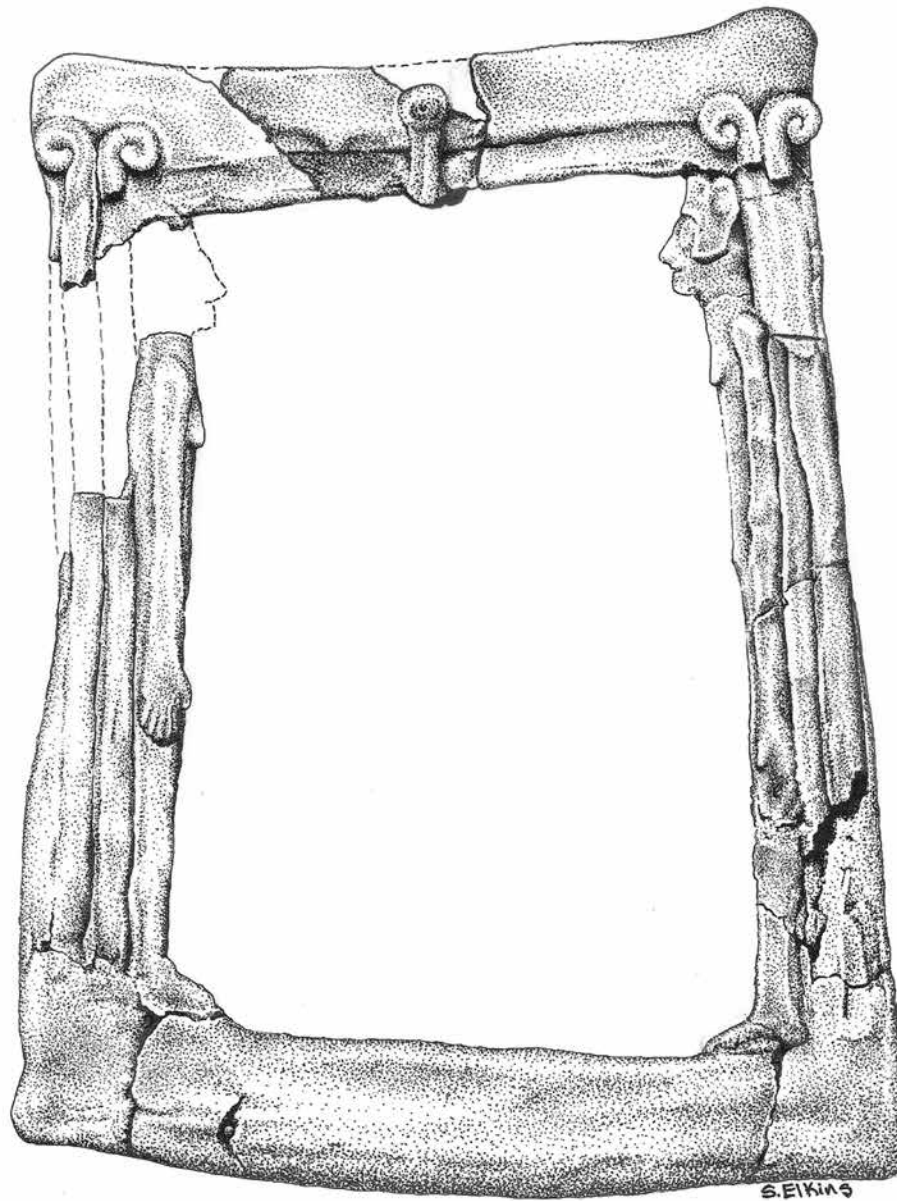


Early Iron Age Model Shrine (ca. 1050 BC) shaped from clay into the form of a place of worship. These are found in domestic and religious settings. The opening of this model is flanked by two human figurines which may have represented male and female characteristics. (Drawing: S. Elkins-Bates)



Iron Age stamped jar handle with cartouche of Pharaoh Thutmose III (see illustration on page 71). The jar handle is Iron Age even though Thutmose III reigned in Egypt at least two centuries earlier, demonstrating the lasting influence of the powerful pharaoh. (Drawing: R. Root)





*Early Iron Age Model Shrine doorway, showing the entry into this small worship model. The dove over the center of the doorway is typical of many of these models, as are the palmettes along the sides. (Drawing: S. Elkins-Bates)*



Early Iron Age “four-room” house (ca. 1250 BC), one of the earliest and certainly the best-preserved structure of this nature and design anywhere in the southern Levant (Israel, Jordan, southern Syria). Sometimes called an “Israelite” house, four-room (or pillared) houses showed up in ancient Ammon, Moab, and Edom. Its design and plan were used for several centuries (ca. 1250–500 BC) because it allowed families in the hill country of ancient Israel and Jordan to combine successfully pastoral sheep/goat herding and agricultural pursuits. (Painting: R. Root)

Reconstructed Early Iron Age four-room house. Partially (re)built of wood, stone, and plaster, this reconstruction from 1999 illustrates the basic structure of this popular house design and also allowed analysis of building materials, all 400+ tons in the building of this one house. (Photo: M. Ullom)







*Late Bronze Age Temple Complex (ca. 1350 BC). Consisting of two side rooms of unknown use (left side); an entry hall with stairs and standing stones (lower right); the main sanctuary with a presentation altar and cultic niche (center); and a small space for the storage of worship paraphernalia already used (upper right). The cultic niche held ceramic vessels and clay figurines in front of five standing stones. Since the central standing stone is relatively short and broad, most scholars believe it represents a goddess, perhaps the Canaanite deity Asherah. (Painting: R. Root)*



# The Archaeologist's Scrapbook

Hands-on discovery of pendant, a pyramidal-shaped piece of fired clay with a hole in the top to allow attachment with a string. These were sometimes decorated with inscriptions. (Photo: S. Ullom)



Discovery of ostrakon. Ostraca (plural) occur during the Late Iron Age, normally consisting of inked writing on reused broken pieces of pottery. Some were receipts for offerings or business dealings and some conveyed correspondence. (Photo: MPP-Jalul)

Taking measurements the old-fashioned way. Since archaeology is a destructive science, documentation of all kinds characterizes its practice. Newer technologies have replaced the methods pictured, allowing precision in three dimensions to 4–2 centimeters. (Photo: J. Logee)



Shepherd with flock. Although romanticized through biblical stories, caring for sheep and goats is a demanding survival strategy in much of the Middle East. Domesticated pastoral animals provided milk products, meat, and fibers for clothing. (Photo: S. Ullom)





*Measuring elevations. The old dumpy levels and stadia rods, a part of the basic tool kit of archaeologists for decades, have been replaced with sophisticated technologies capable of recording the location of archaeological remains in 3D. (Photo: S. Ullom)*

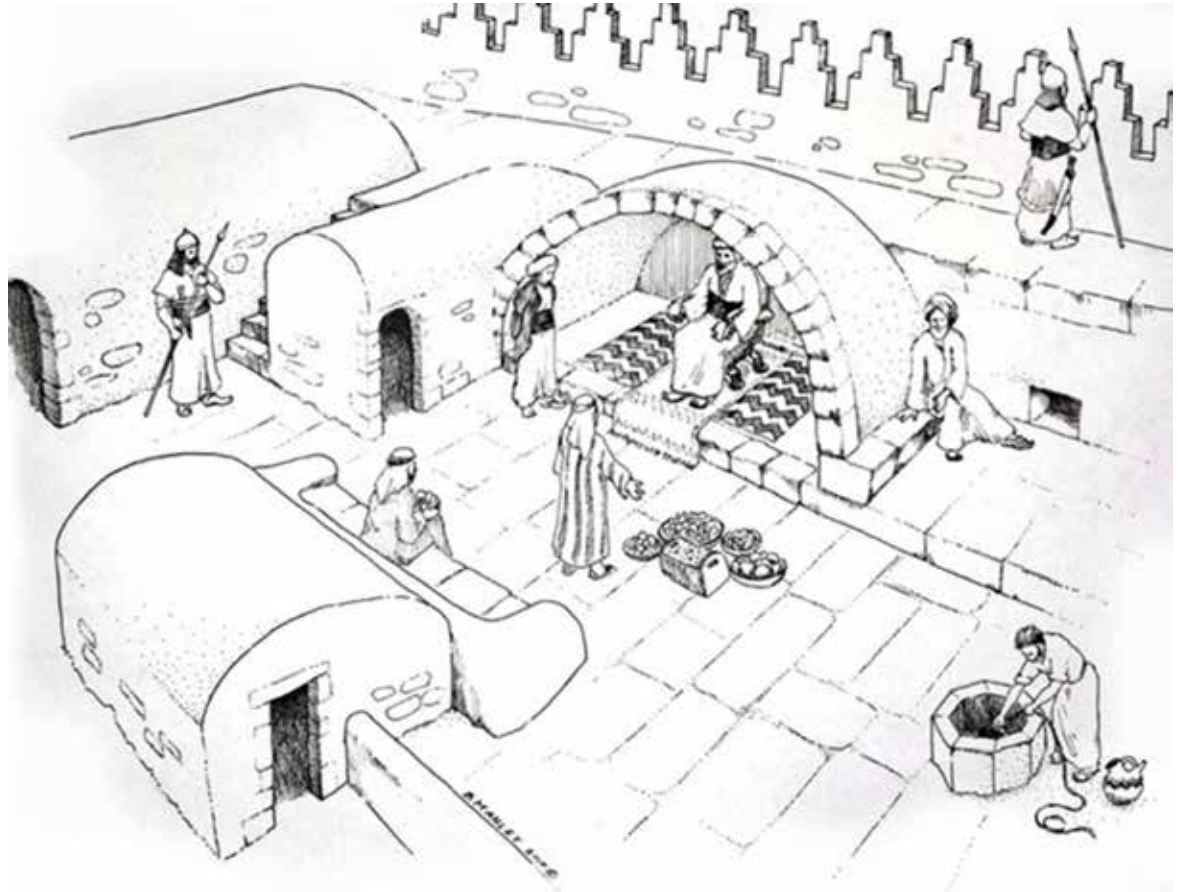
*Excavation techniques. Archaeological excavation is demanding work, requiring careful removal of layer after layer of occupational debris in order to reconstruct the past. (Photo: J. McDowell)*



*Munsell Chart color analysis. Among the many lines of analysis of ancient finds, color determination has been important for studying earth samples, object decorations, and artifacts, among other uses. (Photo: S. Ullom)*

*Sifting at Sunrise. Since the mid-1980s, MPP excavations have sifted every bit of earth uncovered in order to find the smallest of artifacts and samples. (Photo: M. Ullom)*





*Mamluk Governor's Residence. Long a mystery to early excavators, the purpose of buildings on the top of the tell finally became apparent through extensive research done in medieval historical records. (Drawing: B. Manley)*

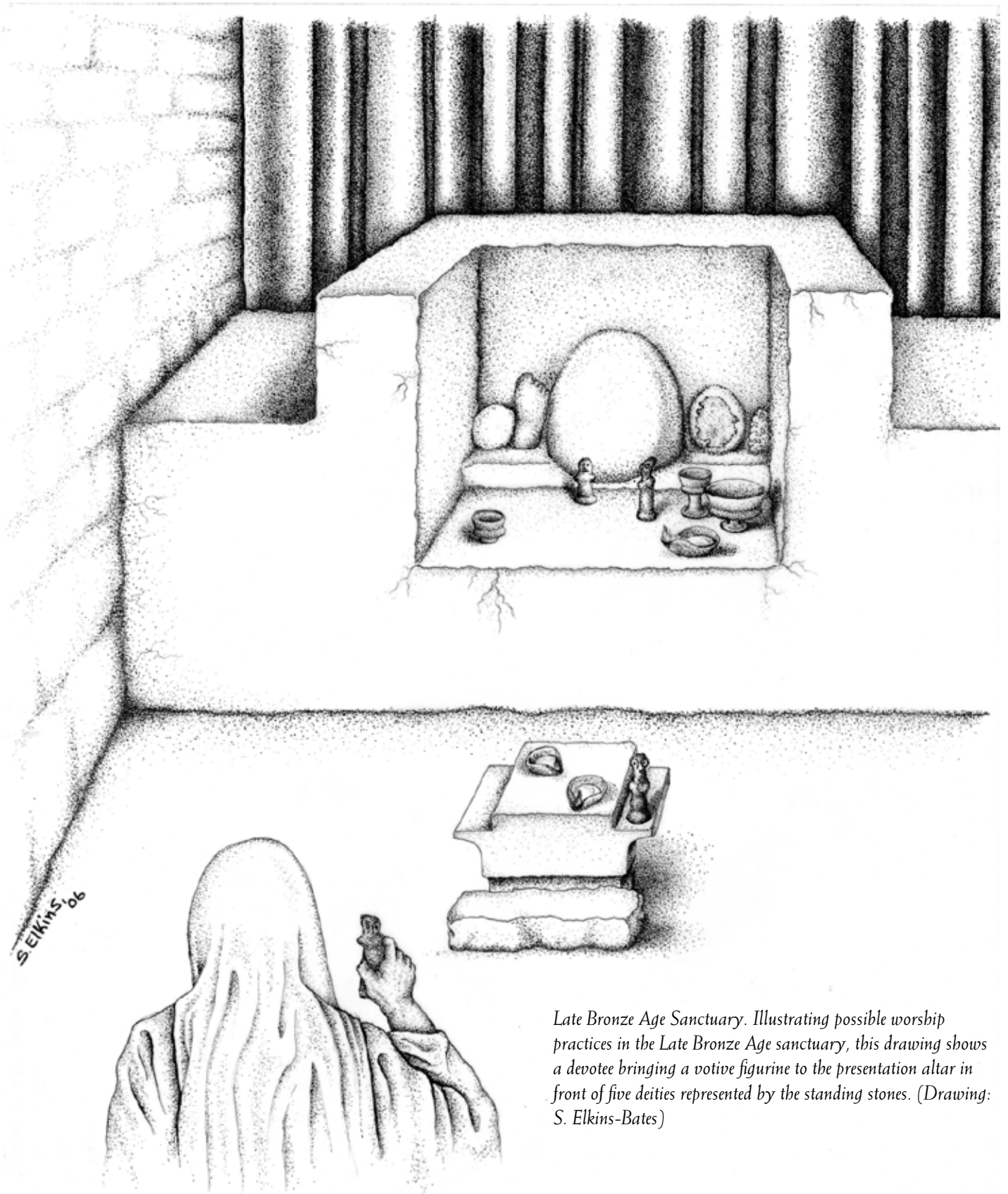
*Drawing of Mamluk Governor's Residence. An important contribution to the study of archaeological remains, drawings help illustrate what is not always clear to professionals or popular readers. (Photo: S. Ullom)*



### **How can I help ensure a future for the past?**

To assist in preserving and protecting sites like those of the Madaba Plains Project, the American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR) established the ASOR Lawrence T. Geraty Community Archaeology Endowment to address a pressing need: namely, to heighten awareness and facilitate the participation of local communities in taking care of heritage sites in their backyards. Read more and donate at: <https://lasierra.edu/cnea/projects/>.





*Late Bronze Age Sanctuary. Illustrating possible worship practices in the Late Bronze Age sanctuary, this drawing shows a devotee bringing a votive figurine to the presentation altar in front of five deities represented by the standing stones. (Drawing: S. Elkins-Bates)*