

1999 Field Season Yields Spectacular Finds at Tel Kedesh

This past summer saw the first full field season at the Museum's newest excavation site, Tel Kedesh in the Upper Galilee of modern Israel. This project is jointly sponsored by the University of Michigan and the University of Minnesota. It is funded by the two universities, private donations, and a generous grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. The 1999 season was one of surprises and spectacular finds, which confirmed our assessment of the site as an ideal place to learn more about Hellenistic Phoenicia but also led us to upgrade our identification of the site's status in the Hellenistic era from mere farming village to major administrative center.

The Site

As described in previous reports, Kedesh is a large tel site, nearly a kilometer long from north to south and rising some 120 feet above the surrounding apple orchards of northern Israel's kibbutz Malkiya. It dominates a fertile upland valley in the Anti-Lebanon range, where the temperate climate and bountiful natural water sources have supported farming villages from the Early Bronze Age to modern times.

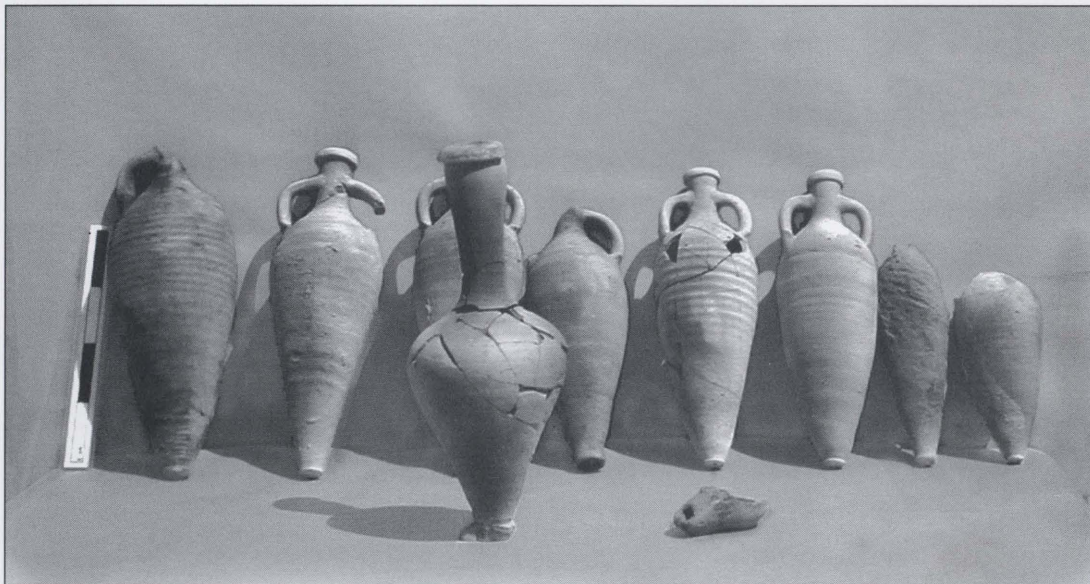
According to the Old Testament, Kedesh was one of the great Canaanite cities, whose population joined in early battles against the Israelites (Joshua 12). By New Testament times, ancient literary references to Kedesh seem to indicate that it had devolved from a large urban center and strategic stronghold to a rural village in the far eastern hinterland of the Phoenician city of Tyre. Medieval sources mention

Kedesh only occasionally. By the time of Israel's 1948 War of Independence, Kedesh housed a few farmsteads, a cemetery, and a grazing field.

Hellenistic and Early Roman Kedesh

The new Michigan/Minnesota excavations concentrate on the Phoenician village of Hellenistic and Early Roman times. This was an exuberant era of conflict and change marked by interaction and exchange among peoples brought forcibly into the Greek orbit by Alexander's conquest of the East. The

participate in the economic prosperity that came in the wake of Alexander. This led to quarrels among themselves over the increased commercialization of their culture, sparking the Maccabean uprising and the establishment of their religious kingdom. Subsequently, the area endured the heavy-handed rule of Herod the Great and the Roman procurators. Eventually, the Jews united in battle against the mighty Roman Empire—and finally saw their dream of independence crushed by Roman legions, ending with the brutal destruc-



Small oil flasks (amphoriskoi) and an unguentarium found in the northwest corner room of the large building excavated this summer at Tel Kedesh.

Photo: S. Herbert

site of Kedesh, then as now, lay at a flash point of interaction: today on the border between Israel and Lebanon; in Hellenistic times at the intersection of Jewish and Phoenician spheres of influence.

While the cosmopolitan Phoenicians appeared to take easily to the ways of the Greeks, the Jews of ancient Palestine had a more difficult time. During these years in Israel the previously isolated and provincial population began to

tion of the Temple in Jerusalem in the year 70 C.E.

Reconstructing Daily Village Life

Dramatic political events such as these are all that constitute most reconstructions of life in Palestine before and during these times. The Michigan/Minnesota team chose to excavate Tel Kedesh to get a different perspective: a ground-eye view of what day-to-day life was like in a rural border village

Notes from the Director

As we start another year at the Kelsey I look forward to the range of activities and opportunities that our rich collections and lively community of scholars and friends will produce. The Museum continues its active program of fieldwork in the Near East, with Janet Richards' excavations in Upper Egypt just getting underway as I write. Janet and her team will spend three months investigating the Middle Kingdom cemetery at the important royal center of Abydos and will return in December to report on the finds. My own season at Kedesh in Israel this past summer was even more productive than I had hoped (see story on pages 1, 3-5).

On the exhibitions front, Terry Wilfong will work this winter on the publication of his *Music in Roman Egypt* show, and Robin Meador-Woodruff will mount an exhibition of the early twentieth-century panoramic photographs that are some of the Kelsey's great archival treasures (story at right). Elaine Gazda is busy putting together her large show on the Villa of the Mysteries at Pompeii and the Maria Barosso watercolors that Professor Kelsey himself commissioned. This complex undertaking will be featured in our spring Newsletter. In the area of publications, the upcoming issue of the *Bulletin of the University of Michigan Museums of Art and Archaeology* will be entirely devoted to research on the Kelsey collections and Kelsey-sponsored fieldwork.

We have had one major staffing change over the summer. Our conservator, Geoff Brown, left us to take up the directorship of the Navajo Nation Museum in Window Rock, Arizona. Geoff had been taking care of the collections since 1990, and it was under his leadership that we built the SAFE, the climate-controlled facility that now protects our fragile collections. Geoff was the moving force behind this project, and all of us who value the collections owe him a great debt of gratitude for it. We wish him well in his new endeavors.

Sharon C. Herbert, Director

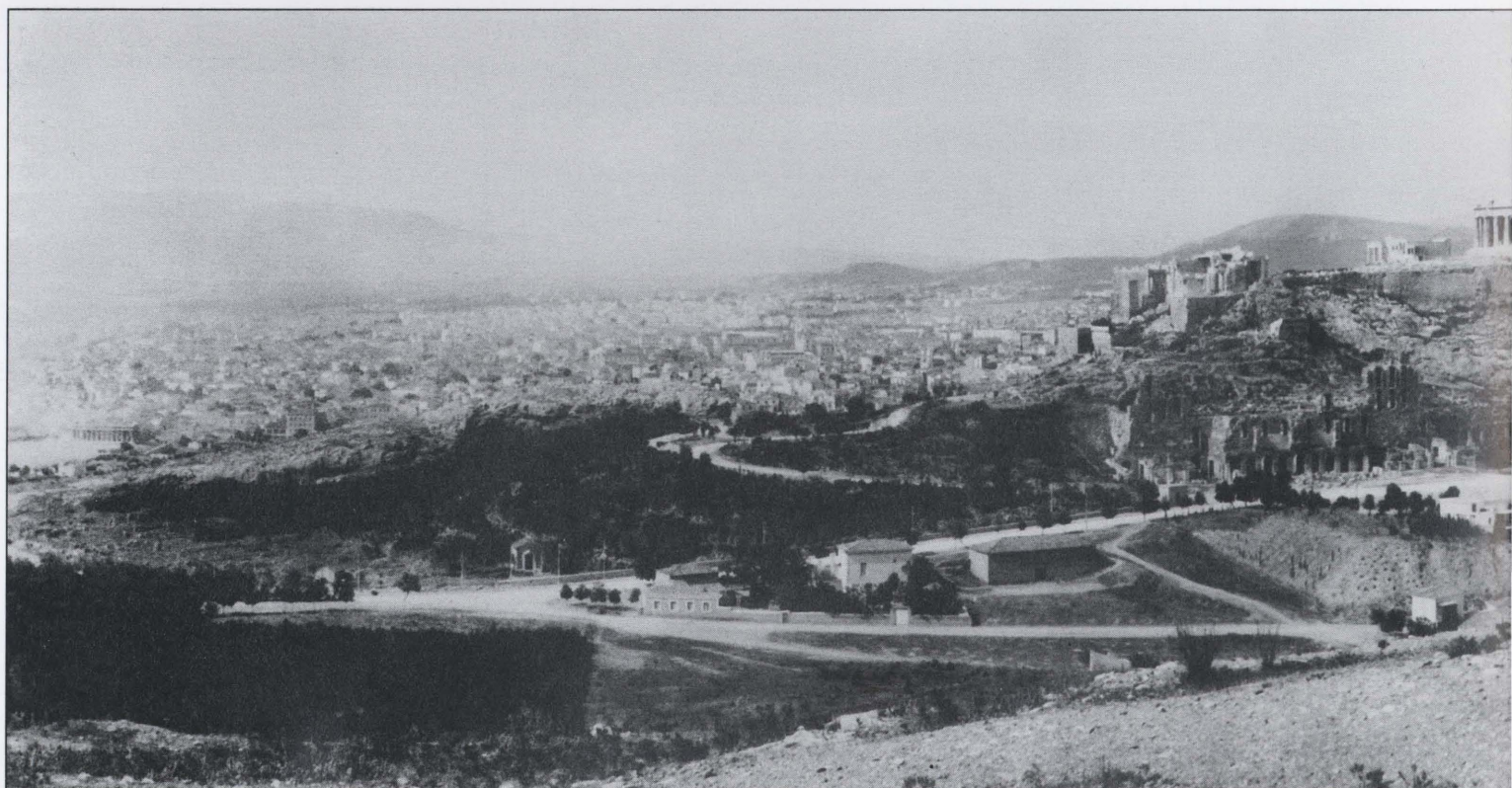
Exhibition of Panoramics

The exhibition *Surrounded by the View: Panoramic Photographs from the Kelsey Museum Archives* will open on January 14, 2000. The show is curated by Robin Meador-Woodruff.

In 1919 and 1920, photographer George R. Swain accompanied Francis Kelsey on an expedition that circled through Europe and the Mediterranean area to document sites of interest to classical history scholars, as well as to identify potential sites for future excavations. Among Swain's photographic equipment was a Cirkut camera, one of the earliest rotation cameras manufactured for commercial use.

With this camera, Swain produced a series of magnificent panoramic views of many of the sites he and Kelsey visited. The photographs were apparently never formally displayed, nor were many, if any, of them published—an oversight that will be remedied in part by this exhibition.

This unique portion of the Museum's photographic archives will be accompanied by a brief introduction to the cameras available to Swain at the time. In addition to his photographic activities, Swain was an avid diarist, and illuminating comments drawn from his journals will make these vistas come alive for visitors to the galleries. We look forward to introducing you to Mr. Swain's amazing photographs.



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during these years. We are also seeking to expand the very meager body of evidence on the material culture of Hellenistic Phoenicia and thereby augment our understanding of the complex intermix that constituted Hellenistic culture(s).

While all the ancient mentions of Kedesh indicated that the site was ideal for these purposes, sad experience has shown that the actual archaeological remains do not always live up to their ancient press. Our preliminary season in 1997 was designed to check on the preservation of the Hellenistic remains and their accessibility, while our 1998 magnetometric survey was meant to give us a sitewide preview of what lay below the surface (a kind of archaeological MRI).

As reported in the 1998 Newsletter, this preliminary work showed the site to be quite promising for our purposes. In the 1997 probes we found that Hellenistic remains were well preserved and very accessible, in fact the latest things preserved below the modern

surface in the southern and western sectors of the tel. The most notable was a house dating to the time of the Maccabees (second century B.C.E.) with a wide array of intact and nearly intact household objects, including cooking pots, perfume juglets, loomweights, and a mortar and pestle left on the floor.

Some vessels had been made in the immediate vicinity, while others were imported from the Phoenician coast. Finding so many vessels essentially intact is unusual, and we suspected that the inhabitants must have fled the premises in a hurry. After some time back in the library we connected these finds with a battle between Jonathan, the Hasmonean commander, and Demetrius, the Syrian Greek king, which ended in a rout of the Greeks at Kedesh in the year 145 B.C.E. (I Maccabees 11.63–64, 67–74).

First Hints of Administrative Center

The architecture and finds in the 1997 probe were consistent with the small rural settlement implied by the extant Hellenistic references to the site. The 1998 magnetometric survey, however,

gave us our first clue that there might be something more to Hellenistic Kedesh. The survey revealed the presence of what appeared to be an enormous building at the southern end of the tel, about 45 feet to the east of the house mentioned above. The building, if the walls indeed proved to be part of a single integrated structure, would be approximately 170 by 120 feet, with a series of rooms arranged around the perimeter, hardly a humble farmer's abode. Since magnetometry does not give a good sense of the depth of the images it produces, the possibility remained that the large building was something of a mirage and with excavation would prove to be a melange of smaller, superimposed but chronologically discrete structures.

Building on the information gained from the 1997 and 1998 expeditions, we were able to design a three-year excavation plan that would explore both the large southern building and neighboring houses as well as sample the occupation history of other sectors of the tel. The 1999 season was the first of the projected three-year campaign.

continued

View from the Hill of Philopappus over Athens, 1920, photographed by George R. Swain, 9 1/2 x 32 1/2 in. From left: the Theseum; part of the modern city; road up to Acropolis; Propylaea; Erectheum; Parthenon; Odeon; Zappeion; Temple of Zeus; Stadium; and beyond this last, Mt. Hymettus. Beyond the Acropolis is the height of Lycabettus, crowned by the chapel. Kelsey photo no. C42.





Site photo showing, in the foreground, the magazine containing large broken storage jars, or amphoras, which are visible around the walls of the room. In the background is the corner room where the bullae were found.

The team, consisting predominantly of students from both the University of Michigan and the University of Minnesota, was in the field from May 20 to July 18. We concentrated our efforts on the southern sector of the tel, where we opened large parts of five 10-by-10-meter excavation squares. We were also able to explore three other areas briefly.

Excavation of Large Building

As was to be expected, our most exciting finds came from the southern sector. There we uncovered parts of five rooms and both the southeast and northwest corners of the large building foreshadowed by the magnetometric survey. It is now very clear that this is indeed a single integrated building covering some 20,000 square feet. Buildings of this size tend to be sites of public administration and the residences of high-ranking officials. The presence of such a structure at Tel Kedesh leads us to believe that it was at least a regional administrative center.

Although we cannot be sure when the building was originally constructed, finds from in and under the final floors show that it was in use down to the middle of the second century. Interestingly, several of the walls of the

building make use of large column drums reused from an earlier structure. This implies that it was not the first monumental building on the site and, coupled with other finds from the Persian period, leads us to believe that the Hellenistic building may succeed an earlier, Persian-period public structure.

If indeed Kedesh is the Upper Galilee's administrative center in the Persian and Hellenistic periods, this would solve a problem that

has long puzzled archaeologists and historians. Up until the Assyrian invasion of the late eighth century B.C.E. the nearby site of Hazor had filled this administrative role, but excavations have shown that Hazor never regained this status after the Assyrian conquest, and the location of regional administration in the Upper Galilee is unknown.

Discovery of Storage Vessels and Bullae

The most spectacular Hellenistic finds of the 1999 season come from the area of the northwest corner of the large building, where we excavated part of the corner room and all of the room to its east. The latter turned out to be a magazine for the storage of wine and probably grain and oil as well. Fourteen massive jars (5 feet tall) stood in place along the walls. Most were locally made, but one was imported from the Phoenician coast, and three others were wine amphoras from the Greek island of Rhodes. The amphora handles bore stamps of local officials, whose dates of office fall within the decade prior to 146 B.C.E.

The jars, and the room, had been damaged in antiquity; there were smaller vessels found in pieces, clearly thrown

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Museum Hours

Tuesday–Friday 9:00–4:00

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Admission is free

and open to the public.

World Wide Web Address

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Photo: S. Herbert

Bulla showing *Aphrodite bathing*.

and smashed on the floor, and the whole room was covered in a layer of lightly burned debris. The combination of destruction evidence and the chronological confirmation of the Greek amphora stamps secures our earlier hypothesis—that the site was hastily abandoned in the course of the battle of 145 B.C.E.

In the corner room, next to the magazine, the finds were even more impressive, and the evidence for violent destruction more pronounced. Much of the room is covered by a layer of bright red burned mudbrick at the top of which five large roofing nails were found; this room was clearly destroyed by an intense fire. At one end of the room, below the burned layer lay more than twenty small oil flasks, smashed together in a tight pile, as if they had fallen straight from a shelf to the floor.

Just in front of the oil flasks was a heap of 1,832 small clay balls with stamped impressions, a type of object known as a *bulla* (plural *bullae*). The *bullae* indicate that at one time the room was an official repository for documents, further evidence that the building served an administrative function. The actual documents would have been written on papyrus and probably stored in wooded chests, all of which would have been destroyed by the fire. Ironically, the same fire is what preserved the *bullae*.

Significance of *Bullae*

Bullae such as those found at Kedesh were used by private individuals and by public officials as a way to ensure the validity of various documents in the Hellenistic world. In some instances, an official would have rolled up a piece of

official correspondence written on papyrus, tied it with twine, pressed a small piece of clay around the twine, and then stamped that piece of clay with his signet. These sorts of *bullae* are the equivalent of ancient envelopes: They ensured the security of a communication, as well as identified the sender. *Bullae* are also used to identify the signers and witnesses (up to six) of various legal contracts, such as land sales, loans, wills, and marriage contracts.

The cache of *bullae* found at Kedesh brings to thirteen the number of such Hellenistic archives found in the ancient world—from Carthage in the west to Seleucia-on-the-Tigris in the east. No

Photo: S. Herbert

Bulla showing symbol of *Tanit*, a Phoenician fertility deity.

other such archive from this period has ever been found in Israel or indeed anywhere in the southern Levant. In fact, the Kedesh *bullae* constitute the fourth largest Hellenistic corpus found in the Near East to date—and thousands more are to be expected from the yet-unexcavated portion of the room.

The *bullae* are quite small—on average 2–3 centimeters in height and less than a centimeter in width. They carry on their unstamped surface the impression of the papyrus and the string against which they were pressed. Many preserve partial fingerprints of the individual who stamped them. They vary in the type of clay and especially in the type of symbols and pictures they carry. There are easily recognized Greek gods and goddesses

in familiar poses, such as Aphrodite bathing or an armed Athena striding; there is Hermes with his caduceus. More complicated narratives are also represented, such as Zeus in the form of an eagle carrying off the hapless Ganymede. Some carry one of the official symbols of the Seleucid kings, the anchor; others bear the symbol of Tanit, a Phoenician fertility deity, and Phoenician lettering. There are many portraits, heads of Hellenistic monarchs as well as what appear to be private portraits of older men; others bear motives that hint at Persian and Egyptian influences. The entire array encapsulates the complicated cultural milieu that existed within the Hellenistic Near East.

Looking Ahead

What is next for the Kedesh project? We plan to excavate two more seasons at the site and have already begun analysis of the *bullae*. We are working to raise the money to conserve, record, and study this amazing windfall. It will take many years to wring every bit of information possible out of these rare finds, but the first step is to recover the remainder left in the room so we will have the complete archive. Our initial research goals of studying the day-to-day life of a border settlement and adding to our understanding of Hellenistic Phoenicia remain in place. The previous characterization of the site as an out-of-the-way village now clearly needs revision, but it is even more apparent that the ground-eye view we can recover from Tel Kedesh will illuminate aspects of this region's history that never made it into the books.

Sharon Herbert, *University of Michigan*
Andrea Berlin, *University of Minnesota*



Bulla showing the head of a horse.

Photo: S. Herbert

Calendar of Events

Exhibitions:

- *Music in Roman Egypt*
Closes December 12
- *The Archaeology of Ethnicity:
Recent Finds from Tel Kedesh, Israel*
October in the Ancient Near East
Gallery
- *Surrounded by the View: Panoramic
Photographs from the Kelsey Museum
Archives*
Opens January 14, 2000

Lectures:

- *A Planned World in Early Egypt*
by John Baines, Oriental Institute,
University of Chicago
October 11, noon, 3050 Frieze Bldg.
Sponsored by Department of Near
Eastern Studies, Frankel Center for
Judaic Studies, Center for Middle
Eastern and North African Studies,
Interdepartmental Program in
Classical Art and Archaeology
- *Problems of Urban Design in the Forum
of Pompeii*
by John Dobbins,
University of Virginia
October 12, 4:30, 2175 Angell Hall
Cosponsored by the Archaeological
Institute of America
- *Search for the Battle of Actium*
by William Murray
April 4, time and place tba
Cosponsored by the Archaeological
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