

Siegfried H. Horn Archaeological Museum NEWSLETTER

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THE ART OF THE ANCIENTS A Way of Looking at Their World

by Maylan Schurch

Almost exactly in the center of the lowest level of Andrews University's James White Library, a slim, brown-haired woman sits at a desk gazing through a six-inch illuminated magnifier writing notations on a card.

She is Dr. Elizabeth Platt, the specialist who is publishing her research on cosmetic, weaving and jewelry objects from Andrews' recently-completed archaeological expedition to Biblical Heshbon. While those around her in the building--students, professors, library staff--are handling mostly 20th century paper products, Dr. Platt analyzes objects which range from 500 to 4,000 [sic] years old.

Preparation for Archaeological Analysis

Dr. Platt, an ordained Presbyterian clergywoman who has taught at Rutgers during the past seven school years, has spent the last three summers at Andrews' Siegfried Horn Archaeological Museum.

She focused her interest on archaeological artifacts while she was earning her Ph.D. in Ancient Near Eastern Languages and Literature at Harvard.

"I wrote a thesis on the jewelry of ancient Israel during Bible times," she recounts. "It dealt with finds from 14 excavations. Up until that time, no one had

really worked on defining jewelry and its historical implications. What I did was to bring together ancient Egyptian, Greek, Roman and other Middle Eastern jewelry artifacts. Then, when I studied them and found similarities, I was able to form categories." The newer finds were then organized using these classifications.

The Heshbon Project

All this was, of course, excellent training for work on the Heshbon finds. For one thing, Heshbon was a highly significant site--its "tell," or mound, was undisturbed by any previous archaeological expedition. And when Andrews University professors contracted for the site in the late 1960's, they determined to excavate it correctly.

"The team that Andrews had to work with came from many different colleges, universities, museums, and other institutions all over the world," says Dr. Platt. "They were very careful to use the best archaeological methods in their approach to the 'dig,' and as a result, Heshbon is certainly heralded as one of the finest excavations in the Holy Land."

From this mound, layered with the 20 cities which made up the occupational levels spanning at least 3,000 years, came the approximately 1,400 jewelry, textile and cosmetic items which have passed through Dr. Platt's fingers.

Dating the items is of primary importance. Where they are found--the exact stratum from which they were unearthed--helps to fix an approximate date. "Here we have an excavation which is very well dated as to the finds and times from which the objects come," she says.

Understanding the "Findspot"

"However, we're not always sure exactly what the place where the object is found was used for. In many cases we can indeed identify that it came from a tomb, a church, a cistern, a part of a wall, and so forth." Other times there are no such clues. But occasionally the object itself can give an indication.

One such instance was the finding of several "double-ended kohl sticks." A kohl stick is a small

bronze or iron rod about as thick as a knitting needle and about five inches long, with lobed ends. It was used to apply a type of mascara to the eyes.

"Now, we found a place in Heshbon where there were a dozen or so of a special kind of kohl stick and parts of them, all grouped together in one spot. Some of the pieces appear to have been bent or broken while being crafted. This may mean that this area was a shop where cosmetic materials were sold."

Cosmetics in the Ancient Mid-East

Finds like this indicate that ancient cultures did indeed regard cosmetics as an integral part of their lives, although they may have been functional as well as simply "decorative." Mascara may have been used for the same purpose that modern-day football and baseball players use soot beneath their eyes--to ease the glare of a bright sun. Or it may have been a protective/healing ointment for the eye diseases so prevalent throughout the history of the Middle East.

Dr. Platt, in fact, is quite convinced that Ancient Near Eastern cultures integrated aesthetics much more closely with their practical lives than westerners do today. The 20th century American tends to relegate his art to an "art center" or to a carefully chosen space of his living room wall; even when he buys a sample of pottery art--an ideally close marriage of art and function--he probably does not store anything drinkable in it.

"I think we must remember," she says, "that there was a fine line, or perhaps *no* line, between cosmetics for beauty and cosmetics for health. Take 'anointing with oil,' for example. In the Middle East, people did need to use more oils and other things that we might regard simply as cosmetic. Putting oil on the head was a good and beneficial practice, so much so that it came to be regarded as a thing of great honor: kings were anointed with oil as a sign of their kingship (and the word 'Messiah' means 'the anointed one.')

Jewelry in Bible Times

However, metal kohl sticks tend to corrode and crumble, oils and mascara evaporate with time, and little

is left to study. Beads, rings, and bracelets, on the other hand, are made of more durable stuff, and consequently make up the bulk of Dr. Platt's research.

Who wore this jewelry, and how was it worn?

"Occasionally we'll find statues from a certain period in Jordan, or paintings, mosaics, friezes, or frescoes; and when human beings are depicted on them, we can sometimes get an idea of the clothes they wore and the jewelry they used with the clothes."

The Fibula

Some jewelry was quite functional. "One of the most interesting items of this type is the fibula," says Dr. Platt. A fibula worked essentially like a safety pin and was worn on a large piece of material to help that piece of material conform to the shape of the human body.

"Weaving and spinning were laborious tasks in the ancient world, and people did not have a great quantity of textile garments. The garments they did have thus had to serve several purposes.

"Therefore, a very large garment might be used as a blanket, or as a cape, or a bundle into which you could put your belongings. So as you wore it, you could have several different kinds of jewelry to act as 'stitching' to keep it together. During Biblical times, the fibula was one of the most important pieces of jewelry."

The fibula could go beyond the purely functional however.

"At Heshbon, we found two beautiful 'crossbow' fibulae of thick bronze. Studies of archaeological work in Roman Britain indicate that this type of fibula was what Roman officers and government officials throughout the Empire wore. That information, coupled with other things we've learned while examining Roman tombs at Heshbon--some of which date from the time of Christ--has interesting implications. It's possible that Pontius Pilate, as well as the centurion whose servant Christ healed, may have worn just such fibulae."

Jewelry, of course, was not limited to Roman officers. "The common people wore fibulae, too, as well as long pins that also attached two pieces of a garment together in a simpler fashion.

"The people also wore bronze rings and copper bracelets. The latter were affixed permanently on their wrists and ankles--in the case of women. They didn't, at least in Heshbon, seem to wear much ear jewelry."

Earrings

The Romans who occupied Heshbon *did* wear earrings, however, and one of the most beautiful treasures found there consisted of earrings of solid gold, which gleam as brightly now as they did 2,000 years ago, for gold does not tarnish. Dr. Platt described the outstanding piece: "It has a central disc, with another disc above it, and the central disc has a bar and four pendants. In the center of the disc, on a milky-blue stone, is carved a woman's face--probably Atargatis, the same goddess we find depicted at Petra." *(see back page)*

Beads

Beads were especially prevalent at Heshbon, and Dr. Platt feels that their form and design went far beyond mere surface ornamentation.

"They wore a lot of beads which seemed to follow the Egyptian pattern in that their colors symbolize the different aspects of nature. The dark blue lapis lazuli is the color of the sky. The turquoise was the color of the water--the Mediterranean--and amethyst was the color of dawn and dusk in the desert. There are green stones in serpentine, too, the color of vegetation.

"The idea was that God, in nature, was giving you what sustained life. That was how you were living--by God's blessings. You wanted to wear the sunlight (gold) and moonlight (silver) on your body as signs of this sustaining power in your very life."

(The conclusion of "The Art of the Ancients" will appear in the Fall issue of the Newsletter.)

THE NEWSLETTER

You may have wondered what happened to the *Newsletter*, whether it had ceased or perhaps the address list had been lost so that you did not receive your copy. Nothing quite as drastic as that has happened, though we have in fact lost one edition of our mailing list.

We apologize for this delay in getting out the *Newsletter*. The widely scattered activities of the museum staff over the past few months have been the main cause for this delay. With the publication of the Fall 1981 Issue we will be back on our normal schedule again.

ARTIFACTS AVAILABLE

A former student at Andrews University is now in the business of selling artifacts, replicas, and slides for use with church and school groups. Illustrative of what he has available are the following: Replica of Selket, scorpion goddess from king Tut (resin with gold overlay \$60.00). Replica of Mirror Case from king Tut (plaster with gold \$75.00). Ancient Persian bronze spearheads (5"-6"--\$30.00). Ptolemy bronze coins (40mm VG--\$30.00). Replica of Isis (14" gold over plaster \$75.00). Replica of Osiris (14" gold over plaster \$75.00). Replica of Rosetta Stone (\$75.00).

For further information write directly to Mr. Jeff Wolff, Star Rt., Box 5413, Groveland, CA 95321.



COINS OF THE BIBLE

Part II

by Stan Hudson

MITE, FARTHING:

The smallest bronze coins circulating among the Jews during the first centuries B.C. and A.D. were called "prutahs" among the locals and are the only Jewish coins mentioned in the Bible. The references are Mk 12:42 and Lu 21:2, both being records of the poor widow and her seemingly insignificant offering.

Mark, writing to a non-Jewish audience, wished to stress that monetary insignificance of the widow's offering, so he wrote that she gave "two *mites* (*lepta*, or "tiny things"), which make a *farthing* (*kodrantes*, Lat. *quadrans*, the smallest Imperial Roman coins)."

Below are pictured two *lepta*, or *mites*, struck by the Maccabean ruler Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 B.C.) along with a Roman *quadrans* from Augustus (27 B.C.-A.D. 14). The *lepta* were crudely struck, often having sharp uneven edges. Hence Christ's reference to "bags" (leather pouches) in Lu 12:33 which "wax not old" (wear out) is more understandable!

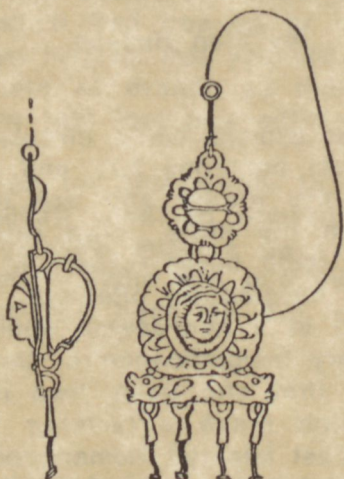


Coin sizes:

13mm

13mm

17mm



drawn by
Richard Brennecke

(see p. 5)

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