2015

2015 Research at Andrews

Andrews University

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/researchbrochure

Recommended Citation
http://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/researchbrochure/6

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Office of Research and Creative Scholarship at Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Annual Research Brochure by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact trobtsn@andrews.edu.
Longue Durée on the Hinge

Tell Hisban is a multi-millennial archaeological site. Located between the Jordanian capital of Amman and the town of Madaba, the archaeological site tells a story of the rise and fall of empires along the eastern Mediterranean as well as the daily struggles of an agro-pastoral people. With strata dating from the Late Bronze Age (1500–1200 B.C.) to the Early Modern Period, it offers a long-range view of life along the fertile land bridge between the sea and the desert known as the Levant. Life, as Øystein LaBianca would put it, on the hinge.

Øystein LaBianca, professor of anthropology at Andrews University, has spent the last year in Norway as one of eight full-time researchers who were awarded a grant from the Centre for Advanced Study (CAS) at the Norwegian Academy of Sciences and Letters in Oslo. LaBianca is co-facilitator of the funded project, titled “Local Dynamics of Globalization in the Pre-Modern Southern Levant,” along with Terje Stordalen, professor at the Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo.

Stordalen and LaBianca have a longstanding research partnership. Stordalen first became interested in LaBianca’s work at Tall Hisban because of his anthropological approach and emphasis on long-duration. LaBianca has developed a modified version of Robert Redfield’s theory of great and little traditions and the longue durée or the “long-term past” in contrast to particular historical periods such as the Iron Age or Classical Era. Second, he is doing global history. In other words, he explains, he is “trying to see the Levant in terms of the history of the globe as a whole.”

LaBianca describes the Levant as “a hinge between macro-regions.” On the west of the Levant lies the Mediterranean; on the east, West Asia, Mesopotamia and Persia; to the south, Egypt; and to the north, Anatolia. Sandwiched between sand and sea, the Levant has served as a place of connection and trade since time immemorial. The Levant has also been the site of great political turbulence, cultural innovation and the foundation of the three Abrahamic faiths. “The connectivity and global entanglement,” he says, “is more intense in the history of the Levant than any other place in the world.”

One can approach the Levant from the perspective of circum-Mediterranean culture—which includes hospitality, honor and shame, tribalism, etc.—or climate, which necessarily impacts the system of food production and diet. In order to understand the various aspects of culture and climate in relation to the overall interaction in the Middle East from a global history perspective, Stordalen and LaBianca conceived a project, “Local Dynamics of Globalization” (LDG).

The 2014–2015 project, “Local Dynamics of Globalization in the Pre-Modern Southern Levant,” is just one aspect of the larger LDG project and, LaBianca says, aims to “resituate how we narrate the story of archaeological sites in the Levant.” The multi-disciplinary research team includes scholars who are specialists in anthropology, archaeology, art history and biblical-, classical- and Islamic history. Five international workshops were conducted as a way to widen the conversation with other researchers, including three of LaBianca’s former students.

Over the course of the last year, LaBianca has solidified what he terms “the Diachronic Cultural Production model” or DCP. The model takes as its points of departure Pierre Bordieu’s concept of “cultural production” and Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell’s “fragmentation-connectivity model.” LaBianca’s adapted model has nine “sensitizing concepts”—local risk regimes, local production regimes, local social organization, connectivity, imperial projects, spatiality/sacrality projects, abatement/intensification—that serve as aids to gain a “global history perspective on the past in the Levant” (LaBianca, forthcoming).

The model seeks to answer questions like “What caused cycles of intensification and abatement?” and “What are the drivers that lead to the development of a culture on one hand and its disintegration on the other?” This study, which is his contribution to the overall project, he says, “is pure anthropology.”
LaBianca is also applying this theoretical model to Tell Hisban, which acts as a micro-region in the Levant. “Hisban provides a marvelous case study,” he says. “The fact is that Hisban is multi-millennial and so we cannot just focus on the biblical, or the classical, or the Islamic. We have to find a way to animate the whole. That has been the passion that has been driving my research for the past thirty to forty years.”

Asta LaBianca, his wife and assistant professor of English at Andrews University, has been working on the “little traditions” aspect of Tell Hisban’s history. Photos and ethnographic notes written by students and Asta LaBianca from 1971–1976 were scanned by Undergraduate Research Scholars Brittany Swart and Doneva Walker. She has been using these materials to construct the modern end of the longue durée in relation to Hisban.

The conclusions of the study will be published in a multi-authored volume tentatively titled “Levantine Entanglement,” compiled by the research team. But another, perhaps more important outcome, is the application of his research to a public outreach program at Hisban. He is currently working with colleagues both at Andrews University and in Jordan to develop the site so that it is accessible and features narration of Hisban’s history over time. The longue durée approach, he says, “respects all the different aspects of the history” and at Hisban, “we are being fully responsible to the science that we have been doing in narrating the longue durée on the hinge.”

Between 1991 and 2001, Jacob Milgrom published a massive three-volume commentary on Leviticus for the Anchor Bible Commentary series. With a total of 2,688 pages, this is the most comprehensive commentary on Leviticus in history and has opened up new territory in scholarship regarding this previously neglected biblical book.

Jacob Milgrom, a scholar and rabbi, was known for his passion for studying what is known as “priestly” literature, namely, biblical texts in Leviticus and other books that deal with concerns of priests. He demonstrated that such texts, which critical scholars following Julius Wellhausen had considered to be disjointed, were actually “coherent records of authentic ancient Israelite rituals and laws.”

Milgrom discovered that biblical legislation concerning sacrifices and purification forms a system that was intended to impress upon the Israelites concepts such as the difference between divine holiness and profane (non-holy) or impure categories; the effects of moral faults and physical ritual impurities on the sanctuary; the need to purge such evils from God’s sanctuary so that his Presence would not depart; and the sanctity of life.

In 1980, Roy Gane, now professor of Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern languages in the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University, began his MA in biblical Hebrew language and literature at the University of California, Berkeley where Milgrom was teaching. Gane came with almost no interest in Leviticus, but Milgrom soon changed that.

Besides the fact that Milgrom knew more about Leviticus than anybody else in the world, Gane was struck by Milgrom’s fascinating teaching style, which was quite rabbinic. To prepare students for thorough verse-by-verse discussion, Milgrom had them carefully study the Hebrew text and also divided among them a comprehensive range of ancient to modern literature regarding the biblical book. These sources in various languages included ancient translations, Dead Sea Scrolls, medieval Jewish and modern commentaries, monographs and articles, as well as Ancient Near Eastern materials for comparison in the Akkadian, Sumerian, Hittite and Ugaritic languages.

During the class period, which took place in Milgrom’s home in the hills overlooking Berkeley, the 8–10 students would report their findings for each verse, with one student taking the lead for each verse and the others then adding information. Together they struggled with questions raised by the text, probing it for possible answers.

Milgrom allowed students to think. Rather than talking all the time, he gave long pauses or just sat and listened as the students debated with each other, occasionally steering the discussion by asking further questions. “And then he would pull things together and show how one passage of Scripture would interpret another passage through close reading of the text,” Gane remembers. “What was exciting about it was participating in the exploration and discovery of new things and seeing everything work together as a system.”

For Gane, these classes with Milgrom were a turning point. His fascination with the book of Leviticus led him to write his PhD dissertation on Leviticus under Milgrom, which he completed in 1992 and subsequently published as “Ritual Dynamic Structure” (Gorgias Press, 2004). Since then, Gane has published “Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy” (Eisenbrauns, 2004). Since then, Gane has published “Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy” (Eisenbrauns, 2004). Since then, Gane has published “Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy” (Eisenbrauns, 2004). Since then, Gane has published “Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy” (Eisenbrauns, 2004). Since then, Gane has published “Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy” (Eisenbrauns, 2004). Since then, Gane has published “Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy” (Eisenbrauns, 2004). Since then, Gane has published “Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy” (Eisenbrauns, 2004). Since then, Gane has published “Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy” (Eisenbrauns, 2004).