

50th Anniversary of Madaba Plains Project

Andrews University planning several events over the next three years

[Campus News](#) | Posted on September 20, 2017



Å ystein S. LaBianca, director of the Tall Hisban Cultural Heritage Project, with Hisban village elders. (Photo by Ivan LaBianca)

By: Becky St. Clair

2017–18 marks the 50th anniversary of the start of the Heshbon Expedition to Jordan, the forerunner of the Madaba Plains Project (MPP), an archaeological project at three locations in Jordan: Tall Hisban, Tall al-Umairy and Tall Jalul. The leaders of the first team to attempt the expedition were Siegfried Horn of Andrews University, Roger Boraas of Upsala College (New Jersey) and Bastian van Elderen of Calvin College (Michigan). They completed the trip in summer 1968.

Today, MPP is the longest continuously collaborating archaeological consortium in Jordan. While the scholarly achievements that have resulted from this long-standing collaboration have been extensive and well-received, the challenge now is how to provide a sustainable future for the sites themselves.

“Archaeology is in reality a very destructive enterprise in that as we dig, we expose such architectural elements and installations to the elements and to damage caused by humans and

their animals,” says Øystein LaBianca, senior director of the Hisban Cultural Heritage Project and professor of anthropology at Andrews University. “Is it any wonder, really, that each time we return to our sites after a year or more away they look nothing like how we left them?”

In a letter to former archaeology and anthropology students and others involved in the MPP over the last five decades, LaBianca announced the Lawrence T. Geraty Community Archaeology Endowment. Geraty, a founder of the MPP, led expeditions to Jordan in 1974 and 1976 during his tenure at Andrews University.

Proceeds from the endowment will incentivize local engagement with protection and presentation of archaeological tell sites throughout Jordan, starting with the MPP sites.

“We are pleased and honored that the American Schools of Oriental Research will administer this endowment as part of their initiatives on behalf of the cultural heritage of the Middle East,” says LaBianca. The goal is to raise \$100,000 by December 2017, and eventually see the fund grow to \$1M over the next five years.

In honor of this 50th anniversary year (MPP@ 50), several special events have been planned at various venues over a three-year period, beginning in September 2017 during Andrews University’s Alumni Homecoming Weekend. A full list is included below.

Sept. 28–30, 2017

Alumni Weekend and MPP Reunion

Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan

(see andrews.edu/alumni/homecoming for detailed schedule)

Nov. 16–20, 2017

Annual Meeting of the American Schools of Oriental Research

Boston, Massachusetts

July 5–15, 2018

MPP@ 50 Tour of Israel and Jordan

Celebrating at Tall Hisban, Wednesday, July 11

Nov. 10–11, 2018

MPP@ 50 Celebration as the major focus of the tenth annual Archaeology Discovery Weekend

La Sierra University, Riverside, California

Fall 2018

Workshop: “Mamluk and Ottoman Archaeology in Jordan: A Celebration of the Legacy of Hisban”

Sponsored by the Research Unit of Islamic Archaeology and the Annemarie Schimmel Kolleg at the University of Bonn

TBA 2019

14th International Congress of History and Archaeology of Jordan
The University of Florence, Florence, Italy

For more information about each of these events, to be kept updated on other MPP@50 news and for information about each of the MPP dig sites, visit andrews.edu/archaeology.

“The rationale for our upcoming reunions is not just an opportunity for us to reconnect with fellow expeditioners and share memories of the past,” LaBianca explains. “We also look forward to working together to enlist and empower members of the host communities where we dig as partners in helping us to protect, restore and preserve these sites in ways that will benefit not only future generations of diggers, but also future generations of Jordanian families, students and scholars.”

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