

A farewell to our great friend Lawrence E. Stager (1943–2017)

It is with deeply felt sadness to say good bye to our long-time friend, colleague and co-editor of this journal, Harvard Professor and former Director of the Semitic Museum of the Harvard University Lawrence E. Stager. We had enjoyed a close cooperation together with the Ashkelon team in the SCIEEM 2000 research programme (FWF Spezialforschungsbereich) and became firm friends.

Lawrence Elwood Stager, born January 5, 1943 at Kenton near Dunkirk, Ohio, grew up in the rural Mid-West and was expected to follow the footsteps of his father as a farmer. The Harvard Club of Dayton, Ohio, discovered, however, the intellectual qualities of the young man and sent him to Harvard University to study as an undergraduate. After the first year, he wanted to return to farm life, but it was his father Francis Stager who insisted he should return to his studies. Stager graduated with *magna cum laude* in 1965 with a BA in Archaeology and History of the Ancient Near East on burial customs in the Iron Age. He continued his studies under supervision of great teachers, such as G. Ernest Wright and Frank Moore Cross, at the *Near Eastern Languages & Civilizations Department*, obtaining his MA degree in 1972 and his PhD degree in 1975 “with distinction”, with a dissertation on the topic of desert farming. In between, he participated at the excavations at Gezer in Israel, at Tel el-Hesi and in the Buqe’ah Valley, where he gathered evidence for his PhD-thesis under the danger of friendly fire. This experience forged his decision to devote his life to the archaeology of the Ancient Near East.

From 1973–1985 he taught at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago where he became a full professor. In this time, he co-directed excavations at Idalion in Cyprus with Anita Walker and between 1975–1980 he concentrated on Punic archaeology with his excavations at the commercial harbour area of Carthage. At this site, he was able to collect first archaeological evidence of child sacrifice among the Punians.



Courtesy Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon

In 1986 he won the appointment as inaugural Dorot Professor of the Archaeology of Israel and Director of the Semitic Museum at his *alma mater*, the Harvard University. He was an inspiring teacher who won the respect and admiration of his students. More than fifty dissertations were closely supervised by him.

In the early 1980s something important happened in the life of Larry Stager. He was introduced by Philip King, then President of the American Schools of Oriental Research, to the philanthropist couple Leon Levy and Shelby White, who were interested in putting up an expedition on a site which represented in its stratigraphy all important phases of the history of Ancient Israel. By the advice of the deans of archaeology in Israel, Yigael Yadin and Benjamin Mazar, the decision was made in favour of the famous Philistine site of Ashkelon. Benjamin Mazar, then head of the Council of Archaeology of Israel secured the licence for the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon



Courtesy Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon

without the usual partnership of an Israeli institution, which could be seen as a sign of great trust in Larry.

Since 1985 the fieldwork of the Leon Levy Expedition at Ashkelon proceeded under Larry Stager and later under co-directorship with Daniel Master, a former PhD student of Larry and now Professor at Wheaton College, for over 30 years on a large scale and brought about most important results. The excavation and recording of four phases brought to light awesome defence systems of the Middle Bronze Age. Near the entrance of the defence system the “Shrine of the Golden Calf” was discovered. Within a small building a model shrine of terracotta containing the gilded bronze figure of a calf – the icon of young Ba‘al – was

found, bringing about an association with the biblical tradition. Also, the Late Bronze Age and the Philistine occupation produced unexpected results, such as the recent discovery of a Philistine cemetery which was the first one uncovered in this region. This discovery and the application of DNA studies and strontium analyses – all this put Ashkelon again and again in the forefront of archaeological news – will most probably settle the dispute about the origin of the Philistines.

Larry involved his elite students in the research with pertinent dissertations besides involving renowned specialists in the analysis of the collected data. Equally ground breaking were the exposure of large areas of the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Periods. The experience gathered in Carthage stimulated the evaluation of data of Ashkelon. Important articles about the economic and political considerations to perceive the port power of these cities in contrast to the landlocked agro-pastoralist economies in the highlands, which he had investigated previously, were published.¹ The comparison between Phoenician and Punic major cities contributed and will continue to contribute to the understanding of the cultic, political and mercantile sea going world of the Phoenicians in the Mediterranean.

The results were and are going to be processed in an imposing monographic series which is envisaged to cover 15 volumes.² Larry Stager at least was able to see the proofs of the very substantial volume 6 on the Middle Bronze Age which carries, as also volumes 1 and 3, in many respects his handwriting. His most popular publication in co-authorship with Philip King was the award winning “Life in Biblical Israel” (Louisville, KY 2001).

It was a great pleasure for the undersigned, together with his research associates Karin Kopetzky and Maria Antonia Negrete-Martinez, to cooperate with Larry and his Ashkelon group on the synchronisation of phases in Ashkelon and Tell el-Dab‘a. These studies were made possible in a most generous atmosphere by Larry Stager. This

¹ L.E. STAGER, Port Power in the Early and the Middle Bronze Age: The Organization of Maritime Trade and Hinterland Production, in: S. WOLFF (ed.), *Studies in the Archaeology of Israel and Neighboring Countries, in Memory of Douglas L. Esse*, SAOC 59, Chicago, Ill., 625–638.

² Thus far have appeared: L.E. STAGER, J.D. SCHLOEN and D.M. MASTER (eds.), *Ashkelon 1: Introduction and Overview (1985-2006)*, Winona Lake 2008; B. JOHNSON,

Ashkelon 2: Imported Pottery of the Roman and Late Roman Periods, Winona Lake 2008; L.E. STAGER, D.M. MASTER, and J.D. SCHLOEN, *Ashkelon 3: The Seventh Century B.C.*, Winona Lake 2011, which won the Levy-Sala Book Price for the best final excavation publication. M. PRESS, *Ashkelon 4: The Iron Age Figurines of Ashkelon and Philistia*, Winona Lake, 2012; Y. HUSTER, *Ashkelon 5: The Land Behind Ashkelon*, Winona Lake 2015. The volumes 6–9 are in print and will appear shortly.



Courtesy Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon

co-exercise in the field of ceramic and glyptic studies firmly synchronised the Ashkelon stratigraphy with the Tell el-Dab'a stratigraphy and brought about as a most important result that the later phase of Middle Bronze Age IIA (MB I) lasted fairly well into the time of the 13th Dynasty, definitely supporting the low chronology of this period. The Egyptian seal impressions in the oldest moat deposits at Ashkelon, which can be synchronised with Tell el-Dab'a Phase G/4, date to the late 12th and the 13th Dynasties.³

In 1999 Larry Stager, together with Robert Ballard, initiated an underwater investigation with remote sensing and underwater robotics of two

Phoenician shipwrecks near the Egyptian border. They contained a cargo of hundreds of amphorae most likely once filled with wine from Tyre bound for Egypt. They date to the 8th century BC. This expedition was disseminated in a National Geographic Society film and caught worldwide attention.

Larry Stager was a very generous colleague and if you won his trust, he was a most loyal friend. To his students he was a devoted professor who was always ready to give a helping hand.

In 2008 Larry Stager was given a substantial Festschrift with 50 contributions in all his fields of interest.⁴ On the 8th of July 2018 he should have

³ L.E. STAGER, The MB IIA Ceramic Sequence at Tel Ashkelon and Its Implications for the "Port Power" Model of Trade, in: M. BIETAK (ed.), *The Middle Bronze Age in the Levant. Proceedings of an International Conference on MB IIA Ceramic Materials in Vienna 24th-26th of January 2001*, CChEM III, Vienna 2002, 353–362; R. VOSS, A Sequence of Four Middle Bronze Age Gates in Ashkelon, *ibidem*, 379–384; M. BIETAK, K. KOPETZKY, L. E. STAGER and R. VOSS, Synchronisation of Stratigraphies: Ashkelon and Tell el-Dab'a, *E&L* 18 (2008), 49–60; L.E. STAGER &

R. VOSS, in: D. ASTON and M. BIETAK, *Tell el-Dab'a VIII, The Classification and Chronology of Tell el-Yahudiya Ware*, UZK 12, Vienna 2012. More results will be published in the forthcoming volume 7 of the Ashkelon monograph series.

⁴ J.D. SCHLOEN (ed.), *Exploring the Longue Durée, Essays in Honor of Lawrence E. Stager*, Winona Lake, Ind. 2009. P.S. A list of publications of Professor Lawrence E. Stager appeared just recently in the volume to his honour in *Eretz Israel* 33 (2018), xix-xxii.

been given a second Festschrift in the series *Eretz Israel* no. 33, in a solemn award ceremony from the hands of the 102 years old president of the Israel Exploration Society Joseph Aviram, who was a close friend of Larry. Such an award is only rarely given to a non-Israeli. Such recipients were thus far the great scholars William F. Albright and Frank Moore Cross. Larry was the third in this remarkable row. But the event became a memorial with four tributes and two scientific lectures by Amihai Mazar and Daniel Master, testifying the importance of Larry Stager's achievements in archaeology. He knew about this event and looked very much forward to it, but sadly, did not experience it anymore. Other honours bestowed upon him were the invitation to deliver the Schweich Lectures at the British Academy in 2017 under the title: "Ashkelon: Seaport of the Canaanites and the Philistines." He looked so much forward to see these lectures in print, but again, sadly, he missed this pleasure.

An event which he did not miss, however, was his election as a Corresponding Fellow of the Austrian Academy of Sciences in 2008, which he combined with a visit to Vienna together with his beloved wife Susan. Another honour bestowed upon him was the Percia Schimmel Award for Distinguished Contributions to the Archaeology in Eretz Israel and the Lands of the Bible in June 2017. Recently, just a few months before the end of his lifetime, he gave a memorable lecture about the Philistines and the discovery of their cemetery at Ashkelon at the Austrian Academy in October 2017. We saw Larry again at the ASOR Conference in November 2017 in Boston and did not know that this would be the last time we met him. On the 29th of December 2017 Larry passed away at his home as a consequence of an accident. He leaves behind his wife Susan, his daughter Jennifer, his son David, four grandchildren, and of course his friends all of whom will miss him very much.

Manfred Bietak