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The Institute of ARCHAEOLOGY Siegfried H. Horn Museum



Stordalen Lecture

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Terje Stordalen is Professor of the Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo. He coordinates the project Local Dynamics of Globalization, which during the year 2014-15 was located at the Centre for Advanced Study, at the Norwegian Academy for Science and Letters. On April 3, 2017 Dr. Stordalen presented an informative lecture entitled “Characteristics of Cultural Production in the Iron Age Southern Levant” as part of the Horn Museum Lectureship Series.

Stordalen’s goal was to detail the special conditions for cultural production in the southern Levant. By cultural production, he means the social processes involved in a generation and the circulation of cultural forms, practices, values, and shared understandings. In the social-scientific world, it has an additional meaning, associated with the work of the French social philosopher Pierre Bourdieu, especially his book *The Field of Cultural Production*. Bourdieu developed theories on the distribution of power that is manifest in the production and consumption of culture.

If one counts the entire surface of the Levant, it is relatively small, about 325,000 km²; ca. 1.3 times the size of the state of Michigan. In addition, it was always a patchwork of political and cultural units at the periphery of world empires. So, why is it that these tiny and fragmented lands became the breeding grounds for such resilient and globally-important cultural paradigms? To at least partially answer this question, Dr. Stordalen proposed that there was something in the local social and political conditions that pushed the cultural production in the direction of resilience and durability. First, the Levant is ecologically fragmented, where smaller and larger sites developed on the coastlands, plains, hill country, and valleys. These entities had to adapt to local conditions of soil, rainfall, temperature, wind, pastoral environment, and trade options. Unlike in the Nile or

(cont'd p. 2)

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NEWSLETTER

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Terje Stordalen.

Tigris/Euphrates River Valleys, subsistence technologies and risk management strategies had to be specifically adapted to local conditions.

The Levant sits on a corridor between shifting epicenters, on three continents, and from as early the Neolithic period has been geopolitically strategic, and hence subject to control by early imperial powers. The fact that the area was also rich in natural resources (i.e., cedar wood, copper, salt, wheat, wine, olive oil) made it desirable to control, as reflected by the rivalry, exploitation, and swift political changes in the history of the region over the millennia. The fragmentation of the Levant is mirrored in its political and cultural fragmentation. Regional rivalry rendered the Levantine cultures easy prey for competing empires of the eastern Mediterranean, making their way of life always a precarious matter.

The dominating empires also left their imprint on the Levantine cultures. This came about as a result of cultural conditions that arose, including exposure to different ways of thinking, economic surplus, and cultural blending. The result was a very rich cultural repertoire. For example, elite products entered into a region where they would otherwise not have been invented. Concomitantly however, the error in these common cultural paradigms was that they were not backed by a consistent and strong presence of imperial input. In the case of Jerash, an elite Roman city built east of the Jordan River, it thrived under imperial patronage, but when the Romans left, its development could not be sustained. So while these foreign overlords extracted agricultural and economic surplus from the Levant, they also brought to it a richness of cultural products, which led to a cultural surplus beyond inherent Levantine capabilities, but was beyond the kind of social control and support that would have allowed these products to continue to thrive in their place of origin. This cultural exposure combined with local fragmentation ultimately resulted in challenges to social identity. One occasional strategy for those producing

local identities was to adapt both local and foreign incoming-cultural products, while maintaining a sense of integration into the local cultural ecology, such as Herod's adaptation of Roman architecture to the challenges of Levantine topography.

During the last two decades there has been a shift in the perception of urban-rural connections in segmentary states (of the kind that ruled the Levant during the Iron Age). Particularly salient in these shifts are two important points. First, there was weak central control of rural villages, that were to be perceived as separate polities, and as the basic social units of the time. Second, rural villages in segmentary states of the Iron Ages Levant were non-uniform, some of which developed some level of social complexity. When elite cultural products were moved from urban to village contexts, their cultural and social ecologies changed, usually becoming more simplified. In the view of Pierre Bourdieu, complex societies with a high level of specialization develop social fields around cultural products. Such fields could include literature, education, politics, and are commanded by cultural, social, and physical capital produced in the field. Rules for obtaining capital are internalized as *habitus*, the knowledge of how best to obtain cultural products. In short, the transplantation of elite cultural products from elite cultural epicenters into Iron Age Levantine villages entailed that these products were exposed to a less disciplined audience than had been the case in their context of origin. In Dr. Stordalen's own words, he describes the Levant as "a sub-imperial cultural pressure cooker; small spaces, high cultural density, huge stakes in politics and identity making, and perennial supplies of heat in the form of external pressure and internal rivalry." This created a very dynamic environment, with unpredictable cultural developments.

To illustrate this concept, Dr. Stordalen detailed three specific examples of this phenomenon: seals on Levantine pottery, the art of writing, and the cultural

paradigm of collections of canonical writings. Cylinder seals come from Bronze Age Mesopotamian settings; they were used to verify and seal important documents or containers. But in the southern Levant during the Iron Age, the use of seals was adapted into the indigenous repertoire in a very surprising way; it was used by pottery producers and was associated with dedicated workshops or distribution networks. So the function of the seal changed; it lost its regulatory force and literary informative sense, and became part of a symbolic convention available for communication far beyond the ranks of specialists and state administrators. In the ancient Near East, writing was invented in administrative circles in Egypt and Mesopotamia in the 4th millennium BC; they had very complicated pictorial and syllabic script systems, which kept writing as an esoteric practice that clearly distinguished the elite from the populace. The alphabetic script was invented in the Levant, emerging first in Phoenician culture sometime in the 2nd millennium BC, and was the predominant writing system of diverse cultural groups in the region during the Iron Age. The typical sequence in human development has been that writing and literature emerge as a consequence of the formation of early states; but southern Levantine writing seems to have developed prior to the formation of states, and these texts were not preoccupied with state matters but the business of everyday life. Especially during Iron Age II, there developed regional literatures in variations of Northwest Semitic languages, using Phoenician or Proto-Semitic script (e.g., Hebrew, Philistine, Ammonite, Moabite, Edomite, Nabatean, and Punic literatures).

Writing has a characteristic cultural history in the Levant; it seems practically all important script systems of the ancient Mediterranean world had a presence there. Mesopotamian cuneiform was used for writing in East Semitic language in Ebla; Egyptian hieroglyphic script is known from the Amarna period; Linear alphabetic scripts occur in occasional

inscriptions of the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age. Numerous variants of scripts in the Phoenician Proto-Semitic alphabets occur as well; sources towards the end of the 1st millennium BC hold a plethora of writings in Old Aramaic and Greek scripts; later on, there were Latin and Arabic scripts. All these systems were used for local production of texts, suggesting that the scribes who used these systems were not only multilingual but multiscriptic. Add to this that the average literacy during these early periods was very low, and the picture becomes quite baffling. It is no doubt that Levantine people who put their wit to writing were exercising elite cultural paradigms; but what was the political motivation and interest in developing national texts and literatures in a largely oral society? Before this question can be addressed, one must explore the cultural paradigm of collections of canonical writings, meaning collections of superb writings staged as a charter for collective cultural or social identity. This does not simply concern the collections themselves, but what Dr. Stordalen refers to as “canonical ecology,” meaning to name the complex social configurations of the use of these writings. If a canonical ecology is one specific instance of scriptural usage, then the cultural paradigm behind that is the grammar that makes the use of scriptures in one ecology comparable to that of the use of scripture in another ecology. Dr. Stordalen uses this concept in attempt to track the history of the cultural paradigm of collections of canonical writings.

Because this paradigm was applied in different ways throughout five millennia it was originally Pan-Mediterranean, but it got a definitive reformulation in the Hebrew-speaking, Hellenistic-Roman Levant. Its many later reenactments seem to mirror some of the characteristics of cultural production associated with the Levant in the Iron Age. A number of collections of superb literatures are documented in the 2nd millennium BC, staged as basis for (and the means to regenerate) group identities (e.g., the Egyptian Pyramid Texts, Ugaritic

mythology, and Hittite epics, myths, and hymns). The 1st millennium BC added more collections, including Greek mythology (e.g., Homer), the Hebrew Bible and the Greek Septuagint. From an objective viewpoint, the Greek and Hebrew adaptations of this cultural paradigm have one common characteristic: the addressing of people outside the scribal world who created the canon, in essence becoming ethnic/popular canons. The 1st millennium AD kept the scriptural canons coming, with the Peshitta, the Avesta, the New Testament, the Mishnah, the Talmud, the Quran and others all being added to the mixture.

In spite of this long history of the cultural paradigm of canonical writings, it in no way implies that these successive implementations of the paradigm are all the same; rather, each has particular and individual contents, beliefs, practices, social configurations. What is common is the tendency within them all that goes back to the cultural production of the early Levant: a balancing of elite and popular influences in these scriptural paradigms (or the canonical ecologies). First, the users of these scriptures tend to develop individual ownership and very strong emotional bonds to them. They become the basis for individual and collective identities alike, and the integration of the two; and that renders these scriptures to be very powerful political instruments. Second, to control this political potential, the scriptures are never left for the populace to read for themselves; canonical scriptures are consistently curated by religious experts. Third, because these scriptures consistently address the individual and seek to engage the common religious and moral imagination, there is an inherent instability in the system. In other words, the paradigm keeps opening for reformers to say “I have the right reading; follow me!” In conclusion, putting the elite canon into the hands of common people, in order to induce social, ethnic, or religious cohesion generates a popular following, but also unexpected ways of

tapping into canonical power and dignity. (Dorian Alexander)



Regional ASOR

As a continuation of the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Madaba Plains Project (1967/68-2017/18), several papers were presented at the Midwest Region *Society of the Biblical Literature (SBL)*, the Middle West Branch of the *American Oriental Society (AOS)* and the Regional meeting of the *American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR)* on February 2-4, 2018 at Saint Mary's College, South Bend, Indiana.

Papers presented by these Madaba Plains Project members include: Robert Bates (The Roads at Tall Jalul, Jordan and their Implications for Understanding the Scale of Iron Age Occupation); Jeffrey Hudon (Judah and Jordan? A Royal Jar Handle from Tall Jalul); Øystein LaBianca (Biblical Heshbon Fifty Years Later), and Paul Ray (Methodological Changes at Hesban and the Madaba Plains Project), all of Andrews University. (Paul J. Ray, Jr.)



Jeff Hudon.



RANDOM SURVEY

4,000-Year Old Contract:

Excavated in 1925 at Kaniš, in Turkey, among more than 1000 Old Assyrian-period cuneiform tablets, a recently-published tablet from this collection deals with an ancient problem, also reflected in the Hebrew Bible. Similar to the case of Abraham and Sarah, the husband (Laqipum) in this marriage contract could employ a surrogate mother if his wife (Hatala) failed to conceive within two years following their marriage, after which the female slave would be freed following the birth of the first male baby.

City of Oedipus Found?

Archaeologists have located the first tangible remains of the city Tenea, which is thought to have been first settled by Trojan war captives after the sack of Troy by the Greeks. The city, located in the Peloponnese, until now known mostly from ancient texts, has yielded walls and floors of buildings, ceramics and over 200 coins dating to 4th century BC.

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New Tomb Found:

An unlooted tomb from the Fifth Dynasty (2494-2345 BC) of Egypt (Old Kingdom), has recently been found at the necropolis of Saqqara. The tomb, in which the hieroglyphs still contain their original colors, as well as carved statues inside 18 niches along the walls, has depictions of its owner, a priest named Wahtye, and his family. Now located under a buried ridge, this bi-level tomb measures 10 m long, 3 m wide and 3 m high. So far five shafts, four still sealed, have been found. Wahtye served as priest during the reign of Pharaoh Neferirkare.

Seal Impressions Found:

At least 1,020 unfired-clay seal impressions, representing decayed papyrus documents, have recently been found in an underground crevice carved into the soft bedrock beneath the city of the Maresha, in Israel. The seals date to Hellenistic period, during the height of the city's prosperity. One of the inscriptions, many of which feature portraits of Greek deities, dates to 145 BC. The latest date to ca. 110 BC when the city was destroyed.

Roman Legionary House Found:

A 1st century AD Roman legionary house, near *Symbolon Limen*, on the Crimean peninsula (ancient *Chersonesus Taurica*) has been found. Roman troops, were stationed there after the defeat of Mithridates VI Eupator by Pompey in the 1st century BC.

NEWSLETTER



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