‘To Aleppo gone …’

Essays in honour of Jonathan N. Tubb

edited by

I.L. Finkel, J.A. Fraser and St J. Simpson
Cover: 2014,6012.6. View of a Levantine landscape with a broken car and two figures in western dress changing a tyre; a puzzled male onlooker in local dress and a man on a donkey behind, with beehive houses on either side of the paved road; there is a river and a bridge in the background. Pen and black ink, over pencil, watercolour, heightened with white. Drawn by Donald Maxwell, 1914.
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Preface

Our pleasant and most enjoyable task, the three of us, has been to put together a Festschrift to salute our dear and former colleague, Jonathan Tubb, who retired as Keeper of the Department of the Middle East in April 2022 after serving in that role for over a decade.

Jonathan, who first sprang youthfully up the steps of the British Museum swinging his keys in 1979, was ideally qualified to be Keeper of so broad and complex a department. As all who know him will attest, he combined extensive knowledge of the Levantine collections with many fruitful archaeological seasons in the field, backed up by long experience and understanding of the workings of the Museum itself. His reign in post engendered appreciative loyalty and a spontaneous sense of mischievous good humour under which all his staff flourished.

One particular feather in Jonathan's cap was taking tour groups to various countries of the Middle East, which offered a pleasurable way to travel, plenty of scope to expound on the sites and what had been found in them, while meeting an unexpected array of adventurous individuals. In conversation on one of these trips Jonathan was able to say, with perhaps unique appositeness, 'I never joke about my work, 007'.

Jonathan joined the Museum after training at the Institute of Archaeology, and his keen sense of outreach is aptly illustrated by his Dorling Kindersley book Bible Lands, published in 1991. In 1990/91 he curated a very popular exhibition, Archaeology and the Bible, his accompanying book has been one of the Museum’s best-selling titles, and another entitled Canaanites has passed through 27 editions in three languages. First and foremost, Jonathan was an archaeologist and he always emphasised the importance of archaeological context in the interpretation of the people and material culture of the past, and this is central to the Ancient Levant gallery he developed as the curator in 1998. It was natural for him to use archaeological material as a means of doing this: he was the site photographer at Abu Salabikh in Iraq in 1975 and 1976, deputy director of excavations at Tell Nebi Mend in Syria, and directed his own excavations in the Jordan Valley from 1984 to 1996, firstly at Tiwal esh-Sharqi and then Tell es-Sa’idiyeh, where he hosted the Museum’s Director, David Wilson. He championed archaeology as the Program Chair at ASOR and attended all their meetings, was Chairman of Archaeology Abroad, Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, and President of the Palestine Exploration Fund. He understood the importance of archaeology for its impact within countries too, and as Keeper of the Department of the Middle East from September 2011 until his retirement, he developed this aspect further. From 2013 to 2015, he directed three seasons of excavations inside the fort at Ras al-Hadd in Oman, following a request by the Ministry of Culture in Muscat. He actively engaged with the Museum’s International Training Programme for curators from around the world and, to his great credit, proposing and managing the UK-Government funded Iraq Emergency Heritage Management Training Scheme, which set a new standard for practical training of Iraqi archaeologists through classroom teaching in the Museum and field training on new excavations at Tello/Girsu and Qalatga Darband in southern and northern Iraq respectively.

In producing this volume, we have invited Jonathan’s close friends and colleagues to contribute, with brevity, one burst of prose which might combine acknowledgment of the man and his achievements with some novel idea or discovery that would be certain to interest him. We managed against all odds to bring the work into existence quite unsuspected until we presented him with the cast list and headings as hors d’oeuvre. The papers fall naturally into areas of activity reflecting his career and interests, from the Jordan Valley to the wider Levant, then to Iraq, issues of safeguarding cultural heritage and upholding ethical standards, and archaeological personalia.

Irving Finkel, James Fraser, St John Simpson
J.N. Tubb: a bibliography of works

Books

Articles
Tubb, J.N. 1982. A Crescentic Axehead from Amarna (Syria) and an Examination of Similar Axeheads from the Near East. Iraq 44/1: 1–12.


Reviews, short notes and other publications


"To Aleppo Gone...": Essays in Honour of Jonathan N. Tubb


