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MUSE

The official newsletter of the Humanities Division
Brandeis University

Message from the Head of the Division

Dear Friends of the Humanities,

Welcome to spring with more and more vaccinations on the way! My crocuses, tulips, and daffodils are pushing up sprouts, and warmer weather is making me feel more hopeful.

First of all, congratulations to Professor Wendy Cadge (SOC) for her appointment as the next Dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (starting in July 2021). And news directly from the Humanities: Let's also congratulate Professor Ulka Anjaria (ENG), who just published her new book: *Understanding Bollywood: The Grammar of Hindi Cinema*. Routledge, 2021.

UDR for Religious Studies, Jaiden Aerial Kay Gividen '21 (NEJS major and Religious Studies minor), has interviewed Darlene Brooks Hedstrom (the Myra and Robert Kraft and Jacob Hiatt Associate Professor in Christian Studies in the Departments of NEJS and Classical Studies) for this issue of MUSE. Professor Brooks Hedstrom explains how studying the past can make us face all sorts of issues related to racial inequity, social justice, and diversity, which her work in archaeology and the material culture of past civilizations shows. I hope you will all enjoy what she has to say.

Wish all best wishes,

Ann Olga Koloski-Ostrow (AOK-O)
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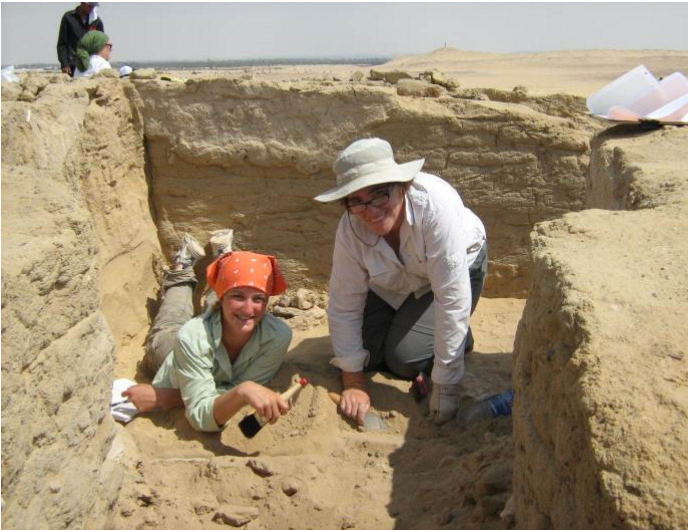
Interview with Darlene Brooks Hedstrom, Myra and Robert Kraft and Jacob Hiatt Associate Professor in Christian Studies

JG: 1. What is the focus of your scholarly work, especially in relation to the departments or programs in which you teach: Department of Classical Studies, Department of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies, and the Program in Religious Studies?

DBH: My scholarship reflects my commitment to reassess and apply new theoretical models to the examination


John the Little's Monastery in Wadi Natrun, Egypt, with the Yale Monastic Archaeology Project: Professor Brooks Hedstrom on right (white hat) with Trinity Johnson on left (red scarf), Development Manager at the Nancy & David Wolf Holocaust and Humanity Center.

of religious life and the lived experience of early Christian communities, both lay and monastic, in a diverse, religious landscape that fits perfectly between Classical Studies (CLAS) and Near Eastern and Judaic Studies (NEJS). I would align myself in the fields of Late Antique Studies and the medieval Roman empire, more traditionally known as the Byzantine empire. I have worked for years in Egypt with my colleagues at the Yale Monastic Archaeology Project—first as Chief Archaeologist for the White Monastery Project in Sohag and for the John the Little Project in Wadi Natrun. Currently I serve as Senior Archaeological Consultant for the John the Little Project and am in the process of finishing an extensive monograph on the results of over fifteen years of archaeological work on a monastic residence from the ninth and tenth centuries CE.

I regard artifacts and material remains, both monumental and portable, as physical texts that provide underexplored areas of information for writing a history of Christian communities within the eastern Mediterranean world. The archaeological material I use comes from years of excavation work in the Middle East, coupled with research in long-neglected archives of earlier excavations. Since my work is paving new pathways in scholarship, I employ archaeological and historical theories that reflect my deep commitment to interdisciplinary work by applying historical ecology, materiality, and spatial theories to investigate the artifacts of the past—both textual and artifactual. My scholarship tells the stories of the Christian Middle East and to demonstrate the *realia* of religious diversity of the late antique world.

My scholarly work is focused on overlooked areas of the past. I am interested in mud bricks, but also the unknown makers of the mud bricks who constructed the walls of monasteries that I excavate. I am interested in how I might add historical texture to our perception of the past by asking questions about how ingredients became meals within a monastery. Such a field of inquiry allows me to work with a wide array of sources: historical accounts of meals; letters written on fragments of pottery asking for salt and fish; excavated remains of kitchens and storage rooms; archaeobotanical remains from oven ash or in ceramic bowls; and carbon and nitrogen isotope levels indicating diet in the buried remains of monks. All of these elements contribute toward building a richer portrait of Christian food practices in Late Antiquity.

JG: 2. How does your research and/or teaching inform issues of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), social justice, or systemic racism, if they do?

DBH: My scholarship also examines, and critiques, inherited knowledge about the past, particularly how archaeologists and scholars in the 19th and 20th century shaped and defined what we know about the past. In particular I look at how Protestant Christian archaeologists and travelers to Egypt devalued Coptic Orthodox Christians' history and diminished the history of Egypt's Christian past. My research highlights prior patterns of systemic racism that were part of the colonial or mandate archaeology that developed in the Middle East. I am interested in who is excluded from larger narratives of the past and why. By examining who is missing from the past we can begin to uncover the prejudicial readings of the past and then rewrite narratives in a more inclusive way.

In my teaching I seek to find a variety of ways to foster diversity, equity, and inclusion by creating components of each course that include readings, discussion topics, and ethical debates about the past. Although most of my work is based in antiquity, I believe that the past is always being deployed to create narratives about the present and that sometimes debates in the past can also resonate with the present. As an example, my NEJS 130 Debating Jesus course is focused upon how ancient Christian communities in the eastern Mediterranean held very different views about Jesus. They asked important questions about whether Jesus was fully divine, fully human, a sage, a good person, a teacher with secret knowledge, and more. Each community grappled with who Jesus was, and until the New Testament canon was fully established, Christians were reading a wide array of materials that offered interesting ideas about Jesus. Archaeology reveals that early Christian communities read a

wide selection of canonical, non-canonical, and sometimes "heretical" works. Trash mounds from villages in Egypt reveal that Christians discarded Christian texts, both canonical and non-canonical and may have held very different ideas of what makes something sacred and worthy of keeping. Such stories provide pathways for students to consider that Christianity has many expressions and may challenge notions that the past was more conservative and less inclusive. This is why, at the end of the course, students write a final project on what they would like an early Christian library to include–they select the works that that they think best reflects the diversity of the early Church as they see it.

Professor Brooks Hedstrom at Kirkham Abbey in Yorkshire, England.

In my Cleopatra course, I begin with the central question of whether Cleopatra was Black. We read scholarship from a wide array of authors, but in particular scholars whose Black identity allows students to learn why the question of Cleopatra's African, Macedonian, Egyptian, and Greek identities matters. The course takes us through the political intrigue of Roman power in Egypt and how the legacy of Cleopatra's Ptolemaic predecessors set up Egypt to be in a vulnerable position. We consider how sexism and gender bias shaped the writing and rewriting of Cleopatra's biography and how Shakespeare's play presented a myth of Cleopatra that was then again recrafted by George Bernard Shaw. Cleopatra sits as a woman whose story is told by men in numerous generations through paintings, operas, and films. The reception of a powerful female king, whose actions impacted three of the most powerful men in Rome, still continues to capture modern audiences. By looking at Cleopatra we not only see the history of her life, but also the modern questions about race, gender, and equality.

JG: 3. Why did you want to come to Brandeis University at this point in your career?

DBH: My desire to join the Brandeis community stems in large part from my training in graduate school with Dr. Edwin Yamauchi, who graduated from Brandeis in 1963 with a PhD in Mediterranean Studies. I studied with Yamauchi at Miami University (Ohio) in a history program and was trained to teach courses from the Ancient Near East to Late Antiquity. He talked often of his Brandeis professor, the famous Dr. Cyrus Gordon, and why we needed to know a lot about the ancient world. Yamauchi was passionate about the details of each civilization, but also the ability to think comparatively about the ancient world. While colleagues at other schools dived deep into one civilization or time period, Yamauchi brought Brandeis' Mediterranean world view to his doctoral students. Due to Ed's teachings, I developed a wide array of interests in the past from dolphins in Etruscans tombs, to pirates in the Bronze age, to Christianity under the first caliphates, to the Gospel of Mary's gender ascension passages, and the value of a monk's cell to train the mind. In many ways the Brandeis training I received allowed me to be comfortable with the margins and boundaries of fields in ways that other scholars might not be.

The Kraft-Hiatt Chair in Christian Studies is a position in which I am proud to be situated in both Classical Studies and in Near Eastern and Judaic Studies. I am also a member of the Religious Studies program where I can contribute to the study of religious practices, traditions, and materiality. At Brandeis I will be able to return to my roots and help train a new generation of students with new ideas and theories about how to study the past. I am looking forward to teaching courses such as *Denial and Desires: Gender and Sexuality in the Early Church* and the Medieval Roman empire, in which we will study Constantinople, the legacy of its Roman identity, and why it spanned for 1000 years. I am looking forward to developing projects with undergraduate and graduate students on the history of Christianity in the Middle East and seeing the broader connections between the Hebrew Bible, the Qur'an, and regional religious traditions. A new course I will develop is entitled *Scholars and Thieves: Archaeology, Manuscripts, and Museums*. In this course students will use reading strategies to consider how collecting policies, the antiquities trade, and the desire for ancient manuscripts fueled archaeological projects.

JG: 4. If you give a talk to the Brandeis community, what would you tell us about the importance of archaeology and the benefits of studying it within the framework of a liberal arts education?

DBH: Archaeology has the power to tell stories of those forgotten in the grand narratives of the past and the

ability to tell the stories of unknown people and the spaces in which they lived. Archaeology can also tell alternative histories, ones that were intended to be obscured or ones that were simply overlooked.

I believe archaeology can offer us a truer picture of the experiences of enslaved persons living in America and challenge long held stories about the enslaved and their enslavers. The excavation of the homes of enslaved individuals at Popular Forest, for example, one of Thomas Jefferson's plantations, and at Montpelier, an estate owned by James Madison, offers vital evidence for studying the individuals who lived at these two properties and what their actual lives looked like. For instance, at Poplar Forest we find evidence for how enslaved persons reused and repaired broken cookery that was once used in the main house. We can also examine the wasters from stone pipe making to locate the home of a pipe maker. His style of pipes was more commonly used among the enslaved than enslaver populations. Additionally, finding the post holes of the timber framed houses with sunken storage pits provides site managers with the evidence needed to rebuild the houses so that the properties reflect the actual lived experience of everyone at Poplar Forest and Montpelier and not just a grand estate of a white enslaver with little trace of the living quarters of enslaved Blacks. Archaeology has the power to expose the false history that would seek to erase the memories of enslaved persons. Within a liberal arts setting, such a discussion will help us explore the role of plantations as heritage sites in the history of white America and the growing recognition that a more inclusive history is necessary, such as the Whitney Plantation, which is dedicated solely to telling the story of slavery and offering a memorial for all the women, men, and children enslaved. Archaeology offers an opportunity for healing by providing the truth of lived experiences of those in the past.

Reaching further back in history, I enjoy talking about how archaeology can help build a more nuanced view of religion and religious practices. For example, in my own field of monastic history, monks, both male and female, are presented in written sources as saints whose daily lives offered numerous examples of holy and perfect living. The hagiographies, or sacred biographies, recount how unique each monk was, and their actions serve to inspire other Christians. But archaeology at various monasteries provides a much richer window into homosocial communities. We can see that monks divided their houses into specific areas for work, wrote curses on the walls of their houses if anyone stole any belongings, and we can learn that they ate more foods than what was reported about them in the literary texts. Instead of just describing and cataloguing finds, archaeologists employ a wide range of theoretical models to help interpret material from institutional archaeology to landscape archaeology to postcolonial archaeology. It is in looking at the mundane and the hidden elements of the past that we find the ability to weave a richer tapestry of the past.

A Celebration of the Life of Andreas Teuber
Friday, March 26, from 1-2 pm

Please come to help us all memorialize our dear Professor Andreas Teuber this Friday, March 26, 1-2pm. Details (and ZOOM link) are below.

Join from PC, Mac, Linux, iOS or Android:
https://brandeis.zoom.us/j/92767008726?pwd=YXNRa2MwWVppVzJwS3RxejA0cXVFZz09
Password: 604434

For more information, please visit the Department of Philosophy website.
Questions? Email philosophia@brandeis.edu.