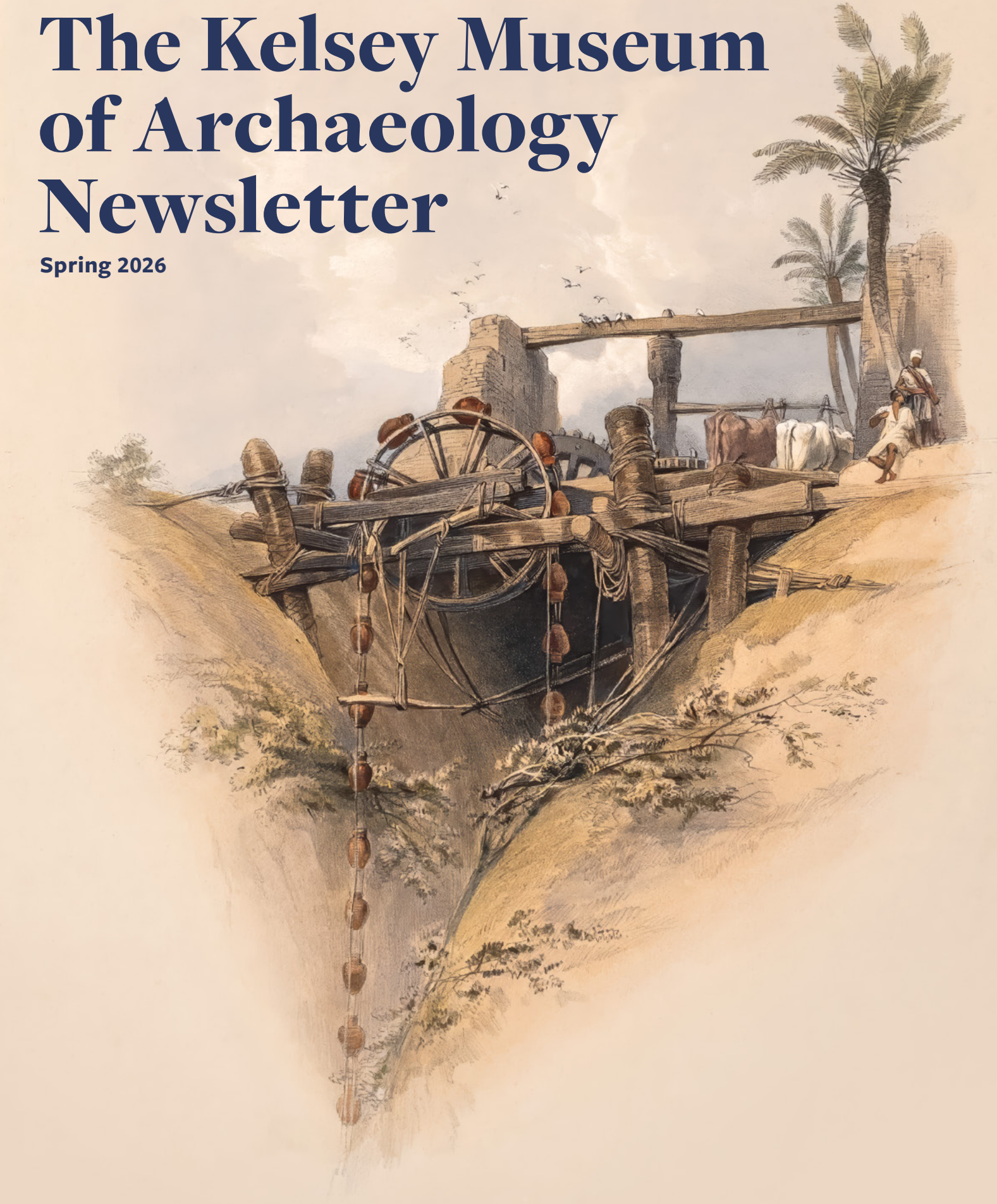
The Kelsey Museum of Archaeology Newsletter

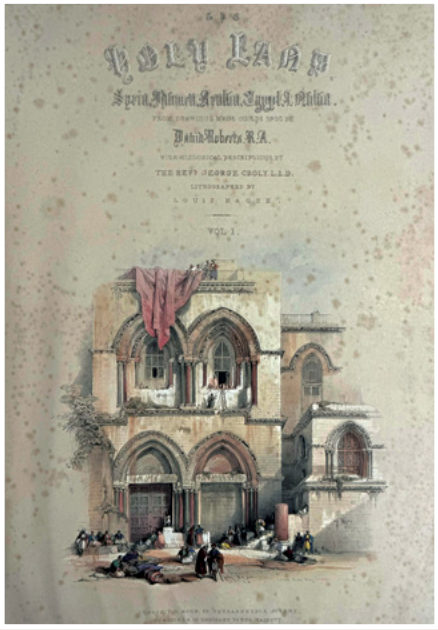
Spring 2026



Lithographed Landscapes: The Kelsey's New David Roberts Volumes

On the Cover

A tinted lithograph depicting a waterwheel that was used to irrigate Nubia. This page is one of almost 250 such illustrations found in David Roberts' *The Holy Land, Syria, Idumea, Arabia, Egypt, and Nubia*. Late last year, thanks to a bequest, the Kelsey Museum received six volumes bound in six folios containing these lithographs, which were based on paintings done by Roberts—regarded as one of the "greatest of the Holy Land artists in the nineteenth century and perhaps of all time." See more on **page 6**.



Right: The copyright page of *The Holy Land, Syria, Idumea, Arabia, Egypt, and Nubia* details how the drawings were made "on the spot" by David Roberts, with historical descriptions by the Reverend George Croly and lithographs by Louis Haghe.

Celebrating a Century: Share Your Kelsey Story!

The Kelsey Museum will celebrate a huge milestone in 2028—our 100th anniversary! Since 1928, countless students, scholars, staff, docents, and community members have come through our doors. As we prepare for a centennial year full of programming and parties, we want to hear from you about the influence the Kelsey Museum has had in your life. Whether you explored our galleries as a student, taught a class here, led tours as a docent, worked with our collections, or visited with family and friends, your experiences are part of the Kelsey's legacy. Help us honor 100 years of impact by reflecting on how the museum has shaped your journey. Send your story today at **myumi.ch/8qZM2**.

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INFORMATION

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GALLERY HOURS

The Kelsey Museum galleries are open to all visitors Tuesday–Friday 10:00 AM–4:00 PM and Saturday–Sunday 11:00 AM–4:00 PM. We are open until 7:30 PM the third Thursday of each month, and we offer both in-person tours and a variety of virtual programs throughout the year.

From the Director

Dear Friends,

July 1, 2026, marks the official end to my six-year tenure as director of the Kelsey Museum. I came aboard as director of the Kelsey in 2020, when terms like "social distancing," "mask mandate," and "reopening plans" had become all too familiar.

"I have never worked in the Kelsey before," I wrote in my first letter in the fall of 2020, "and I am looking forward to the new challenge."

As anticipated, my time leading the Kelsey Museum has not been without challenges. But it has also been full of incredible, rewarding work. Looking back, I could not be prouder of all that the Kelsey has done and accomplished over the past six years.

Throughout my directorship, creating a gallery focused on the art and artifacts of the Byzantine and Islamic worlds was an ongoing commitment. I am delighted to be able to see the fruits of this project in the form of the near-finished gallery, scheduled to open this summer. Throughout the planning and development processes, it has become clear that this is more than just a new gallery. It also expands on the chronological scope of the museum, experiments with new methodologies, and marks an inflection point in our mission, in terms of what stories we tell and how we tell them.

There are so many other ways the museum has evolved in these past years beyond the physical. Perhaps most notably, a generational change in staffing presented the opportunity to form a new museum culture ripe with fresh blood and fresh eyes.

Something that hasn't quite changed over the last half decade is the various financial pinches felt by the arts, humanities, social sciences, and museums. From the earliest days of the COVID pandemic to the looming uncertainty around state and federal funding today to war and unrest across regions with direct connections to the Kelsey, it can often feel like an uphill battle to make a case for archaeology, ancient history, and education—and why it all matters.

This is one of the reasons that the funding we have received from Klinsky is so impactful. Having spent most of my archaeological life in Italy, it's been exhilarating to think, learn, and talk about sites in Sudan, Tunisia, and Mongolia—and even get to visit these places, in some cases. More than that, it's been immensely gratifying to see researchers from across campus come together to pool ideas and resources for the greater good of archaeology at the University of Michigan and to see how these fascinating projects can leave a real footprint on K–12 education and public outreach.

There's certainly still more to do, and everyone at the Kelsey Museum—including my not-yet-designated successor—surely has big goals about where to go next. But I am honored to have contributed to this chapter of Kelsey history and leave the museum in a better place. It has been a fun ride!

Nic Terrenato, Director and Curator for the Archaeology of the Italian Peninsula

Coming Soon: Ancient Abstractions

The lifelike naturalistic bodies of Greek and Roman sculpture have been a source of wonder since the Renaissance. Indeed, the Italian Renaissance artist Vasari identified the ancient world as the time "when sculpture rose to its greatest height." But close likenesses of the natural world are not the only visual products of the ancient past.

Curated by Nicola Barham, *Ancient Abstractions: Roman Visual Trends Beyond Naturalism* traces alternative artistic effects of the ancient Roman world that today would be considered examples of abstraction. The exhibition will focus on monuments and motifs that have long been overlooked in our accounts of ancient art. Oversize arrangements of interlocking shapes pulsate in bold block colors from tombs, temples, and homes; stylized animals flicker into view, only to collapse once more into geometric arrangements; and artists adopt experimental shorthands for the depiction of space across media. Anticipating recent interests in color and form, the visual trends of antiquity emerge as much more varied than has long been told.

"The vibrant non-figural effects that commonly appear in Roman artworks have been effectively cut out of the stories we construct about the ancient world," Nicola explained. "This exhibition corrects that oversight, recentering visual dynamics of bold color and shape in the galleries of the Kelsey Museum."

Ancient Abstractions will be on view from October 1, 2026, through February 28, 2027. Featuring a sarcophagus adorned with waving lines, millefiori glass shot through with concentric rings of almost impossibly bright colors, and geometric mosaic that once decorated ancient villas, this exhibition will unite objects from the Kelsey Museum and other notable US collections, including the University of Rochester's Memorial Art Gallery and the University of Oklahoma.

Below: Strigilated sarcophagus from the Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester, R. T. Miller Fund (1943.34).

This term, I am the graduate student research assistant (GSRA) for the upcoming *Ancient Abstractions* exhibition. My research interests lie in the visual culture of the Hellenistic and Roman Middle East. My dissertation focuses on the artistic representation of the Syrian Goddess/Atargatis in ancient Syria and how her images developed through time and across regions.

As a GSRA, I am responsible for collating object information for gallery labels and conducting research to build the bibliography for the exhibition's catalog. Throughout this process, I have become more familiar with the Kelsey Museum's collection. It is a fantastic experience to work alongside the curator and other museum staff to learn about different aspects of planning an exhibition. These experiences are incredibly valuable to prepare me for a future career as a researcher and educator in a museum setting.

As an art historian myself, working on *Ancient Abstractions* has inspired me to look at the abstract and ornamental motifs in ancient art from a new perspective. While traditional training in classical art history has taught us to value figurative art as key to understanding ancient cultures, abstract patterns and motifs likely dominated the visual landscape of antiquity. Abstraction can almost be seen as a universal visual language, but it is simultaneously strange and familiar. I hope this exhibition will inspire more people to look at ancient art afresh.

—*Wenxuan (Cecilia) Huang, IPAMAA*

Conservator Suzanne Davis removing the tile from the plywood and cardboard backing. Photo: Laurel Fricker.

Above: Front and side views of the tile before conservation treatment. The latter shows the cardboard, putty, and plywood backing. Photos: Laurel Fricker.

Conservation Treatment of a Tricky Tile

When the Conservation Department first examined KM 1981.4.119, a beautiful tile slated for display in the Kelsey's new Byzantine and Islamic gallery, it was clear that it had been previously restored. There was modern paint on the surface, and its multiple fragments had been glued together with a yellow-brown adhesive and then mounted to a thick sheet of plywood. But conservation intern Laurel Fricker noticed an especially unusual restoration material when she was photographing the tile: cardboard. In places, cardboard had been wedged between the plywood and the tile, probably to help level the object as it was adhered to the plywood.

Both cardboard and plywood are acidic and can damage archaeological material, and the yellow-brown adhesive and paint obscured the tile's original surface in places. I wanted to remove the tile from the plywood backing, disassemble and clean it, and readhere it with a modern, reversible conservation adhesive before putting it on view in the new gallery. Sounds reasonable, right?

Well, maybe. In theory, this is a standard conservation treatment. In real life, the tile was given to the museum in the 1980s as part of a gift, we have no records about its past treatment, and the cardboard Laurel had spotted was the first, small sign of an extensive and very odd prior restoration campaign. My investigation revealed that the tile was joined to the plywood (and the cardboard) with an unknown, pigmented putty that is now insoluble in every solvent known to humankind. In places, the tile was also adhered to the board(s) with epoxy—something we determined from the glue's characteristic luminescence under ultraviolet light—and the epoxy is also insoluble. Luckily, the restorer had applied a skim coat of water-soluble plaster to the back and sides of the tile before sticking it to the cardboard and plywood. By wetting the interface between the mount and tile and applying careful pressure, I was able to detach it, leaving behind a big, yucky mess of putty, cardboard, and wood.

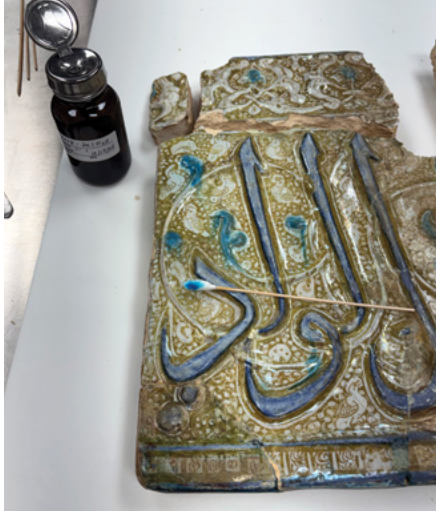
At this point, I had hoped things would become easier, but those hopes were soon dashed. The front of the tile boasted a myriad of coatings—ranging from our old friend epoxy to dirt to bright blue paint—over its entire surface. The adhesives joining the tile fragments also vary, from water-soluble animal glue to epoxy (again!). Some of the in-fills are easily water-soluble, some are not, and some are reinforced with metal wire drilled into the tile. Removing

the epoxy coatings and adhesives will be especially challenging. This is an important step, because epoxy is too strong for most ancient and historic materials and can damage them, but it is notoriously difficult to solubilize without the use of carcinogenic solvents—solvents the University of Michigan prohibits on campus.

We are using a variety of investigative approaches and strategies for disassembling and cleaning the tile, and without any documentation to guide us, it's been tricky to navigate the complex treatment. Projects like this really make the case for the importance of carefully documenting all conservation treatments!

On the plus side, the cleaned sections of the tile look great. The coatings on the surface had completely obscured the metallic luster of the tile's original glaze, which is now shining brightly again in the areas that have been cleaned. Stay tuned for further updates about this tricky tile treatment!

—Suzanne L. Davis, Senior Associate Curator and Head of Conservation



The tile during cleaning. This bright blue modern paint was all over the surface! Photo: Suzanne Davis.

Of Kings, Camels, and Palm Trees: The Sealings from Seleucia

It's not every day that you find Seleucid artifacts in a museum, even if the Seleucid Empire was the largest kingdom during the Hellenistic period. When a colleague from Urbana told me about the hundreds of sealings that lay deep in the basement of the Kelsey (right across the street from my office!), I marveled. Not much later, with the support of Professor Anna Bonnell Freidin and the help of the museum staff—particularly Shannon Ness and Michelle Fontenot—I was able to access the collection and began developing a research project.

The sealings were excavated by U-M at Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, Iraq, over a century ago. These little pieces of clay wrapped documents and letters that people in Seleucia wrote when buying or selling goods, especially salt. Once the document was ready, a person could use their signet ring to literally "seal" the whole affair.

Not many people have studied the Seleucia seals at the Kelsey since their excavation. They are small, very fragile, and hard to handle, and they display diverse iconographic motifs—not always of the best quality. In sum, not very attractive materials.

But behind their humble appearance lies a treasure, for these sealings offer unique insight into the everyday life of the inhabitants of one of the largest cities in the Hellenistic world. Much has been said about kings and elites, while the broader population has often been neglected by scholarship. The sealings can help with this.

Now, the collection is somewhat chaotic. I've spent the last few months reviewing the only catalog we have of the sealings, filling some gaps and noticing things that hadn't been observed until now. Sharon Herbert's previous work on these materials has been invaluable to me, and I couldn't have even started without her expertise.

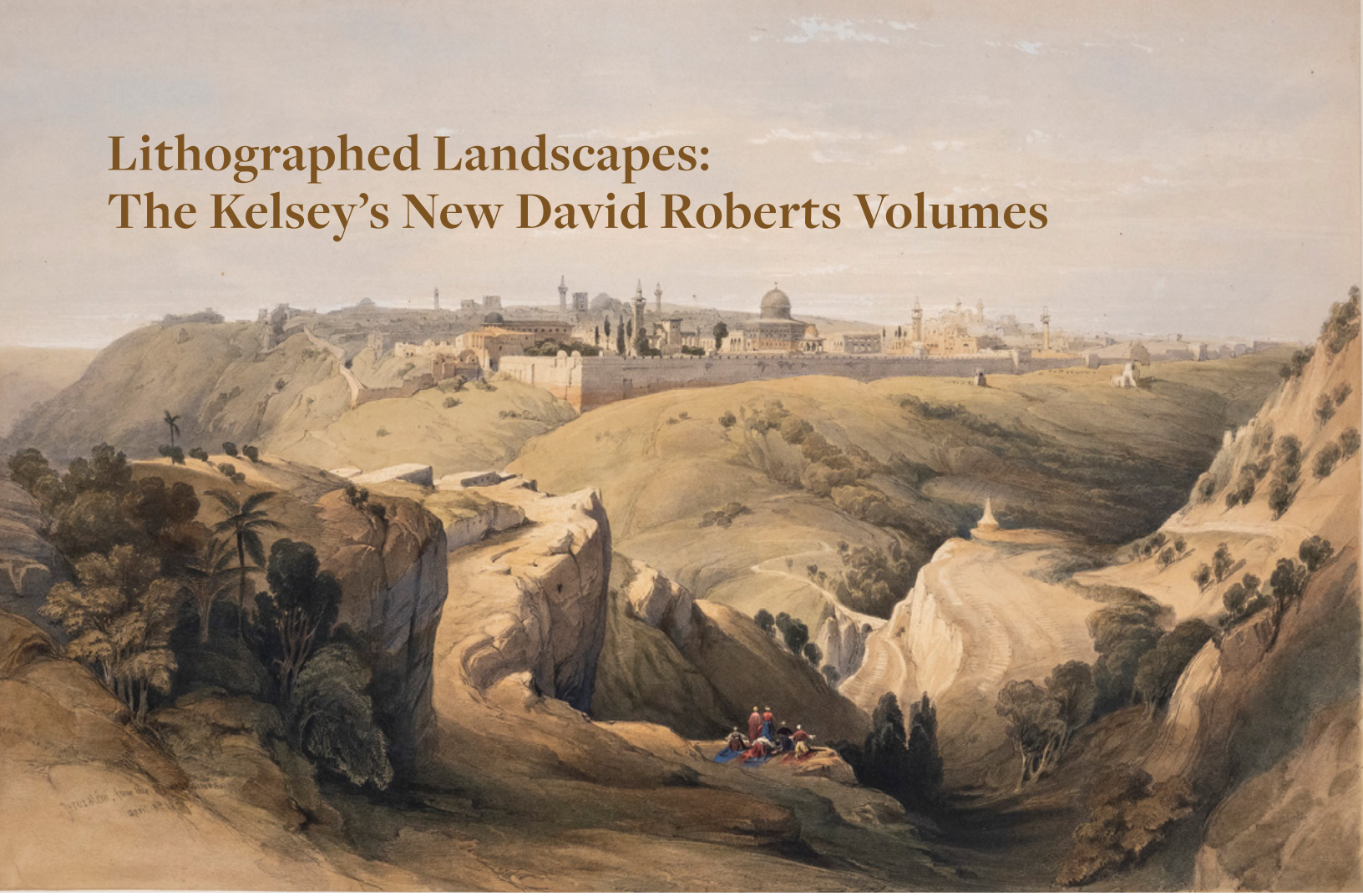
However, there is still a lot to do. I hope that my work helps bring this fascinating collection to the spotlight so that people can learn about the little camels, kings, gods, and monsters that populate the surface of the sealings and that once populated the imagination of Seleucia's inhabitants.

—Ezequiel Martin Parra, Interdepartmental Program in Ancient History

Above: Ezequiel working in the registry.

Right: Some of the Seleucid sealings.

Lithographed Landscapes: The Kelsey's New David Roberts Volumes



This past fall, the Kelsey Museum received a truly monumental gift—monumental both for its large size and for the sites it depicts. Bequeathed from the estate of Eugene and Emily Grant under former director Sharon Herbert, the acquisition consists of six bound portfolios from *The Holy Land, Syria, Idumea, Arabia, Egypt, and Nubi*a, one of the great works of Scottish painter David Roberts. The set, first published in the 1840s, presents nearly 250 tinted lithographs (by Louis Haghe) that trace Roberts' 11-month journey through North Africa and the Middle East. The travelogue captures temples, landscapes, cities, and people with a dramatic eye and skilled hand, offering striking glimpses of ancient sites and modern scenes, all while documenting a key moment in the evolution of Western interest in the Middle East. The volumes also arrive at a fortuitous moment: as the Kelsey completes its new permanent gallery centered on the Byzantine and Islamic worlds, Roberts' images provide a rich backdrop—visitors can expect to see select views in the exhibition.

Top: Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives. From Roberts, *Holy Land*, vol. 1, pl. 17.

Right: Persian Water-Wheel, used for irrigating Nubia. From Roberts, *Egypt & Nubia*, vol. 2, p. 9. Photos: Sally Bjork.

Bequests can have a real impact on the Kelsey Museum's collections and the stories we are able to tell. To learn more about how you can create a meaningful legacy at the Kelsey through a bequest, contact Associate Director Jennifer Kirker at **jkirker@umich.edu**.

Behind the Scenes in Kelsey Education: Lesson Plans, Object Handling, and Provenance

My name is Abigail Staub, and I'm a fifth-year doctoral candidate in IPAMAA. I specialize in Roman amulets, apotropaia, and personal ritual interventions, and I am particularly interested in their cognitive and psychological role in mitigating perceived risk. My dissertation investigates remnants of ritual around the mouth of the bread oven in Roman imperial bakeries, considering the vernacular, localized, and creative interventions visible in object assemblages and architectural remains. In my dissertation, I contextualize the remains in the multisensorial context of the bakery, taking into consideration social and occupational realities—for instance, the impacts of thermal stress and flour inhalation on the body and the compounding ramifications of physical strain and enslaved status on an individual's day-to-day activity.

This term, I am a Rackham doctoral intern in the Kelsey Museum's Education Department. Here, I have been working alongside Shannon Ness, university programs manager, to develop lesson plans and programming for a diverse array of undergraduate classes. I've particularly enjoyed a provenance module we offer as an option for undergraduate classes, given my own background in provenance research. The students love getting to work with real documents as provenance detectives themselves. It's also been a delight to dig through the database and select objects related to courses' unique interests for their object-handling sessions. I learn so much about the Kelsey's collections while researching objects, and it's especially fun when the object has never been pulled for a course before and we're able to expand our repertoire for the future.

In addition, I have been developing a number of Education Department resources, including a glossary, a Q&A, and an introductory guide to "magic" for docent training, as well as an introductory guide to baking (as a means to contextualize the Kelsey's basalt grain mill—an underutilized object in university and K–12 tours). I have also been working to strengthen Kelsey's database entries for objects we have pulled for object handling this semester by adding information from our research into the newly added "Education" subsection. I hope that by doing this, future scholars will be able to learn more from some of our understudied objects!

Working in the Education Department has helped me gain experience and confidence in my creative thinking and pedagogy skill sets. I've worked across numerous museum departments in the last decade, but I always find myself drawn back to education. I hope to work in a museum setting upon the completion of my dissertation.

—Abigail Staub, IPAMAA

Above: Abigail Staub working with a class at the Kelsey Museum.

Right: Objects from the Kelsey Museum related to Abigail's research on apotropaia.

On View: Learning Through Play

Curator Heidi Hilliker stands next to her Kelsey in Focus case, featuring miniature and full-size weaving and spinning tools alongside modern toys.

How did children learn crafts in Roman Egypt? This question forms the basis of "Learning Through Play: Childhood and Textile Craft in Roman Egypt," a Kelsey in Focus case curated by PhD candidate Heidi Hilliker (Middle East Studies).

At Karanis, an agricultural village in Egypt's Fayum region, learning may have begun through experimentation and playful imitation. Excavated by the University of Michigan in the early 20th century, the site preserves rich evidence for daily life, including how people worked, learned, and produced goods. Tools, textiles, and texts show that textile production was a common part of village life. Written sources indicate that some children learned through formal apprenticeships, while objects from domestic contexts point to informal learning at home.

The two miniature tools featured in this exhibit—a toy weaving comb and a small whorl-weighted spindle—closely resemble adult equipment. Like children today who play with toy versions of everyday objects, ancient children likely learned skills through thematic play, preparing them for later participation in Karanis's textile-producing community.

"Learning Through Play" is on view now through May 25—you can find it on the first floor of the Kelsey Museum (near the display of ancient glass), or check it out online here: **myumi.ch/61Azn**.

Refining Reality: Creating Lifelike 3D Models

The Kelsey Museum's digital assets team has been hard at work refining and expanding our methods for creating 3D models of artifacts.

The basic method we use is called "structure-from-motion photogrammetry." At its core, the method needs only a camera, a computer, and specialized software. We start by taking lots of overlapping photos around all sides of the subject. We next feed those images into software that identifies matching points among photos, then uses the differences in distance and position of points to reconstruct the 3D shape of the subject—similar to how many animals can use two eyes to detect depth. This is our preferred 3D capture technology because it produces photorealistic, colorized models and is relatively affordable, flexible, and mobile. As a proud sponsor of excavations and other fieldwork, the Kelsey Museum aimed to focus on mastering and teaching methods that can be taken into the field by multiple projects at the same time and that U-M graduates can replicate more easily at other institutions as they continue their careers.

At the beginning of the Kelsey Museum's 3D scanning project, the team focused on capturing the basic geometry of objects. But we have worked to push our capabilities further over the last year and a half. Our goal now is to produce 3D models that have important additional features: no shadows or reflected highlights, which allows us to add and control virtual lighting and apply realistic surface treatments; accurate color, which allows researchers to evaluate material use and pigmentation; precise scaling, which allows us to take measurements from objects and have digital versions appear at life size; in-the-round

geometry, which allows viewers to see all sides of an object; and accurate representations of material qualities, such as shininess and transparency—an important aspect of experiencing artifacts and understanding their use.

Taken together, these features ensure that virtual and 3D-printed objects appear as close as possible to reality. To accomplish these goals, we have adopted an array of new approaches and tools, such as ring lights and flashes, color calibration targets, scale bars, automated turntables, and careful image editing. These new capabilities have enabled us not only to publish astonishingly lifelike models on the web (see **sketchfab.com/kelseymuseum**) but also to bring the ancient world to life in exciting new ways.

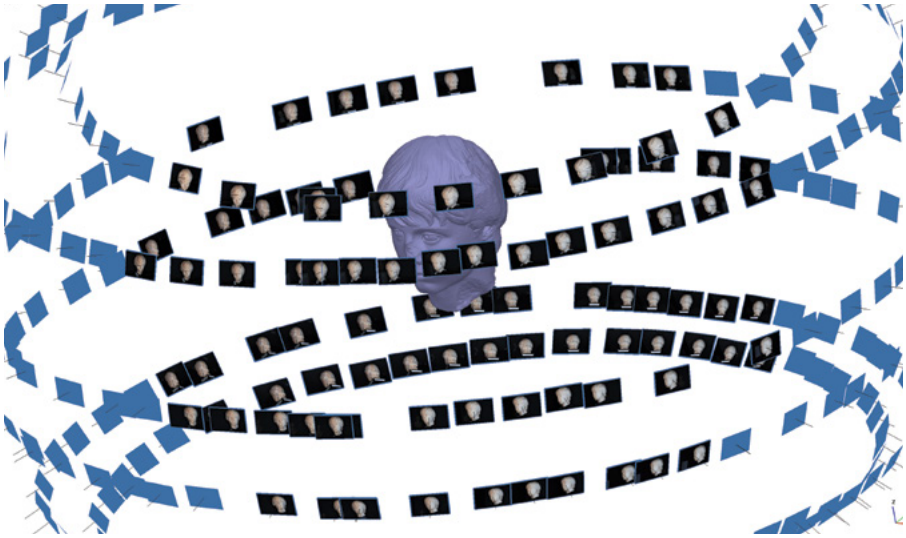
For example, for IPAMAA PhD student Laurel Fricker's recent Kelsey in Focus case on color at Karanis, we collaborated with the Kelsey's graphic designer, Eric Campbell, to produce a video that integrated 3D animation with multispectral imagery to enhance Laurel's storytelling about what we can learn from the scientific imaging techniques she had applied. The video (accessible at **myumi.ch/D8511**) played on a monitor next to the case and helped us explain what we can learn from multispectral imaging and connect these ideas to the objects in the case next to it. We also published these 3D models on the website that accompanies the exhibition, so you can explore them at home (**myumi.ch/qZ2pE**).

In addition, we are able to create "augmented reality" experiences that blend virtual models with the real world. To see this in action with Kelsey object KM 1977.3.2, scan the QR code to the right with your phone, then point your phone at a clear spot on a desk, table, or other flat horizontal surface near you. Once the model of our pyxis appears, you can move your phone around to view it from all angles and even see inside—which you can't currently do with how this object is displayed in the museum.

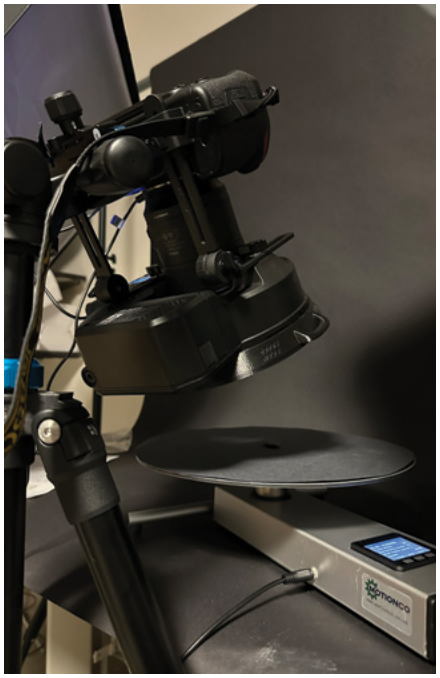
As always, many thanks to the U-M undergraduate and graduate students who have worked on this project (Hannah Edwards, Thea Bilich, Philippe Kame, Lauren Alberti, and Anton Strachan), helping us adopt these techniques and produce some incredible models!

—Chris Motz,
Manager of Digital Assets

SCAN ME



Above: 3D modeling in process; in this screenshot, you can see the photographs taken from various angles around the head of Polydeukion.



Right: The automatic turntable and camera setup the digital team uses to capture images.

Above: Laurel Fricker working on KM 80072 in the Conservation Lab.

Left: Details of treatment for the glazed stucco. In the upper image, the white putty Laurel applied is visible; in the bottom photo, the adhesive has been painted over.

Adventures in B-72: Conserving a Stucco Fragment

I am a PhD candidate in IPAMAA writing my dissertation on children and childhood in ancient Greek houses, but I got into archaeology because I am fascinated by "things." My internship with the Conservation Department this semester has only increased this passion.

I first started working with the conservation team several years ago, conducting research on pigments and dyes on objects within the Kelsey Museum's collection. However, I wanted to expand my skills and gain experience performing conservation work and treating objects. I was able to create an opportunity to do so thanks to the Student-Identified Rackham Doctoral Internship program.

Since my internship in the Conservation Department started in January, I have become well versed in the different types of deterioration that are possible for stone, glass, and ceramic objects and the kinds of conservation approaches recommended for each material. My favorite parts of the internship are that I have been able to conserve objects intended for display in future exhibitions and practice different conservation techniques.

Recently, I have been working on KM 80072, a fragment of a turquoise and black decorative glazed stucco wall. A few issues needed to be addressed to stabilize the object: adhesive from a previous conservation treatment was starting to fail, and there were visible cracks and voids in the stucco and across the decorative glazed surface. To fix these problems, I mixed an adhesive of Paraloid B-72, which is an easily reversible acrylic copolymer, and injected the solution into the cracks.

In one area, part of the decorative glaze was being undercut and needed a different kind of remedy. This required me to thicken my glue by bulking it with tiny glass bubbles to create a putty that I could place beneath the unstable area to support the glaze above. Once the bulked fill putty was in place, its bright white color was noticeable. I then practiced my color-matching skills, mixing acrylic paints and applying them to the fill.

If you know where to look, my work is visible. My color matching is not perfect, and the B-72 adhesive slightly darkens the color of the stucco, but these are not bad things. Conservation treatments like this one are reversible, but that is only possible if you can tell where the object has been treated!

—Laurel Fricker, IPAMAA

Left: Hope Zainea working in the lab.

Above: Details of treatment for KM 26135 showing the amulet before (left) and after (right) the removal of the fabric adhered to its back.

A Semester in the Conservation Lab

I am a third-year undergraduate at the U-M, majoring in psychology and anthropology, with a concentration in archaeology, and minoring in museum studies. My research interests include archaeological conservation methods and the ethics of museum curation, and my archaeological fieldwork has focused on North American sites, with an emphasis on transparency and community outreach. These experiences fostered my interest in the ethics and social responsibility of archaeological work, both in the field and in museums.

This semester, I am the undergraduate intern in the Conservation Department, fulfilling the internship requirement for my minor in museum studies. I was drawn to conservation work because of my interest in repatriation processes, following a conversation with a conservator about removing pesticides from NAGPRA-eligible objects—making them safe to handle and return to their tribes of origin. I was inspired to learn about the unique and necessary role that conservators hold within museums, which led to my pursuit of a position in the Kelsey lab.

Here, I work with the Kelsey's conservators, Suzanne Davis and Carrie Roberts, learning about the broad spectrum of work that falls under conservation. I also assist them with a variety of projects, including object photography, condition reports, and surveys.

One of my ongoing projects is the removal of Egyptian artifacts from display boards. As part of a previous exhibition held many years ago at U-M's Museum of Anthropological Archaeology, objects such as a stone amulet, ceramic sherds, and necklace beads were adhered directly onto informational display boards, where they have remained for decades. To begin the project, I learned how to photograph objects and then edit and label the images.

The first object to be treated was a stone amulet with fabric backing adhered to it (KM 26135). We tested the efficacy of different solvents as the first step of treatment, ultimately determining that acetone was most effective. With a treatment plan in place, I used a poultice (a bundle of cotton soaked in acetone solvent) to soften the glued-on fabric, which popped off once the poultice was removed. All that was left to do was to clean up any remaining glue with cotton swabs, photograph the post-treatment amulet, and update the database with the images and record of the treatment. This rewarding project has taught me new technical skills and allowed me to observe the transformations of objects through treatment.

Carrying out physical work with collections and observing the conservators has informed my research interests, as it opened up knowledge to a new sector of archaeological work. My time in the lab has afforded me direct and hands-on experience performing conservation work on archaeological materials, as well as a host of technical skills that integrate knowledge of chemistry and archaeology. I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to work at the Kelsey and to be mentored by skilled conservators. My time here has expanded my knowledge base and presented an educational experience that could only be achieved at an institution of its caliber.

—Hope Zainea, Conservation Intern

Seals, Scripts, and Stories: Katherine Burge on the Kelsey's Next Gallery

For years, the Kelsey Museum has been working on creating a permanent gallery that poses an exciting interpretive challenge: how to make the vast history of the Middle East and North Africa—across a period of roughly 1,600 years—legible, meaningful, and engaging to visitors within a single space. Opening in the summer of 2026, this gallery will bring together objects that speak to multiculturalism of the Byzantine and Islamic worlds, uniting objects from the Kelsey's collection, loans from partners across campus, and a rotating community case that presents historical viewpoints alongside modern voices.

At the center of this tremendous effort is **Katherine Burge**, a postdoctoral fellow with appointments at the Kelsey and the History of Art Department, who has served as lead curator of the new Byzantine and Islamic gallery for almost two years. An archaeologist focused on Bronze and Iron Age Mesopotamia, Katherine connects texts, images, and material culture through her work. She brings an interdisciplinary, field-trained approach to gallery-making—one focused on how people recorded and shared information, structured societies, and moved through built environments.

In this interview, Katherine traces her path from ancient languages to excavation, reflects on the importance of university museums like the Kelsey, and offers a preview of the ideas shaping the soon-to-open gallery.

KMA: How and when did you first become interested in archaeology?

KB: I first became interested in archaeology through ancient languages. I took Latin in high school and loved the process of deciphering texts; it felt a bit like code breaking. In college, I continued studying Biblical Hebrew, Ugaritic, Aramaic, Hittite, and Akkadian and eventually majored in ancient Near Eastern studies. I later pursued a master's degree in Assyriology in Paris, where I spent long hours translating ancient texts in very quiet libraries.

While I was there, I had the opportunity to participate in an archaeological excavation in Iraqi Kurdistan, and the experience was transformative. I discovered that travel and fieldwork were far more compelling than solitary study in the library. More importantly, archaeology allowed me to connect directly with the landscapes and material worlds of the people whose texts I had been studying.

KMA: Why did you choose to specialize in Bronze and Iron Age Mesopotamia?

KB: I was especially drawn to Bronze Age Mesopotamia because it was a formative period for the spread of writing and the emergence of early states. Working on a historical (literate) period allows me to bring together my interests in both textual and material culture.

KMA: You are currently submitting a book for publication—can you tell us more about the book and what it is about?

KB: The book is a revised version of my dissertation and examines a group of ancient seal impressions from a palace/administrative complex at Tell Leilan in northeastern Syria (the capital of an early 2nd-millennium BCE kingdom). Administrative officials used seals to secure doors and storage containers and to authenticate documents as part of managing royal resources. By reconstructing seal designs from fragmentary impressions (many with identifying inscriptions), I was able to trace individual officials' activities across the complex and connect them with written records of their work. Mapping where these sealings were found makes it possible to reconstruct how resources such as food, wine, and luxury goods moved through the palace and were allocated to the royal court, religious institutions, and local and visiting dignitaries. More broadly, the book shows how seal imagery, writing, and administrative practice worked together to structure economic systems and express bureaucratic hierarchy in an early Mesopotamian state.

KMA: As a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania, how were you involved in the Penn Museum? What exhibitions did you work on? What did you learn?

KB: During my time at Penn, I had the opportunity to work on a major permanent installation, *Middle East Galleries: Journey to the City*, which opened in 2018. The exhibition drew on the Penn Museum's extensive Near East collections, spanning the Neolithic to the Islamic periods, to show how many features of modern life first developed in the ancient Middle East. I was involved in several ways throughout the three-year process, including through planning, research, object selection, interpretation, and presentation.

The close familiarity I developed with the collection through this project also led to my involvement in several of the museum's educational programs. I led workshops on the development of cuneiform writing and the training

of young scribal students, and I created and guided gallery tours as part of the museum's "Grad Guides" program. These experiences gave me the opportunity to share the collection with a wide range of audiences and to think carefully about how to make archaeology and ancient history accessible and engaging.

KMA: What do you think the value of archaeology museums like the Kelsey Museum is?

KB: University museums, like the Kelsey, do more than display archaeological materials; they activate them for teaching and research. One of the things that makes the Kelsey special is that learning is not limited to what you see in the galleries. Objects can be brought out of storage so students can handle them directly and study them up close, without the physical and interpretive distance created by display cases. As an instructor, I have seen firsthand how these encounters create powerful opportunities for students to connect with the material past in a direct and immediate way. They are also genuinely fun and memorable learning experiences.

The Kelsey is also a center of active, ongoing research. Faculty and students regularly work with the collections to develop new insights about the past. Just as importantly, the museum shares this work with a wide audience, making it a lively space that connects academic research with broader communities and shows how our understanding of the past is always evolving.

KMA: As lead curator of the new Byzantine and Islamic gallery at the Kelsey, what are you most excited about? What do you hope the impact of the gallery will be?

KB: From a curatorial perspective, I'm especially excited about the gallery's interactive and digital elements, which will invite visitors to explore key themes and objects in deeper and more personal ways. I'm also looking forward to the inclusion of a rotating community-curated case, which creates space for voices beyond the curatorial team (including university partners, local stakeholders, and descendant and diasporic communities) to share their perspectives in dialogue with the collection. It's a meaningful way to bring multiple viewpoints into the gallery and highlight how interpretation is a collaborative process.

In terms of content, I'm particularly excited about the sub-theme "writing and the transmission of knowledge," which explores how people learned to write, how texts circulated, and how manuscript traditions shaped intellectual life across the Byzantine and Islamic worlds. It connects closely with my own research interests in writing as a practical and social technology. For visitors, I think this theme tells a compelling story about the human effort behind communication: the teachers, students, scribes, and scholars who preserved and shared knowledge and the manuscripts that carried ideas across languages, regions, and centuries.

“What Do You See?” A Student Educator’s Approach to the Ancient World

This past school year, visiting K–12 teachers may have noticed something new on their field trips to the Kelsey Museum: undergraduate students, equipped with subject knowledge and visitor-centered educational techniques, guiding classes through the galleries and hands-on activities. These undergraduate gallery educators (UGEs)—hailing from a wide range of academic and personal backgrounds—help create new points of connection with visiting students, shaping educational experiences whose impact extends well beyond a single museum visit.

Allison Oldani is one student among the initial cohort of seven UGEs who have already made a huge impression on the region’s K–12 students and teachers. A senior double-majoring in international studies and history of art, with minors in museum studies and music, Allison brings an incredible energy and a love for ancient art and cultures to everything she does at the Kelsey.

“I first came to the Kelsey for a class as a freshman,” she recalled. “We did object handling—so I actually got to touch thousands-of-years-old artifacts.” The experience stuck with her: “I remember taking pictures and sending them to my friends and family and bragging about it.”

So when she later went searching for student jobs connected to museums, the UGE position felt like an obvious next step: “I was like, ‘Perfect—I’ve been waiting for this!’”

Ask Allison what she loves about guiding visitors, and you’ll quickly hear her philosophy: slow down and look closely—skills she herself has honed through her art history courses. “In today’s day and age, I feel like people don’t know how to actually look anymore!” Allison explained. “When you go to a museum, it seems like it’s more about quantity over quality.” Her tours intentionally resist this checklist mentality: “When I’m giving tours, I’d rather look at less stuff but make it more meaningful.”

This approach begins with one grounding question: “What do you see?” For Allison, there are “no stupid answers—literally anything that you see.” It’s a small shift that has a big effect. Instead of a tour that’s delivered to kids—classroom style—the museum’s objects become things students can read and interpret themselves.

The most rewarding moments of a tour come when close looking transforms into real insight. “I like talking about Greek pottery, especially the Herakles vase, and asking visitors why the figures are black and white,” Allison said. “I just gave a tour, and it was one of the best groups I’ve had. When I asked about the Herakles vase, one kid answered, ‘It’s gender, isn’t it?’”

“My favorite part of doing tours is saying, ‘That’s a good guess!’ and talking through their thoughts,” she explained

with a laugh. But this student’s educated guess surprised and delighted her: “It’s just impressive when a kid absolutely locks in with you and says something so smart. I always get blown away and think, ‘Oh, this is what I’m doing it for.’ I love it when a kid cares.”

Allison’s interests—international studies, art history, museum studies—aren’t separate spheres at the Kelsey. They frequently overlap, especially in the way she invites K–12 students into the ancient world. “For me, art history is a lot about storytelling,” she said. “I love to use storytelling as the gateway into talking about culture and history. It’s so much more interesting to engage a group of people by telling them a story than it is to just tell them facts.”

Behind the scenes, one of Allison’s biggest surprises has been realizing how much coordination it takes to make a museum visit feel seamless: “I’ve truly learned how much work goes into curating a visitor experience—and not just from a museum education standpoint.” From her perspective now, the visitor-facing moment in the galleries is just one part of a larger system. “When you go to a museum, you’re not thinking about the people who are working in

the office, making sure everybody knows to come here," she said. "It just all interlocks together."

If there's one skill Allison says the UGE role has helped her develop, it's inquiry-based learning—building an educational experience around visitors' questions and interpretations rather than sticking to a strict lecture format: "Going in, I assumed I was going to have to memorize a script. But the fact is that I have so much freedom to talk about what I want to talk about." She continued, "While training in inquiry-based learning, I learned how to navigate a tour by exploring [visitors'] questions rather than just talking at them."

Working as a UGE has also reshaped how she connects her disciplines at U-M. "For art history, my focus is mostly on painting," she said. "People like to sort archaeology and the stuff at art museums into separate categories. But working here has melded the two together, from an art historical perspective." Her museum studies coursework now has a real-world reference point as well: "I'm taking two museum studies courses right now, and I'm constantly talking about the Kelsey—about things like provenance and provenience," she noted. "The Kelsey has definitely expanded how I think about museum studies and put it into context."

Allison's enthusiasm for the UGE program is straightforward—and contagious. "Do it, come here!" she said when asked what she'd tell a fellow student considering the role. "I promise it's so worth it. It's wonderful, and people actually love what they do."

Allison will continue working as a UGE during her fifth year at U-M. After receiving her degree, she plans to attend grad school and continue down the path of museum education sparked by her time at the Kelsey. In the meantime, however, her invitation is open: "If anybody sees me in the galleries with a name tag, ask me about the Villa of the Mysteries! I will tell you all that I know."

Artistic depiction of Callityche. Illustration: Bruce Worden.

Introducing the People of Rome

Meet Callityche and the other residents of Puteoli, a bustling town near the Roman imperial port of Misenum. Based on real inscriptions in the Kelsey Museum's collection, five self-guided tours now invite visitors to explore the lives of everyday Romans through the artifacts and monuments that shaped their experiences.

Visitors can find the tours near the Kelsey's entrance with the other self-guided materials, or they can scan the People of Rome QR code to use their own device. Each narrative brings you on a journey through the first and second floors of the galleries, providing new perspectives on artifacts from the permanent collections and a very human look into the diverse people who made up the Roman Empire.

People of Rome launched in December 2025 and represents the collaborative work between educators, illustrators, graphic designers, and others here at the Kelsey Museum. Even now, the tours continue to evolve as the Education Department and the digital assets team work with the Alternate Reality Initiative (ARI)—a U-M student group—to develop an app that allows visitors to experience the People of Rome with greater interactivity and ease.

For more information and to get to know the People of Rome, visit **myumi.ch/9pAjr**.

—Shannon Ness, University Programs Manager

Top to bottom: Coins of Cato (KM 94982), Caesar (KM 1991.2.310), and Brutus (KM 1987.9.7).

Republican Rome and Revolutionary America

As the United States marks its semiquicentennial (250th anniversary) in 2026, museums across the campus have been invited to create programs and displays reflecting on the national moment. From June through November 2026, the Kelsey Museum will contribute a Kelsey in Focus case that explores how stories and symbols from ancient Rome shaped Revolutionary-era ideas about liberty, leadership, and power—and how those same inheritances carry lasting contradictions.

In their struggle against King George III, America's Founding Fathers often turned to the Roman Republic for inspiration. Figures such as Brutus, Cincinnatus, and Cato—celebrated as defenders against power-hungry individuals—were idolized in the budding nation's battle to resist authoritarian rule. One significant Roman influence came in the form of a stage play. Written by Joseph Addison, *Cato: A Tragedy* (1713) dramatizes the titular character's final days of his opposition to Julius Caesar. The play was immensely popular in pre-Revolutionary America, and in 1778, George Washington commissioned a performance at Valley Forge to rally and inspire his troops.

When it came time to build a government, the founders again looked to the ancient world, adopting structures like a Senate and term limits, even as they also drew on Rome's example to justify slavery and protect elite control of politics.

Ancient Rome's legacy in America is complicated, with freedom and bondage stacked side by side in the foundations of United States history. The Kelsey in Focus case will bring this nuanced story to life with an 1804–1811 edition of Addison's play. It will also feature large 3D prints of Kelsey coins depicting Cato, Caesar, and Brutus (see left), emphasizing the political and propagandizing power of these everyday objects. The installation will further follow Roman echoes in American visual culture, where Washington himself was repeatedly framed through a Roman lens—though not always consistently.

Educators Will Pestle and Shannon Ness, along with museum director Nic Terrenato, are working together to develop this Kelsey in Focus installment, which is supported by a $4,400 grant from U-M's U.S. at 250 initiative. Join us for a family program on the evening of June 18 (on the veranda at the Kelsey Museum), and watch for details about a related talk in the fall.

From the Field to the Classroom: Making the Klinsky Expeditions Accessible to K–12 Learners

I'm a writer, educator, and editor living in Detroit. I'm also a parent to two young kids and a very amateur gardener. I started my career as a middle school English teacher. I absolutely loved supporting the reading, writing, and critical thinking lives of young people. After six years in the classroom, I became a full-time stay-at-home parent for a year, which then led me to content and curriculum writing.

Writing curriculum was one of my favorite aspects of classroom teaching, and it's still the work that gives me the most creative energy and satisfaction. I love thinking about how to take complex or unfamiliar ideas and translate them into engaging and empowering learning experiences. Over the years, I've worked in a range of disciplines as a curriculum writer: English/writing, social studies, social-emotional learning—and, most recently, anthropological research!

Since last fall, I have worked with the Kelsey Museum's Education Department as a curriculum writer for the Klinsky Expeditions' K–12 educational materials. Alongside the work that University of Michigan faculty are doing around the world, there's a commitment to K–12 programming that connects students to archaeology and the kinds of questions researchers are asking right now.

One of the best parts of this has been working alongside the principal investigators for each project. They each bring such passion, expertise, and relentless curiosity to their projects, and all of them were eager to support translating their research into accessible K–12 learning experiences.

For each project, I created a five-part lesson plan series, ranging from elementary to high school, visual arts to life sciences. The lesson series connect students to live archaeological research across five continents and thousands of years of human history. Throughout every series, students don't just learn about research; they mirror its methods, building transferable skills in critical thinking, evidence-based reasoning, and ethical analysis.

At the elementary level, a third-grade art unit anchors students in humanity's oldest social instincts. Using ancient DNA research and ostrich eggshell bead making, students explore identity, belonging, and long-distance connection in early African societies. Middle schoolers investigate submerged prehistoric landscapes beneath Lake Huron, where glacial retreat and ecosystem change shaped the lives of early Indigenous hunter-gatherers, and apply those lessons to modern Great Lakes environmental challenges. A second middle school series reframes nomadic peoples of the Eurasian steppe as architects of the earliest Silk Roads, using artifact and burial analysis to challenge textbook narratives and connect ancient trade networks to modern globalization. A third takes students to Sudan, where ongoing excavations at the ancient Kushite city of Napata raise urgent questions about whose history gets told, and who gets to tell it.

The high school series asks students to do what archaeologists actually do: read ancient texts as data, analyze satellite imagery and GIS tools, and grapple with the logistical realities of moving an army over a North African landscape—all in an effort to locate the long-lost site of the Battle of Zama.

Across all these lessons, I'm most excited that students will get close access to ongoing archaeological research. So much of K–12 schooling is learning about knowledge that has already been produced. With these projects, students learn that knowledge-production and discovery are ongoing, and there is so much in our world that we don't yet know or understand. This, to me, creates an energizing sense of possibilities for young people who are just starting to imagine their own place in the world.

—Matt Homrich-Knieling, Curriculum Writer

On March 26, the Kelsey hosted an event where attendees could get up close and personal with some of the Klinsky archaeologists to learn about the advanced technologies they use to uncover the past. "Unearthing Understanding: Up Close with the Klinsky Archaeologists" featured conversations with Geoff Emberling and John O'Shea, glimpses of an underwater ROV in action (above left), and a magnetometry obstacle course (above right)!

Tiny Traces, Careful Thinking

How Broken Pots Tell Human Stories at Jebel Barkal

By Saskia Büchner-Matthews and Anna den Hollander

Broken pottery sherds may not look impressive at first glance. Yet in archaeology, even the smallest fragments can preserve remarkable information about everyday life in the past. Stylistic changes in their fabrics reveal important clues about the chronology of a site; the types of vessels and their materials can provide insights into artisanal practice and daily life; and the pots themselves can shed light on trade connections far beyond the site.

Organic residue analysis allows us to study these sherds in even more detail. The generous grant from Steve Klinsky to the University of Michigan and the Jebel Barkal Archaeological Project (JBAP) allowed us to do a trial study of nine sherds of Meroitic pottery excavated at the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Jebel Barkal, Sudan. Taken together with ceramic, archaeobotanical, and zooarchaeological analysis, this work provided glimpses into what people cooked and how they managed animals and crops.

Organic residue analysis is based on the observation that when ceramic pottery vessels are in use, tiny amounts of organic material become absorbed into the microscopic pores of the ceramic. These traces can include fats, oils, proteins, or other molecular compounds. Some of these residues can survive for thousands of years—as is the case at Jebel Barkal, where the fragments studied are at least 2,300 years old. Using modern chemical techniques, archaeological scientists can extract and analyze these molecules to reconstruct ancient food practices. Complemented by other lines of analysis, this allows us to get a more complete picture of subsistence practices at the palatial city during Meroitic times.

For this study, nine pottery sherds were selected for analysis. These fragments came from vessel types strongly associated with food preparation. The samples were analyzed at BioArCh, University of York, a state-of-the-art laboratory specializing in archaeological chemistry. Using highly sensitive analytical techniques such as gas chromatography–mass spectrometry (GC-MS) and isotopic analysis, researchers were able to extract and analyze faint traces of ancient organic residues preserved in the pottery fabric.

The residues preserved in the pottery were generally very low, with concentrations just above the threshold at which results can still be meaningfully interpreted. This is typical for archaeological ceramics of this age from hot and arid regions like Sudan. During the life cycle of the vessel, regular activity such as heating and washing contributes to degradation. Once discarded, the ceramic matrix protects organic compounds from most degradation, but burial conditions, soil chemistry, heat, and time still contribute to some erosion of surviving residues.

Several vessels contained evidence for animal fats. However, two sherds (FIG. 1), belonging to a

Figure 1. The vessels JB 487-22 (handmade dish) and JB 504-22 (handmade cooking pot) showed signals of dairy production from ruminant animals such as cattle, sheep, or goats grazing on C4 plants.

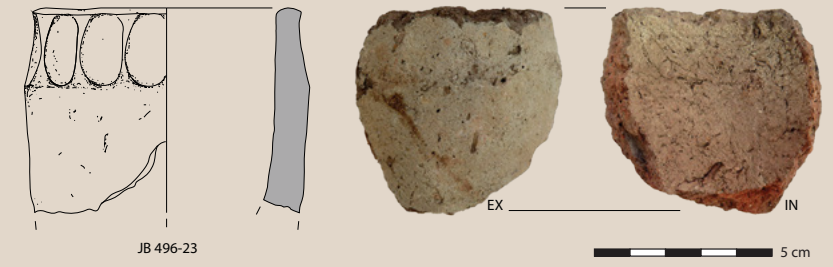


Figure 2. Aquatic resources were identified with certainty only from the inside of the handmade bread cone mold JB 496-23. This sample shows characteristic biomarkers for fish/freshwater resources as well as corresponding isotopic values.

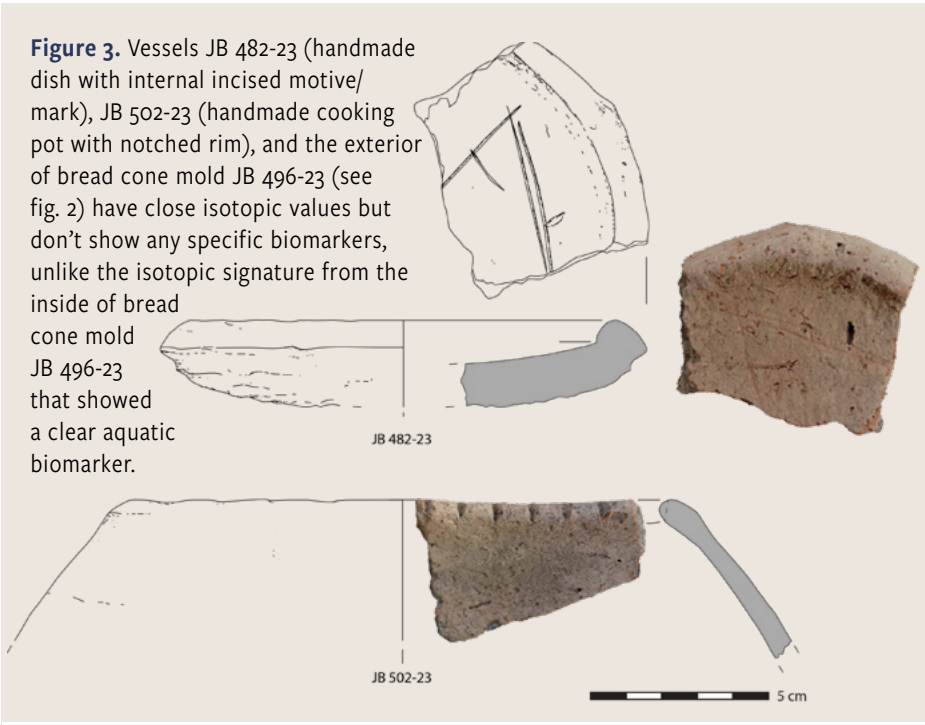


Figure 3. Vessels JB 482-23 (handmade dish with internal incised motive/mark), JB 502-23 (handmade cooking pot with notched rim), and the exterior of bread cone mold JB 496-23 (see fig. 2) have close isotopic values but don't show any specific biomarkers, unlike the isotopic signature from the inside of bread cone mold JB 496-23 that showed a clear aquatic biomarker.

Figure 4. The handmade cooking pot JB 506-23 yielded fats resembling modern porcine fats alongside other chemical signals, suggesting a mixture of plants such as millet but also possible traces of cereals, fruits, and other non-leafy plants.

small handmade dish and a cooking pot, showed clear signals of dairy products derived from ruminant animals such as cattle, sheep, or goats grazing on C4 plants. C4 plants are drought-resistant species that use a four-carbon photosynthetic pathway to stay productive in hot, dry climates. Examples from Sudan include millets such as sorghum and certain desert grasses found on the savanna.

Another sherd from a bread cone mold (FIG. 2) preserved chemical markers associated with aquatic resources, most likely fish. This is particularly interesting since our excavations have recovered virtually no fish bones, despite the site being located along the Nile River. Furthermore, the co-occurrence of freshwater fish biomarkers and fecal stanols presents us with possible evidence of multipurpose use or repurposing of the vessel—perhaps as a ladle or cup. Two more vessels, as well as the exterior of the former, have close isotopic values but do not show any specific biomarkers (FIG. 3).

A further handmade cooking pot (FIG. 4) yielded fat residues resembling those of modern porcine (pig) fat, alongside chemical signals suggesting a mixture of foods. These may have included a C4 plant such as millet together with other animal products, as well as traces consistent with cereals, fruits, and other non-leafy plants. This indicates that meals may often have involved complex dishes or stews rather than single ingredients.

Because lipid concentrations are so low, these interpretations rely on multiple lines of evidence rather than a single signal. Encouragingly, the residue results align well with other archaeological data from the site. Milking scenes are depicted on a late Meroitic bronze bowl from Karanog (FIG. 5), the faunal assemblage was largely dominated by cattle bones (ca. 85 percent), and a variety of domesticated and wild C4 cereals (sorghum and millets) and grasses make up a large proportion of the archaeobotanical record. Other cereals, including wheat and six-row hulled barley, were also present at the site.

Taken together, these strands of evidence allow us to begin sketching a seasonal picture of food production and animal management at Jebel Barkal. During the rainy summer months, fresh savanna grasses and millets likely grew in the wadis, providing ample grazing for cattle that could roam more freely. It is possible that cattle was penned during the drier winter months and fed fodder (C4 grasses and millet processing waste) to ensure they stayed away from the wheat and barley fields that were more intensively managed than the millet ones. This fodder may have consisted of by-products from summer crops like millet or plant material gathered earlier in the year. Such practices could help explain the strong C4 signatures observed in some of the animal fats recovered from the pottery.

These findings are particularly exciting because they show that even faint chemical traces can yield robust interpretations when approached carefully. Here, archaeology becomes a productive balance between science and interpretation: molecular data provide the evidence, while archaeological context gives it meaning.

Organic residue analysis does not always deliver simple answers, but it does deliver new perspectives. As we continue working on these materials

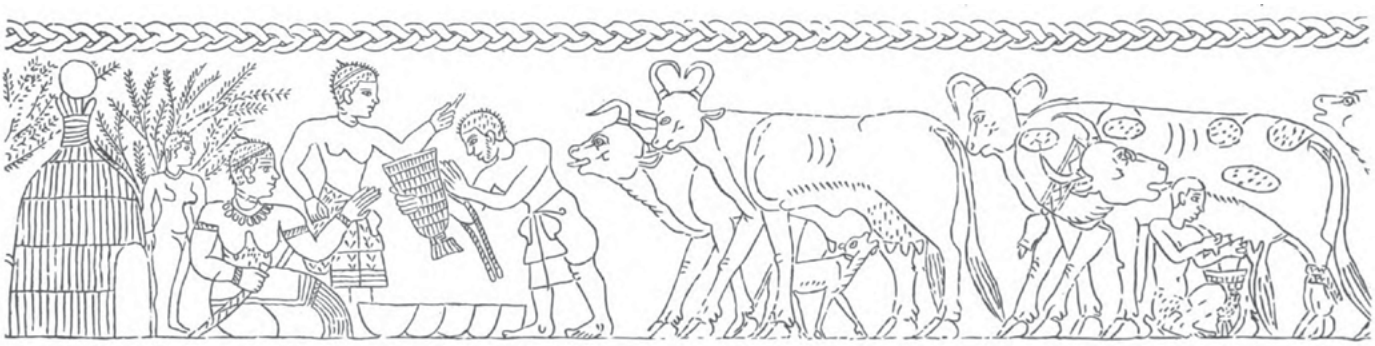


Figure 5. Karanog, tomb 187, detail of a scene engraved on a late Meroitic bowl. From Woolley and Randall-MacIver 1910: pl. 27.

and refining our interpretations, we invite you to stay tuned for further results—as these vessels continue to reveal more about everyday life in the past.

Saskia Büchner-Matthews is the director of the finds office for JBAP. An archaeologist and material culture specialist and teacher, Saskia works in several African countries, Europe, and the Middle East.

Anna den Hollander does archaeobotanical analysis for JBAP. She is a PhD candidate at University College London's Institute of Archaeology. Her dissertation focuses on the archaeobotany of South Asia.

JBAP Blog

A shorter version of this article first appeared on the Jebel Barkal Archaeological Project blog. To stay up to date on this project, visit and subscribe at **sites.lsa.umich.edu/jbap**.

Lost and Found: The Jebel Barkal Cemetery

In January and March of this year, the Jebel Barkal team made an important discovery—after more than 100 years of archaeological research at the site, we found the cemetery for the ancient city! The team was led by Sami Elamin in the field, with consultation by international members of the project, all made possible by the generous financial support of Steve Klinsky.

Beyond the unexpected discovery of the cemetery itself, some of the team's findings within the burial chambers were surprising as well, including the revelation that many of the burials were looted in antiquity. Sami and his team took a break from fieldwork for Ramadan, but they are now hoping to excavate one more tomb—one that does not have a clearly visible looter's pit cutting into it.

The excavation was also of great interest for people living around the site. There were lots of visitors, including a school group that came and was allowed to "excavate" for part of a day.

—Sami Elamin, Archaeologist, Director of Archives, and Senior Inspector, National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums, and Geoff Emberling, Research Scientist and JBAP Director

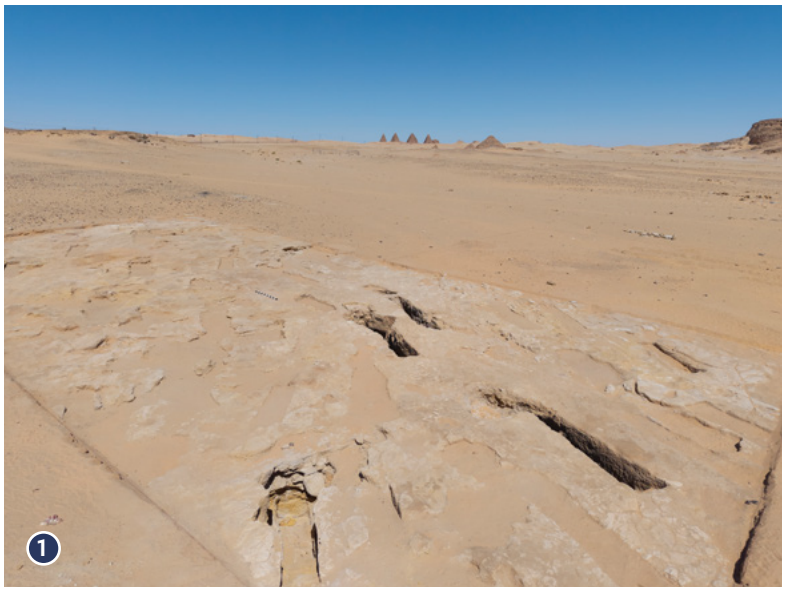


Figure 1. The team cleared off the surface of a 20- by 40-meter area that is located south of the Jebel (partially visible at the upper right) and east of the Meroitic royal pyramids (center background). Of the 45 burials they found, the team excavated four, assisted by Sudanese "Heritage Protectors," who are local archaeology students. The excavations were a very useful training opportunity for them.

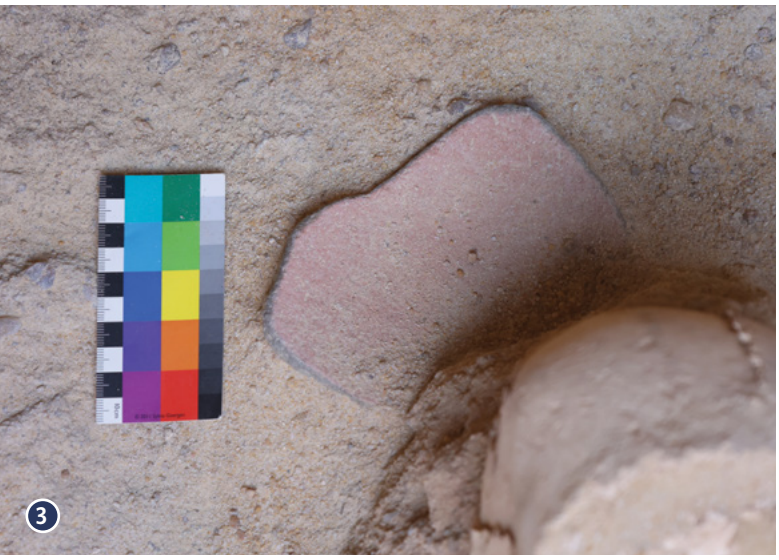


Figure 2. This is burial B-107, which is typical of these burials. It consists of a narrow staircase leading straight down to a burial chamber. As the team discovered, most of the burials had been looted in antiquity—the circular pit at the end of the staircase (seen at the left of this image) was dug by looters.

Figure 3. Excavations recovered a digging sherd, worn on the edges, which would have been what the looters used to dig into the burial itself.

Figure 4. The steps leading down to the burials were very carefully cut into the sandstone and were often well preserved.

Figure 5. Some of the burials were fancier than others—this is the entrance to B-112, showing an arched entryway to the burial chamber.

Figure 6. And now for some interpretation. The shape of the burials themselves is typical of ancient Kush, particularly the late Napatan and early Meroitic periods (ca. 600 BCE–100 CE). But none of the burials had the usual assortment of jars, beads, or other offerings that we would expect from burials of those times. But scattered in the fill of the burials were broken potsherds like this one, which clearly date to the Meroitic period. Our current understanding is that the tombs were built, then looted, then later cleaned out for reuse by a local community many centuries later.

The Richard Redding Fund: Supporting Grad Student Research Across U-M

The Richard Redding Fund supports specialized research for members of the Kelsey Museum's graduate student community. Created by distinguished researcher Dr. Richard Redding and expanded through memorial gifts made in his honor, the fund awards grants of up to $1,500 for lab work and research analyses essential to student projects—furthering Dr. Redding's legacy of academic excellence and mentorship. In 2025, several University of Michigan students received funding through this program; read about their projects below.

Erina Baci

I am a graduate student at the U-M Museum of Anthropological Archaeology (UMMAA), focusing on Late Bronze Age to Early Iron Age settlement and mobility in the Balkans, particularly in Kosovo (ca. 1400–800 BCE). My research investigates how communities navigated and interacted with their landscapes, with a focus on hillforts, the predominant settlement type of the period.

My dissertation blends multiple datasets—including surface collections, excavation data, isotopic analyses, absolute dating, and GIS—to build a more nuanced understanding of settlement patterns and human mobility. One key line of evidence I employ is radiocarbon dating to gain a more precise understanding of when these sites were inhabited. Because such datasets are scarce in Kosovo, my work represents a significant step toward creating a reliable chronological framework for the region.

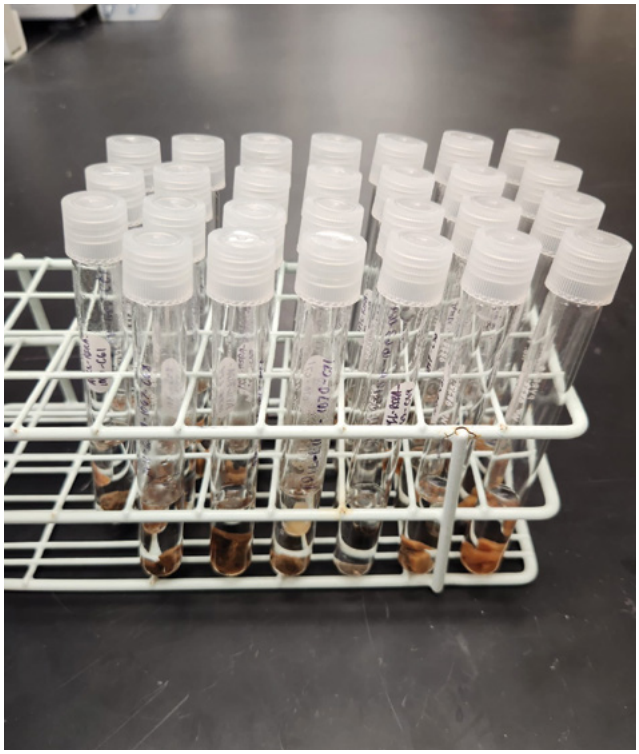
A field photo of Erina Baci's project in Kosovo.

I received support from the Richard Redding Fund to cover costs associated with my radiocarbon dating. This funding has enabled one additional submission, the "cherry-on-top" date: a wheat kernel recovered through flotation from a potential structure. Dating seeds provides particularly precise chronological information, as seeds are short-lived and reflect annual cycles, offering a tighter temporal resolution than long-lived materials like wood.

Looking forward, I plan to complete and defend my dissertation this summer and continue my research in Kosovo. I aim to expand the databases I have been building, further refining chronological frameworks and exploring patterns of settlement and mobility across the region.

Bailey Franzoi

I am a seventh-year student in the Interdepartmental Program in Ancient Mediterranean Art and Archaeology (IPAMAA), generally interested in the impacts of imperialism on ancient people and their environments. I am a zooarchaeologist, trained by Richard Redding, and am currently studying the faunal material from the Kelsey-excavated site of Tel Anafa for my dissertation.



Above: Tell el-Hesi bone samples demineralizing for collagen extraction.

Right: Kara Larson (right) and her UROP research student, Sam White (left), measuring Tell el-Hesi collagen samples on a microbalance in the Ancient Protein and Isotope Laboratory.

I applied for the Richard Redding Fund to do scientific analysis on some of the ancient sheep and goats from the site—extracting collagen from bone to determine whether the animals sampled were sheep or goats and drilling teeth to perform stable isotopic analysis, which might provide clues into how the animals were herded across the landscape through their lives. These techniques were not really available to Richard when he published a small percentage of the Tel Anafa faunal assemblage in the 1990s, and I'm honored to both finish his work and take it into the future.

Kara Larson

I am a PhD candidate in anthropological archaeology at U-M whose research focuses on household foodways and herd management strategies in early urban communities of the Southern Levant. My dissertation examines how people living in emerging Early Bronze Age cities organized food production and provisioning in environmentally marginal regions. In particular, my work investigates livestock management and foodways at settlements along the edge of the Northern Negev Desert, including Tell el-Hesi and Tell Halif.

The project supported by the Richard Redding Fund focused on finishing zooarchaeological identification and stable carbon ($\delta^{13}C$) and nitrogen ($\delta^{15}N$) isotope analysis of faunal remains recovered from my directed 2022–2023 excavations at Tell el-Hesi. These analyses help reconstruct the diets and grazing environments of recovered sheep and goats, providing insight into herd management strategies and how animals were integrated into early urban food systems.

Following the completion of zooarchaeological identification, the results from the sheep and goat collagen isotopic analysis revealed that the caprines from Tell el-Hesi grazed on diverse landscapes and—when combined with zooarchaeological data and already completed bioapatite isotopic results—suggest that households were likely responsible for herding, managing, and processing their own livestock. These results challenge top-down foodway assumptions for the Early Bronze Age in the Southern Levant and offer exciting insights into the role that households played in early urban living.

The Richard Redding Fund specifically supported laboratory costs

associated with faunal identification and isotopic analysis, including sample preparation and equipment use, all of which would not have been possible without funding support. Ultimately, these analyses form an important component of my dissertation research and will contribute to future conference presentations and peer-reviewed publications on Early Bronze Age foodways and urban provisioning in the Southern Levant.

Ginny Miglierina

I am a sixth-year PhD candidate in IPAMAA. My dissertation investigates how night and darkness were actively incorporated and experienced in religious contexts in the 5th and 4th centuries BCE. In my research, I show how—by shaping objects, spaces, and sensations—the night was integral to the creation of the ritual assemblage and the definition of ritual experience.

With the assistance of the Richard Redding Fund, I have been carrying out experiments with replicas of ancient Greek lamps to measure the levels of illumination from these lighting sources. I was able to acquire three different types of lamps, as well as a lux meter and flax yarn for the wick. For fuel, I have used regular olive oil, which was widely available in the Greek world. I am still working out some details of my experiment—for example, my wick sits really low in the lamp's spout, possibly because modern yarn is more refined than ancient fibers. Nonetheless, I have been able to light all three lamps, and I am starting to collect data on the illumination levels they provided, both individually and collectively. The goal is to assess the kinds of activities that could be done under lamplight and the effect of this lighting on sensory perceptions.

While similar studies have reconstructed the use of lamps in households and interior spaces, my interest lies in how artificial illumination could be used outdoors and in sanctuary contexts. This project supports my dissertation by providing experimental evidence to discuss how artificial light could be used to facilitate the practice of nocturnal rituals.

Lighting experiments from Ginny Miglierina's project.

Updates from the Graduate Student Community

Recent IPAMAA graduate **Andrew Crocker** accepted a tenure-track position in art history and museum studies at Florida Southern College. Best wishes to you, Andrew, as you begin your professorial career!

IPAMAA PhD candidate **Laurel Fricker** gave a conference presentation, "Through the Eyes of a Child: Growing Up in an Ancient Greek House," at the Archaeological Institute of America (AIA) annual meeting in early January.

Allison Grenda, PhD candidate in the Department of the History of Art, has been based in Greece this academic year as the 2025 AIA Olivia James Traveling Fellow and as an associate member at the American School of Classical Studies in Athens. She has conducted dissertation research at sites across Greece and taken part in study trips to the regions of Macedonia, Thrace, Corinth, and the Argolid. Allison also participated in an excavation in Ohrid, North Macedonia, over the summer of 2025.

In early January, IPAMAA student **Ginny Miglierina** also presented a paper at the AIA annual meeting in

Laurel Fricker (above left) and Ginny Miglierina (left) presenting at the AIA annual meeting, San Francisco, January 2026.

San Francisco. This paper, titled "Bodies, Bears and the Night: Liminality in the *arkteia* at Brauron," was taken from a chapter of her dissertation that investigates nocturnal ritual activity in Greek sanctuaries during the 5th and 4th centuries BCE. "The paper was well-received," Ginny said, "and I had a great time exploring San Francisco with my IPAMAA friends!" In addition, Ginny was recently awarded a Rackham Predoctoral Fellowship for 2026–2027.

Alex Moskowitz, an IPAMAA alumnus, received an honorary mention among those who were nominated for the Rackham Graduate School's 2026 ProQuest Distinguished Dissertation Awards. Nominees for this award were part of a select group of students who represented the best scholarly work published in Rackham dissertations across a broad range of disciplines. Well done, Alex!

IPAMAA's **Chloe Morris** and **Erica Venturo** have both been admitted to the American School of Classical Studies in Athens for its Regular Member program in 2026–2027. A big congratulations to both of you, Chloe and Erica!

On Monday, March 2, IPAMAA graduate student **James Nesbitt-Prosser** successfully defended his dissertation, "The Roads of Roman North Africa: Migration and Cultural Change." His research uses epigraphic evidence of road construction and repairs to explore the relationship between migration patterns and the Roman road network during the 1st–3rd centuries CE. "I argue that the changing patterns of migration and the development of the road network were tied together in a positive relationship, reinforcing one another through repeated usage and investment," James explained. Kudos, Dr. Nesbitt-Prosser!

New Kelsey Staff

Exhibit Coordinator **Todd Berenz** began his work at the Kelsey Museum in January, bringing with him many years of experience in mountmaking, exhibition design, and installation. This position marks a career milestone, as he has now served across all three major University of Michigan museums. Todd is eager to continue to learn and adapt toward a complementary design practice for the Kelsey Museum. Grounded in a studio art degree from the University of Wisconsin–Madison, his professional work spans exhibiting library special collections, contemporary and modern art, natural history, and ancient art and artifacts. Todd particularly enjoys the process of creative problem-solving and puzzling out design solutions. He looks forward to collaborating with the entire Kelsey staff and engaging with the collections.

Longtime colleague and educator **Shannon Ness** became the Kelsey's university programs manager in January. Her connection to the Kelsey began a decade ago as a graduate student in IPAMAA, where she developed a commitment to community-based archaeology and found her passion for undergraduate teaching, both in the classroom and in the field. Shannon had served as our university programs coordinator since 2024, connecting more than 6,000 students across various disciplines to the ancient world through tours and object-handling sessions. In addition to the new relationships she built with instructors across campus, Shannon is most proud of the success of the gladiators exhibit with the broader Ann Arbor community. As university programs manager, she is excited to develop more campus connections and new opportunities for engagement.

The Kelsey Museum is pleased to host three graduate students as fellows and research assistants during the winter 2026 semester: Wenxuan (Cecilia) Huang, a research assistant with curator Nicola Barham; Abigail Staub, a fellow in the Education Department; and Laurel Fricker, an intern in the Conservation Lab. Hear from these students and read about their work on pages 3, 7, and 10, respectively.

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