



Sharing the Spoils: The Historical use of Loans and Gifts as Collecting Methodologies for Building Biblical Archaeology Teaching Collections

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ABSTRACT

During the first half of the 20th century, the division of finds laws of the British Mandate of Palestine and Transjordan facilitated the legal formation of large Biblical Archaeology collections throughout the United States. For Biblical Archaeologists without excavations or surveys of their own however, creating such a collection was far more difficult with the only existing formal mechanism being the often prohibitively expensive antiquities market. Primarily using the example of the Oberlin Near East Study Collection, Oberlin College's historical Biblical archaeology collection, I argue that in this period, scholars could rely on artifact loans and gifts from their academic colleagues in order to build large teaching collections quickly and cheaply. These dispersals strengthened the social and academic ties of Biblical Archaeologists while also mitigating institutional storage problems. Whereas the export of antiquities out of Palestine was heavily regulated, once artifacts were in the United States, their legal owners could move them as they wished, accompanied by little or no documentation. As a result, while such collections formed through loans and gifts were likely common, they remain an under-documented phenomenon.

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In the past 100 years, artifacts from the southern Levant have flowed into collections, both institutional and personal, throughout North America. This collecting has been motivated by a myriad of factors ranging from the desire of tourists or pilgrims to return from trips to the Holy Land with a souvenir, to museums hoping to evoke life in the ancient Levant.¹ Of the collections that have been studied and published, most are associated with larger institutions that conducted excavations and acquired artifacts via the division of finds (partage) laws of the British Mandate and the early states of Israel and Jordan.² Among the factors that make the history of archaeology in Palestine and Transjordan unique is the large number of excavations that have been undertaken by American seminaries leading to the formation of small Biblical Archaeology collections and museums strewn throughout the United States.³ Biblical Archaeologists without excavations of their own however, had to resort to alternative methods for building archaeological teaching collections. These alternative mechanisms are yet to be explored in the broader academic literature.

In this article, I use the history of the formation of Oberlin College's historical Biblical Archaeology collection, the Oberlin Near East Study Collection (ONESC), as a case study to explore the wider range of collecting strategies utilized by American Biblical Archaeologists. These were primarily theologians and biblical scholars who used archaeological discoveries from the ancient Near East to shed light on the Bible's ancient historical context in order to establish its theological truth.⁴ By examining the mechanics involved in creating these forgotten collections, as well as the objects that entered them, and scholar's attitudes towards those objects, it should in turn be possible to shed light on the 'object habits' of American Biblical Archaeologists during the first half of the 20th century. This term, coined by Alice Stevenson, refers to a 'community's attitude to things, affecting what was collected, when, and why.'⁵ Taken further, the study of Biblical Archaeologist's object habits might reveal the ways in which these scholars, often guided by faith, differed from other practitioners within the broader field of archaeology.

Oberlin's collection was primarily built between the 1930s and 1950s through several loans and gifts made by other institutions and scholars. Though the export of artifacts from Palestine and the wider Near East was carefully controlled through legal mechanisms, once an artifact was in the United States, institutions and individuals could disperse them with minimal record keeping or oversight. Thus, while Oberlin College did not conduct or participate in any excavation, its professors relied on the small and closely networked American Biblical and Near Eastern archaeology academic communities in order to quickly acquire hundreds of artifacts.

The archival documentation left behind from contributions by Nelson Glueck, the Haverford College Museum of Biblical Archaeology, and the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago to the ONESC suggest that loans and gifts were common collection building strategies employed by American Biblical Archaeologists during the first half of the 20th century. Loans were made up of complete, 'museum quality' artifacts and were, at least officially, expected to return to the

1 Morag Kersel. "The Lure of the Artefact? The Effects of Acquiring Eastern Mediterranean Material Culture." In *The Cambridge Prehistory of the Bronze and Iron Age Mediterranean*, ed. A. Bernard Knapp and Peter van Dommelen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015b). DOI: [10.1017/CHO9781139028387.027](https://doi.org/10.1017/CHO9781139028387.027), 369–370.

2 Morag Kersel. "The Trade in Palestinian Antiquities Owning the Past? *The Jerusalem Quarterly* 33 (2008), 25–26; Morag Kersel "The Changing Legal Landscape for Middle Eastern Archaeology in the Colonial Era, 1800–1930." in *Pioneers to the Past: American Archaeologists in the Middle East, 1919–1920*, ed. Geoff Emberling (Chicago, IL: Oriental Institute Museum Publications, 2010); Morag Kersel. "Storage Wars: Solving the Archaeological Curation Crisis?" *Journal of Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology & Heritage Studies* 3 (2015a), 48; Jordan Pickett. "Contextualizing Penn's Excavations at Beth Shean (1921–1933)." *Expedition* 55 no. 1 (2013); Emily Teeter. "A History of the OI Museum." In *Discovering New Pasts: The OI at 100* edited by Theo Van den Hout (Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 2019).

3 Thomas W. Davis. *Shifting Sands: The Rise and Fall of Biblical Archaeology*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Peter Robert S. Moorey. *A Century of Biblical Archaeology*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991); Neil A. Silberman. "Whose Game Is It Anyway? The Political and Social Transformations of American Biblical Archaeology." In *Archaeology Under Fire: Nationalism, Politics and Heritage in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East* ed. Lynn Meskell (New York: Routledge, 1998), 181–185; Jeffrey Zorn. "The Museum Trail: The Badé Institute of Biblical Archaeology." *The Biblical Archaeologist* 51 no. 1 (1988): DOI: [10.2307/3210037](https://doi.org/10.2307/3210037).

4 Davis. *Shifting Sands*, viii, 81–86; William. G Dever, "Syro-Palestinian and Biblical Archaeology." In *The Hebrew Bible and its Modern Interpreters*, ed. J.A Knight and G.M Tucker. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 53–56; Silberman "Whose Game.", 179; George E. Wright. *Biblical Archaeology*. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957).

5 Alice Stevenson. *Scattered Finds: Archaeology, Egyptology, and Museums*. (London: UCL Press, 2019), 2; Alice Stevenson, Emma Libonati., and John Baines. "Introduction—Object Habits: Legacies of Fieldwork and the Museum." *Museum History Journal* 10 no. 2 (2017). DOI: [10.1080/19369816.2017.1328780](https://doi.org/10.1080/19369816.2017.1328780).

excavating institutions from which they came. In practice however, in many cases, including in the case of ONESC, these temporary transferences came to be permanent. Gifts meanwhile, were more often made up of fragmentary artifacts and were a means of permanently transferring ownership of a group of antiquities. The power of gifts to strengthen social ties has been well documented within the anthropological literature and as such, these transferences were a means of both establishing and strengthening the network of American Biblical Archaeologists as defined by membership in the American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR).⁶

These intra-network exchanges quickly dispersed artifacts but left behind few records. Often, as in the case of Oberlin's collection, no or only minimal documentation exists to attest the arrival of a group of objects. As a result of the haphazard record keeping associated with this form of collection building, the origins of collections assembled through loans and gifts have largely been forgotten. Thus, several Biblical Archaeology collections likely exist at institutions who are unaware of the origins of their collections or who do not use these objects due to a lack of provenance. Retracing the origins of these collections can help re-establish their archaeological contexts, allowing them to gain renewed scholarly interest and pedagogical purpose.

THE ONESC, HERBERT GORDON MAY, AND ARTIFACT GIFTING IN BRITISH MANDATE PALESTINE

The ONESC is a 650-artifact Biblical Archaeology teaching collection held by Oberlin College's Department of Religion. Its holdings cover a vast time span from the Epi-Paleolithic to the Mamluk period, with a focus on Iron Age ceramic vessels and fragments (*Table 1, Figure 3*). The collection was initially formed in 1934 when Oberlin hired Herbert Gordon May, a Biblical Scholar and Archaeologist with field experience at Megiddo, as their chair of Old Testament Languages and Literature (*Figure 1*). Beyond his experience in archaeology, May was hired for his extensive knowledge of Semitic languages and for his expertise in both historical and religious aspects of the Old Testament.⁷ Between 1934 and 1973, May taught at Oberlin, incorporating his personal collection of archaeological artifacts into his courses on the Hebrew Bible, and Biblical Archaeology. May also purchased artifacts for Oberlin's Religion Department, buying some 50 additional objects from Jerusalem's antiquities market in 1967. After his retirement in 1973, the collection remained in Oberlin's Religion Department and was linked to May through its colloquial name, the 'Herbert May Collection,' which was only superseded in 2019.⁸

May joined the Oriental Institute's excavations at Megiddo after completing his PhD at the University of Chicago's divinity school in 1931. From 1931 until 1934, May worked as an epigrapher and recorder at the site, eventually publishing a volume on Megiddo's cultic remains (*Figure 2*).⁹ During that time, he travelled to numerous archaeological excavations and sites, from which he began amassing a personal collection of sherds, lithics, groundstone, and a small number of complete vessels. Many of his artifacts came from discard piles, or were collected from the surfaces of tells, but May also acquired artifacts as gifts from his colleagues.¹⁰ As reconstructed from May's archive as well as objects in the ONESC, these gifts likely included objects from the University of Chicago's excavation at Megiddo, Flinders' Petrie's excavation at Tell el-Ajjul, and Dorothy Garrod's excavation at the prehistoric el-Wad cave (*Figure 4*). Unfortunately, a dearth of archival documentation limits the extent to which the exact mechanics of these transactions can be reconstructed.

6 Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value." In *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 11–12; Marcel Mauss *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*. Trans. W.D. Halls (New York: Routledge, 1990); Susan M. Pearce *On Collecting: An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition*. (London: Routledge, 1995), 69–74; John. F Sherry. "Gift Giving in Anthropological Perspective." *Journal of Consumer Research* 10 no. 2 (1983); Joe D. Seger *An ASOR Mosaic: a Centennial history of the American Schools of Oriental Research, 1900–2000*. (Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2001).

7 "Very sorry for the misunderstanding." Letter to T.W. Graham 27 April, Subgroup I Series VII May-Nelson, Graduate School of Theology Papers, Oberlin College Archive, 1933.

8 Julian M. Hirsch, "The Oberlin Near East Study Collection in Context" (BA Thesis., Oberlin College, 2020).

9 Eric Cline. *Digging Up Armageddon: The Search for the Lost City of Solomon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 302; Herbert G. May. *Material Remains of the Megiddo Cult*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935).

10 Hirsch, "The Oberlin Near East.", 41–51.

SITE	NUMBER OF ARTIFACTS	ARTIFACT TYPES
Afula	16	Ceramic Sherds
Tell el-Ajjul	3	Ceramic Sherds
Ashkelon	2	Ceramic Sherds
Bab edh-Dhra'	1	Ceramic Vessel
Khirbat al-Balu'a	3	Ceramic Sherds
Beth Shemesh	47	Bronze Dagger, Ceramic Sherds, Ceramic Vessels, Cuneiform Tablet Replica, Flint Blade, Game Board Replica, Grinding Stones, Loom Weight, Spindle Whorl, Whetstone
Tel Beth Yerah (Khirbet Kerak)	4	Ceramic Sherds
Tell el-Far'ah (North)	10	Ceramic Sherds
Khirbet Hamra Ifdan	3	Ceramic Sherds
Khirbet Harqala	8	Ceramic Sherds, Flint Blades
Horns of Hattin	2	Flint Blades
Khirbet al-Jariya	3	Copper Ore, Copper Slag
Jerash	3	Ceramic Sherds
Jericho	11	Ceramic Sherds
Lachish	19	Ceramic Sherds
Medeineh (On Wadi eth-Themed)	26	Ceramic Sherds
Megiddo	11	Ceramic Sherds, Ceramic Vessels
Meneiyeh	12	Ceramic Sherds
Tell Miski	1	Ceramic Sherd
Mugharet el-Wad	12	Bone, Flint Blades, Flint Core, Flint Scrapers, Flint Projectile Points
Tell el-Mustah	9	Ceramic Sherds
Na'aran	4	Ceramic Sherds
Tell en-Nasbeh	1	Ceramic Figurine
Purchased Jerusalem, 1967	29	Ceramic Vessels, Glass Vessels
Saliyah	31	Ceramic Sherds, Copper Slag
Tell es-Sheikh Diab	2	Ceramic Sherd, Flint Blade
Tell Umm Hamad	8	Ceramic Sherds
Uruk	1	Cuneiform Tablet
Wadi Arah	1	Ceramic Figurine
Unknown Provenance	252	Bone Pins, Ceramic Sherds, Ceramic Vessels, Flint Tools, Groundstone Tools, Metal Arrowheads, Scarabs
Artifacts from Other Collectors	109	Architectural Fragments, Ceramic Sherds, Ceramic Vessels, Cuneiform Tablets, Cylinder Seal Impressions

Table 1 Artifacts in the Oberlin Near East Study Collection brought to Oberlin College by Herbert G. May.

THE ARREST OF HERBERT MAY AND BRITISH MANDATE ANTIQUITIES LAW

Though May had no difficulty acquiring artifacts in Palestine, he had far more trouble exporting his objects back to the United States and in June 1934 was arrested by the Haifa port authority for antiquities smuggling. Carrying 205 artifacts at the time of his arrest, May had not obtained an antiquities export permit and had apparently falsified his customs forms, claiming in writing that he was not carrying antiquities.¹¹ Surviving records of the event indicate that May genuinely

¹¹ Cline, *Digging Up Armageddon*, 176-184.



Figure 1 Professor Herbert G. May teaching a Biblical archaeology course at the Oberlin Graduate School of Theology, 1951 (courtesy of the Oberlin College Archives). Graduate School of Theology Subseries VI Box 1.



Figure 2 Herbert G. May registering pottery at the Megiddo Expedition's dig house, 1932. From the 1935 Oriental Institute film, *the Human Adventure*.

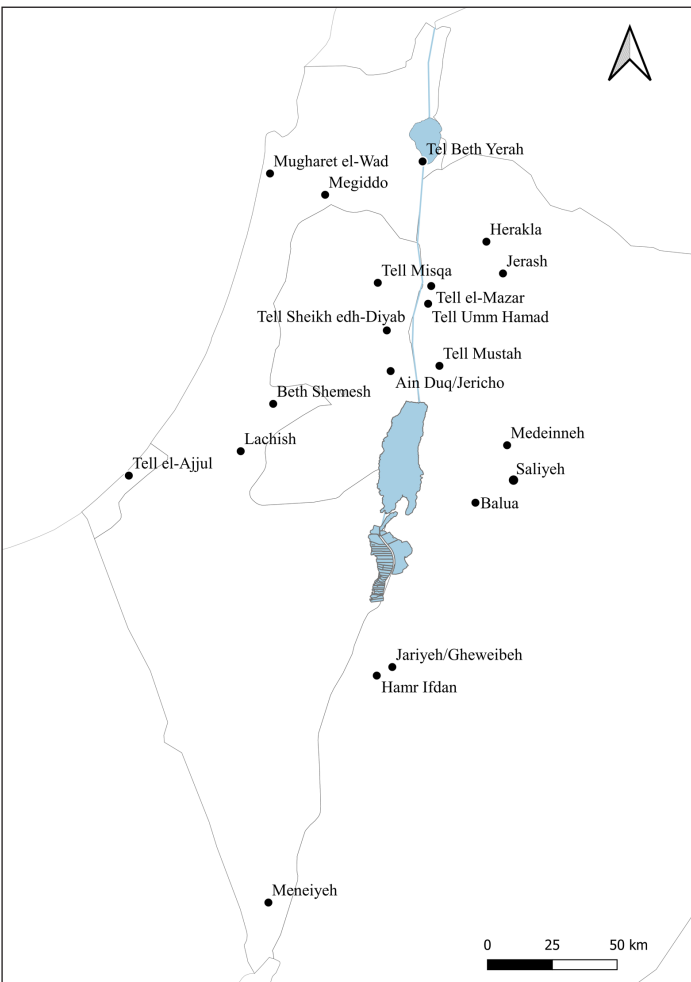


Figure 3 Archaeological sites mentioned in the article. Map by author.



Figure 4 Bichrome Pottery Sherd from Tell el-Ajjul given to Herbert May in November 1932. Photograph by author.

did not believe the sherds and lithics he was carrying could be classified as antiquities.¹² This begs the question as to what May did consider an antiquity and why the definition he operated under differed from the definition offered by Mandatory Antiquities Law.

According to the Antiquities Ordinance of 1929 (AO 1929), any object produced by people before 1700 constituted an antiquity.¹³ Exporting such artifacts was only legal if those items were sold by licensed dealers or were part of a division of artifacts between an institution that sponsored an excavation and the Palestine Department of Antiquities.¹⁴ As the product of personal gifts, and objects from dump piles, May's antiquities did not fall into either of these categories, and though some of his difficulties might have been avoided had the Megiddo Expedition's director, P.L.O Guy clarified that his artifacts were largely discards, it remains the case that in attempting to export such objects, May was still breaking the law.¹⁵

The record of May's arrest holds a valuable clue in reconstructing his understanding of what constituted an antiquity. Throughout the incident, May repeatedly emphasized that his artifacts were not valuable. Although the implication of 'value' clearly refers to monetary value, it also implies that May also thought his objects did not possess archaeological value. Like most excavations in Mandatory Palestine, the Megiddo Expedition made active use of a dump or discard pile where sherds and other objects considered extraneous to the needs of the excavator or unwanted for the division of finds were discarded.¹⁶ Considering the massive scale of the Megiddo excavations, on any given day, a huge amount of archaeological material would be discarded with no record kept of the exact material that had been dumped. As this material was neither recorded nor used to reconstruct archaeological contexts, it is easy to see why May would have also seen such artifacts as not having archaeological value and therefore would not have considered such objects antiquities.

May then likely understood antiquities to refer only to archaeological artifacts that possessed monetary value, that were part of the division of finds, and that might be published. As a result, despite the fact that May exported several objects with field markings, the fact that these artifacts were not recorded in the end of season finds lists or in final publications suggests that May did not consider such artifacts antiquities.¹⁷ Regardless, while several archaeologists gave May artifacts and despite the fact that many of his artifacts were discarded by excavators, under the framework of British Mandatory law, the export of such objects was undoubtedly illegal.

¹² Cline, *Digging Up Armageddon*, 177.

¹³ "Antiquities Ordinance No. 51, 1929." *Official Gazette of the Government of Palestine* 236 (1929): 548.

¹⁴ Kersel, "the Trade.", 26.

¹⁵ Cline, *Digging Up Armageddon*, 180.

¹⁶ William F. Badè, *A Manual of Excavation in the Near East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1934), 32; Cline, *Digging Up Armageddon*, 39.

¹⁷ Hirsch, "the Oberlin Near East", 41–51.

ASSEMBLING ARTIFACTS FOR THE OBERLIN COLLEGE MUSEUM OF BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY (1939–1941)

In 1937, Herbert May began planning an ASOR facilitated excavation, one of the goals of which was to build an institutional teaching collection through the division of finds.¹⁸ However, as May's excavation never passed the planning stage, he began exploring alternate avenues through which he could accumulate artifacts. In 1939, May began writing to his academic colleagues to ask for groups of artifacts he could freely acquire and thereafter incorporate into his classes. Using this method, between 1939 and 1941 and later in the early 1950s, Herbert May facilitated the arrival of several hundred artifacts to Oberlin. The ease with which May gathered artifacts through his academic network demonstrates the ease of reallocation once artifacts arrived in the United States, and the extent to which Biblical Archaeologists were committed to helping their academic colleagues build such collections.

SHERDS FROM NELSON GLUECK'S SURVEYS

In November 1939, May wrote to his close friend, Robert Engberg, a fellow former staff member at Megiddo who was at that time serving as the field secretary of the American School of Oriental Research (W.F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research) in Jerusalem. At the end of his letter to Engberg, May asked, 'Are there available representative collections of pottery sherds which we might have for the expense of paying shipping charges?'¹⁹ Engberg replied, 'Nelson [Glueck] assures me that he has some Transjordan sherds in Cincinnati which you may have.'²⁰

Nelson Glueck is renowned for his explorations and field surveys throughout Transjordan and the Negev Desert (*Figure 5*).²¹ During his surveys, he accumulated thousands of sherds, which he later collected, analyzed, and published a selection of in his *Explorations in Eastern Palestine* series. As the original survey permit holder who legally exported his artifacts back to the United States, Glueck was able to give away his artifacts to whomever he wanted. Based on May's exchange with Engberg, it is clear that following his surveys, Glueck sent a selection of his material back to Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati for further analysis. A selection of this material was sent to Oberlin.

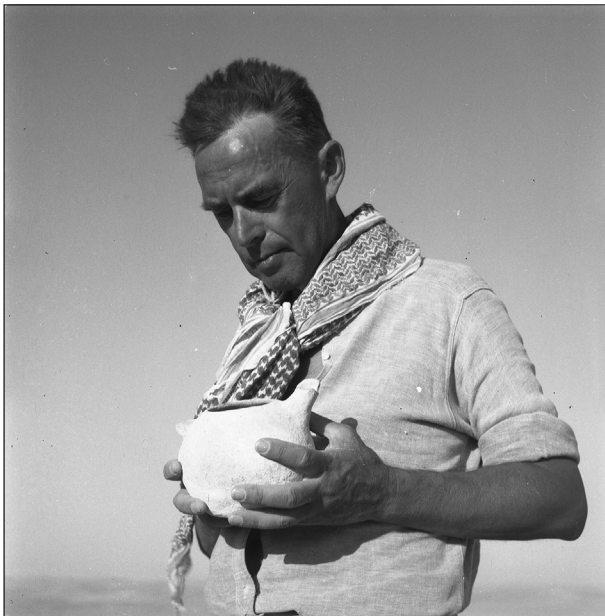


Figure 5 Nelson Glueck
(Courtesy of The Jacob Rader
Marcus Center of the American
Jewish Archives, Cincinnati,
Ohio, americanjewisharchives.org).

¹⁸ Herbert G. May Letter to W. Fredrick Bohn 17 May, Correspondence Series, Herbert G. May Papers, Box 1, Oberlin College Archive, 1937.

¹⁹ Herbert G. May Letter to Robert M. Engberg 14 November. Topical Files, Herbert G. May Papers, Box 1, Oberlin College Archive, 1939.

²⁰ Robert M. Engberg Letter to Herbert G. May, 5 December. Topical Files, Herbert G. May Papers, Box 1, Oberlin College Archive, 1939a.

²¹ Philip. J. King *American Archaeology in the Mideast: A History of the American Schools of Oriental Research* (Philadelphia: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1983), 96.

Glueck's artifacts arrived from Cincinnati in late September 1940 at which time May placed them in a glass cabinet in his primary classroom.²² Later that year, May wrote a personal memorandum describing the artifacts he received as,

'Objects from the explorations of Nelson Glueck in Edom and Moab, specimens of copper ore and slag from the mines and furnaces of Solomon at Khirbet Gwhewibeh and Jariyeh, and a study collection of more than a hundred sherds from the sites of Hamr Ifdan, Balua, Medeineh, Meneiyeh, and Saliyeh (*Figures 6, 7*).'²³



Figure 6 ONESC 273, Iron Age rim sherd from Meneiyeh gifted by Nelson Glueck in 1940. Photograph by author.

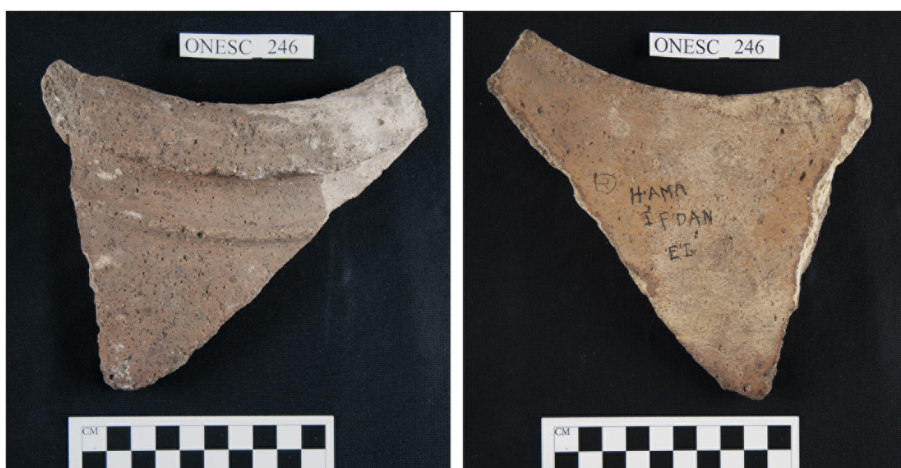


Figure 7 Iron Age Rim Sherd from Hamr Ifdan gifted by Nelson Glueck in 1940. Photograph by author.

Each of these sites appears in the first two volumes of *Explorations in Eastern Palestine*.²⁴ Despite the large number of artifacts sent to Oberlin College, Glueck's archive at Hebrew Union College preserves no record of the transaction.²⁵

A LOAN COLLECTION FROM HAVERFORD COLLEGE

May was similarly able to utilize his academic connections to acquire 50 objects on loan from the Haverford College Museum of Biblical Archaeology. These objects had been excavated by Haverford College at Beth Shemesh between 1928–1933 and were both complete and

²² Herbert G. May Letter to George Walter Fiske, 20 September, Correspondence Series, Herbert G. May Papers, Box 1, Oberlin College Archives, 1940b.

²³ Herbert G. May Memorandum of Objects Received for the Exhibit of Old Testament Antiquities in Room 4. Bosworth Hall. Departmental Files Relating to the Oberlin Graduate School of Theology (GST), Herbert G. May Papers, Box 1, Oberlin College Archive, 1940c.

²⁴ Nelson Glueck. "Explorations in Eastern Palestine, I." *The Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 14 (1933): 1–113; Nelson Glueck. "Explorations in Eastern Palestine, II." *The Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 15 (1934): IX–202.

²⁵ Dana Herman, Email to author, January 9, 2020.

published. Following their excavation, they were exported to the United States and kept in a museum Haverford College established for their storage.²⁶

In early May 1940, Herbert May sent a letter through one of his students, who had previously studied at Haverford College, to John W. Flight, a professor of Old Testament Languages and Literature, and the curator of the Haverford College Archaeological Museum (*Figure 8*). Flight replied to May's initial loan request on May 27th, 1940 writing, 'I shall be glad to send along to you one of our loan collections,' also offering May the opportunity to procure replica Casts, produced at the University of Pennsylvania, of objects excavated at Beth Shemesh²⁷ As opposed to Glueck's gift, Flight's letters indicate a comprehensive record keeping process including a signed contract and a descriptive inventory of the loaned objects. For the purposes of record keeping, the objects loaned to Oberlin were specifically marked with individual loaned object numbers to correspond to Flight's inventory.



Figure 8 John W. Flight. Reproduced from the Haverford Record. 1958. (Courtesy of Quaker & Special Collections, Haverford College, Haverford, Pennsylvania).

After May paid for shipping, artifact packing, and the three replica Casts, Flight sent 50 objects accompanied by an object inventory, and a loan contract for May to sign and return. He also offered Herbert May additional artifacts writing, 'should you wish any other artifacts which may be of use to you - or fragments of various types and periods, we may be able to supply you from our quantities of materials here.'²⁸ According to the original agreement between Haverford College and the Oberlin, the objects were on loan for five years, with an option to renew the loan. While it is possible that May renewed the loan, May's archive at Oberlin contains no record of a loan renewal and the objects remain at Oberlin College some 80 years later.

The Beth Shemesh objects arrived at Oberlin by June 14th and were immediately placed within May's classroom. As complete and published artifacts, May saw the group of objects loaned by Haverford as the most significant at Oberlin, describing them to a colleague as his museum's nucleus along with the material collected while at Megiddo (May 1940a).²⁹ In a personal memorandum May wrote that it was,

²⁶ Margaret S. Eliot and Kirby S. Sylvester *Guide to Depositories of Manuscript Collections in Pennsylvania*. (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical Commission, 1939), 23.

²⁷ John W. Flight. Letter to Herbert G. May 27 May. Correspondence Series, Herbert G. May Papers, Box 1. Oberlin College Archive, 1940a.

²⁸ John W. Flight Letter to Herbert G. May, 4 June. Correspondence Series, Herbert G. May Papers, Box 1. Oberlin College Archives, 1940b.

²⁹ Herbert G. May Letter to George Walter Fiske 14 June, Correspondence Series, Herbert G. May Papers, Box 1, Oberlin College Archive, 1940a.

'compris[ed] [of] some fifty objects including pottery objects such as jugs, bowls, jars, lamps, and representative sherds, and also flint-sickle blades, bronze arrow and spear heads, beads, [an] Egyptian amulet, oxidized grapes, whetstones etc., and excellent replicas of a Canaanite game-board, [the] wedding scarab of Amenhotep III, and an important cuneiform tablet (Figures 9, 10, 11, 12).'³⁰



Figure 9 ONESC 008 Middle Bronze Age dagger from Tel Beth Shemesh. Loaned by Haverford College in 1940. Photograph by author.



Figure 10 ONESC 04, Iron IIC Cooking Pot from Beth Shemesh. Loaned by Haverford College in 1940. Photograph by author.

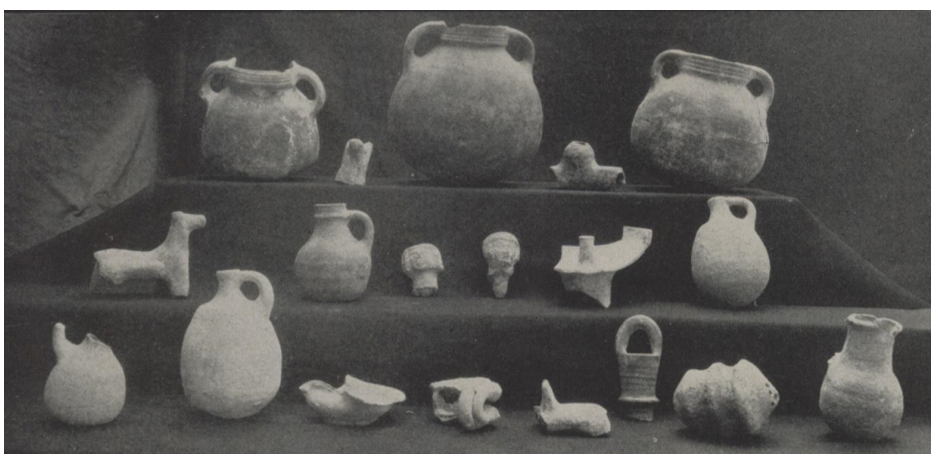


Figure 11 ONESC 04 in its original publication. Reproduced from Grant 1934, Plate XXV. (Courtesy of the Penn Museum).

Examining this list and contrasting its artifacts with those given by Glueck, it is clear that loans were a means of acquiring the types of complete objects that could not simply be given away as gifts.



Figure 12 Herbert May shows a visitor ONESC 04 in 1951 (courtesy of the Oberlin College Archives). Graduate School of Theology Subseries VI Box 1.

The rapidity with which May acquired the loan collection from Haverford College demonstrates that, for members of the Biblical Archaeology community, such loans were commonplace and easy to secure. That May even knew Haverford College had an official loan program suggests that the program might have been common knowledge to members of this community. Though Flight might not have known Herbert May personally, as an ASOR member, and someone with archaeological experience in Palestine, May was afforded a certain level of trust regarding his ability to properly care for and use archaeological artifacts.

A CUNEIFORM TABLET FROM THE ORIENTAL INSTITUTE

Herbert May next utilized his academic connections to acquire Mesopotamian objects, useful for illustrating the broader Near Eastern context of ancient Israelite culture and religion. In April 1941, Herbert May had a phone conversation with John A. Wilson, a noted Egyptologist and then Director of the Oriental Institute (*Figure 13*). May knew Wilson from his time studying at the University of Chicago Divinity School, where Wilson served as a mentor.³¹



Figure 13 John A. Wilson. University of Chicago Photographic Archive, [apf1-11426], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

31 May, *Material Remains*, vii.

During their conversation, May asked Wilson if it was possible for the Oriental Institute to send one of its cuneiform tablets to Oberlin. By the end of April, Wilson wrote to Herbert May to confirm that he was giving Oberlin a cuneiform tablet excavated at Uruk. In his letter, Wilson explained that the tablet was a ‘membership gift’ and stated that he was giving the object, ‘so that you may make effective use of antiquities in your classes.’³² Wilson’s reference to the cuneiform tablet as a membership gift was likely meant as tongue-in-cheek as it seems obvious that most members of the Oriental Institute Museum would not receive archaeological objects upon renewing their membership.

As stated in his letter, Wilson justified his gift due to Herbert May’s declared intention of using the object for teaching. Thus, for Wilson, if an object was to be used in an academic educational setting by a qualified member of the Near Eastern archaeology community, and especially one of the Oriental Institute’s own, it was considered acceptable to simply give it away. The issue of whether there is an official record of this tablet leaving the museum however is yet to be investigated. While it is currently unclear exactly how common this practice was, additional study of other college collections across the United States would greatly improve our understanding.

AN UNDOCUMENTED SECOND GIFT BY GLUECK?

The three aforementioned artifact acquisitions are attested through correspondence preserved in Herbert May’s Oberlin archive. However, the presence of a large group of additional objects in the ONESC suggest that Nelson Glueck gave Herbert May a second gift in the early 1950s. No archival record of this transaction has survived either at Oberlin or in Glueck’s archives at Hebrew Union College or ASOR.³³ This lack of records underscores how these rapid transferences succeeded in circulating artifacts but have ultimately left collections behind with unknown origin or provenance, compromising their long-term usefulness.

Oberlin’s collection contains 40 sherds and four⁴ lithic artifacts from a group of ten sites, all of which Glueck surveyed and published in *Explorations in Eastern Palestine Volume IV*.³⁴ These sites include: Khirbet Harqala/Herakla, Tell Mustah (Tell el-Mustah), Tell Umm Hamad esh-Sherqi (East) and Gharbi (West), Tell Misqa (Tell Miski), Tell el Mazar, Tell Sheikh edh-Diyab, Khirbet Kerak (Tel Beth Yerah), Ain Duq (Na’aran), and Jerash. That the group of artifacts goes together is supported by the fact that all were marked in black marker in the same distinctive handwriting that appeared on objects from Glueck’s first gift. The ONESC’s sherds from Khirbet Kerak (Tel Beth Yerah) are also marked 7/10/46 (October 7th, 1946), a date corresponding to one of the months when Nelson Glueck intensively surveyed Jordan Valley sites (*Figure 14*).³⁵ On preponderance of evidence, these artifacts most likely came from Glueck directly.

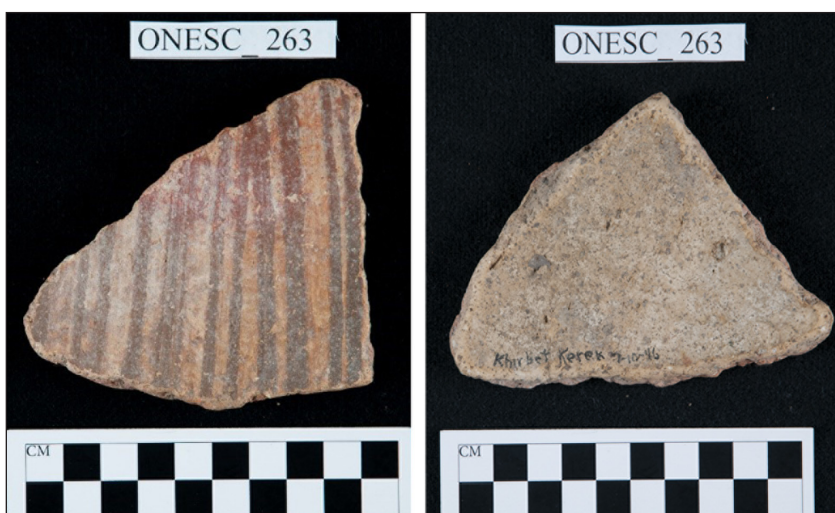


Figure 14 Grain Wash/
Band Slip Ware Sherd from
Khirbet Kerak (Tel Beth Yerah)
collected by Nelson Glueck,
later given to Herbert May.

³² John A. Wilson Letter to Herbert G. May, 25 April. Correspondence Series, Herbert G. May Papers, Box 2. Oberlin College Archive, 1941.

³³ Dana Herman, Email to author, January 9, 2020.

³⁴ Glueck, Nelson. “Explorations in Eastern Palestine, IV.” *The Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 25–28 (1951): iii–423.

³⁵ Glueck, “Explorations,” 404.

From 1939–40 and later between 1942 and 1947, Nelson Glueck conducted surveys that would eventually be published in Volume IV, after which he returned to the United States to begin his tenure as president of Hebrew Union College.³⁶ Upon returning to the United States Glueck sent a certain number of the artifacts he published in that volume to the Museum of the Department of Antiquities in Amman, and the rest to the Smithsonian.³⁷ In order to explain Glueck's second gift, prior to sending sherds to the Smithsonian, as was the case with his first two surveys, Glueck must have sent several bags filled with pottery and lithics back to Cincinnati for temporary storage and analysis, a group of which he eventually sent to Herbert May.³⁸

Though uncertain exactly when this second gift took place, since the Smithsonian Institution accessioned sherds from Glueck's fourth survey in 1952, it is possible that Glueck sent artifacts to Oberlin at around the same time.³⁹ Dating Glueck's second gift to the early 1950s also fits with the background of Glueck's scholarship at that time. By the early 1950s Glueck had finished working on the fourth volume of *Explorations in Eastern Palestine* and had begun a new project in Israel's Negev desert. As a result, Glueck might have been willing to offload a portion of the artifacts he had accumulated in Cincinnati as he had done in 1940.

One possible reason Glueck's second gift may not have been recorded through similar correspondence or documentation as the first may relate to his becoming better acquainted with Herbert May from the early 1940s into the 1950s. When Glueck gave his first gift, the two figures barely knew one another, leading May to go through an intermediary to acquire objects. Letters in May's Oberlin archive however suggest that by the mid-1950s, Glueck and May were personal friends.⁴⁰ As a result, similar to how he was able to acquire objects from the Oriental Institute, May might have arranged for the second gift with Nelson Glueck more informally.

BEYOND OBERLIN: HOW COMMONLY WERE LOANS AND GIFTS USED FOR BUILDING COLLECTIONS?

That Herbert May was able to collect hundreds of archaeological artifacts while only leaving behind fragmentary correspondence suggests that other Biblical Archaeologists might have built collections through similar means. These collections however are yet to be identified in the broader academic literature. This might be attributed to two connected factors. Firstly, as demonstrated by the case of May, many such informally collected collections were assembled by individual professors who acted as curators and were likely the only individuals with complete knowledge of their collection's origins. While these professors, including May, might have passed down some of their knowledge to their successors, it is unlikely that this was done systematically. Compounding this problem, the gradual decline of American Biblical Archaeology from the 1960s onwards meant that institutions that were formerly prominent in the field stopped hiring Biblical Archaeologists and offering Biblical Archaeology courses.⁴¹ As a result and as took place at Oberlin, this chain of oral knowledge would have been broken leaving behind unused collections with entirely unknown histories.

Nonetheless, it is possible to infer that such collections were widespread. When May acquired Oberlin's loan collection from the Haverford College Museum of Biblical Archaeology, the museum's curator, John W. Flight indicated that he was sending Herbert May **one** of Haverford's loan collections, suggesting that certain objects at Haverford were earmarked

³⁶ Jonathan Brown and Lawrence B Kutler, *Nelson Glueck: Biblical Archaeologist and President of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2006); Glueck, "Explorations, IV," xvii.

³⁷ Glueck, "Explorations," xviii.

³⁸ Samuel Greengus "Remembering Nelson Glueck." *The American Jewish Archives Journal* 70 no. 1–2: 119–129 (2018), 124.

³⁹ Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History. "Department of Anthropology Collections Keyword Search, Nelson Glueck. Accessed 23 January. <https://collections.nmnh.si.edu/search/anth/?ark=ark%3A%2F65665%2F3ca2616d4087e4457b969a2c7e1db7d1c>.

⁴⁰ James P. Harland Letter to Herbert G. May, February. Files Relating to the Bible Series, Herbert G. May Papers, Box 1. Oberlin College Archive, 1956.

⁴¹ William G. Dever. "What Remains of the House That Albright Built?" *The Biblical Archaeologist* 56, no. 1 (1993): 25–35, DOI: [10.2307/3210358](https://doi.org/10.2307/3210358); William G. Dever. "The Death of a Discipline." *Biblical Archaeology Review* 21, no 5 (1995): 50–55, 70.

for loan in specific groupings. The objects that eventually arrived at Oberlin were marked VI, potentially indicating that Oberlin's was the sixth loan collection (*Figure 15*). Unfortunately, the location of these other loan collections is entirely unknown. The fact that objects marked using this system do not appear on the artifacts that remained at Haverford suggests that these loaned collections, like Oberlin's, remain at the institutions they were loaned to.⁴² While smaller collections of objects from Beth Shemesh do exist at Bryn Mawr College and Smith college, the exact mechanics of how these collections were formed is unknown and it seems that their origin is not in Haverford's loan program.⁴³

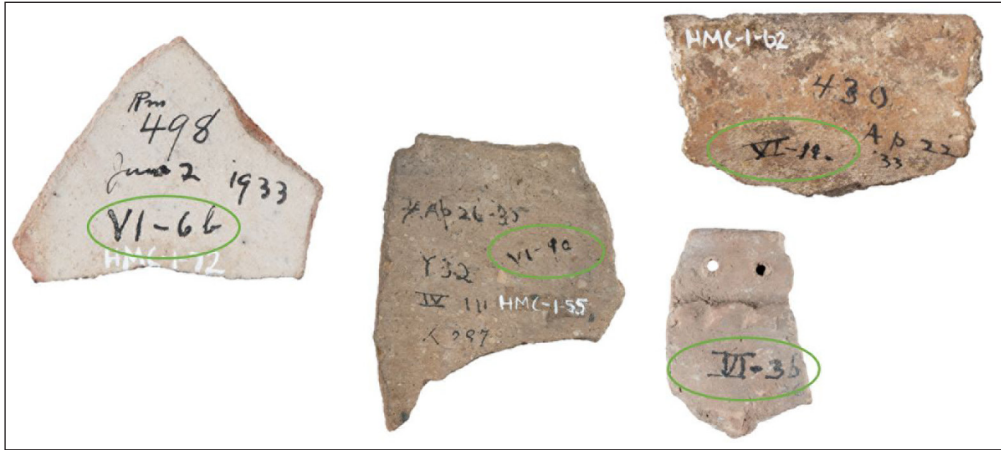


Figure 15 An assortment of sherds from Tel Beth Shemesh Loaned by Haverford College in 1940. The sherds are marked with both their original field numbers and with unique loan numbers starting with the roman numeral VI. Photograph by author.

Nelson Glueck's ASOR archive preserves records of him giving sherd study collections, originally collected during his surveys, to several other professors, who like Herbert May, were ASOR members. In a December 1939 letter, Robert Engberg wrote to Glueck that, 'your annual sherds have been 'sold' to Professor [Carl Sumner] Knopf of the University of Southern California. Action was initiated by John Trever...I am of course reserving one of your **five** Palestinian collections for [John Harden] Hicks (an Old Testament Professor at Southern Methodist University).'⁴⁴ Later that month, Engberg again wrote to Glueck that, 'we are sending sherd collections to [John Harden] Hicks...the other three will probably be disposed of shortly'⁴⁵ The scenario of Knopf and Hicks acquiring sherd study collections from Glueck's surveys via an intermediary colleague mirrors how Herbert May acquired his collection. It is possible that the sherds that made their way to Oberlin were among the remaining three collections Engberg refers to disposing of.

Based on these examples alone, it should be possible to track down at least nine additional Biblical Archaeology collections dispersed by Nelson Glueck and the Haverford College Museum of Biblical Archaeology. These have thus far proved elusive with no clearly published information or internet sources pointing to where those objects might be outside of the references to the University of Southern California or Southern Methodist University that appear in Glueck and Engberg's correspondence. As dispersing objects through loans and gifts seems to have been a widely accepted practice, it is likely that far more individuals and institutions were dispersing objects meaning that many more Biblical Archaeology teaching collections of unknown size were likely dispersed contemporaneously with Oberlin's.

⁴² Penn Museum. "Purchased from Haverford College, 1961 Accession Lot." Accessed September 17, 2021. <https://www.penn.museum/collections/accessionlot.php?irn=666>.

⁴³ Penn Museum Archives. "Elihu Grant Beth-Shemesh Excavation Records" Accessed July 24, 2021. <https://www.penn.museum/collections/archives/findingaid/552815>; Francis Robinson *Smith Alumnae Quarterly* 32. Brattleboro, VT: The Vermont Printing Company, 1941; TriArte. "Pottery from Beth Shemesh Excavation." Accessed July 24. <https://triarte.brynmawr.edu/prt271>.

⁴⁴ Robert M. Engberg. Letter to Nelson Glueck, 12 December. Correspondence Series, Nelson Glueck Papers, 1932-2005, Box 1. ASOR Archives, 1939b.

⁴⁵ Robert M. Engberg Letter to Nelson Glueck, 19 December. Correspondence Series, Nelson Glueck Papers, 1932-2005, Box 1. ASOR Archives, 1939c.

The previously illustrated examples demonstrate that loans and gifts were facilitated by individuals either through correspondence or over the phone. Equally, such arrangements might have been made in person at events like conferences. Though efficient for distributing artifacts quickly, such distributions were also inherently dangerous as in most cases, the history and origins of collections assembled in this way has been lost. In the early 1940s however, ASOR explored the possibility of acting as a central distribution node for the dispersal of artifacts to member schools and scholars across the United States. The limited archival information referencing this episode found in May's archive at Oberlin can be used to assess wider attitudes within Biblical Archaeology towards collection building through loans and gifts.

In 1941, Herbert May was invited to serve on an ASOR committee called the Cast Investigation Committee. This committee was set up to investigate both the interest of ASOR member schools in acquiring archaeological teaching collections and the means by which such collections could be assembled and distributed centrally via ASOR.⁴⁶ That such a committee existed at all is evidence of the contemporaneous widespread desire by professors and institutions to create teaching collections of Near Eastern artifacts assembled from the larger collections of excavating institutions and surveying scholars. A survey sent out by the Cast Investigation Committee in 1941 found that,

'Thirty-seven ASOR institutions wanted to acquire archaeological artifacts not needed by the institutions that possess them...16 institutions express their definite desire for Cast objects...26 institutions wish to have a specimen collection of Palestinian pottery, and suggest names like Wright, Engberg, Albright and Glueck to make the collection. 25 institutions wish to have loan collections made available....4 institutions are willing to distribute their archaeological objects... mostly potsherds....9 institutions possess loan collections that may be secured by other institutions temporarily or permanently.'⁴⁷

Although the Cast Investigation Committee's plans never came to fruition, their survey is illustrative of the widespread desires of the biblical scholars and archaeologists within ASOR's membership to acquire teaching collections through loans and gifts. It also demonstrates an attempt by ASOR to centralize and systematize the sort of interpersonal artifact exchanges Herbert May relied on to acquire Oberlin's collection. As a scholar with roots at Oriental Institute who developed numerous connections through his time excavating in Mandatory Palestine, May likely had closer connections with scholars who had access to antiquities than many of his peers. That so many institutional members of ASOR wished to acquire artifacts perhaps indicates that not all scholars or institutions could rely on loans and gifts equally. As such, the Cast Investigation Committee might have served or even been designed as a levelling mechanism.

Besides the widespread interest in acquiring collections, the survey's results also say a great deal about how these collections could be distributed. The specific mentions of William Foxwell Albright, George Ernest Wright, Robert Engberg, and Nelson Glueck suggests that each of these scholars had assembled large sherd study collections which could be dispersed similarly to how May and other scholars had previously acquired artifacts from Glueck. Though the names of the four schools willing to distribute their objects are not recorded, more than likely, these institutions were ones who, like Haverford College, had sponsored an excavation in Palestine or Transjordan, and thereafter assembled large, and largely unused, collections.

Through Cast distributions, artifacts dispersed through partage and then exported to the United States, could find their way to numerous schools, dispersing artifacts far beyond the original and legally mandated division of finds. As only a limited number of American schools carried out excavations in this period, the large number of institutions willing to part with collections in some way suggests that many, if not most, schools who conducted excavations

⁴⁶ Herbert G. May Letter to Toyozo W. Nakarai, 28 February, Topical Files, Herbert G. May Papers, Box 1, Oberlin College Archive, 1941.

⁴⁷ Herbert G. May, Robert H. Pfeffer, and Toyozo W. Nakarai, Cast Investigation Committee Annual Report. Files Relating to the Bible Series, Herbert G. May Papers, Box 2, Oberlin College Archive, 1941.

in Mandatory Palestine and Transjordan were more than willing to distribute study collections to their colleagues through loans and gifts.

While May's exchange with Haverford College and first gift from Nelson Glueck were both documented by correspondence in his archive, the hypothesized second gift left by Glueck left no paper trail either at Oberlin or at Hebrew Union College. If professors besides Nelson Glueck were giving away sherds and other artifacts in equal numbers, it is feasible that many undocumented Biblical Archaeology collections are spread throughout the United States outside of the more than nine that likely exist in connection with Nelson Glueck or Haverford College. Had the Cast Investigation Committee succeeded in centralizing these exchanges around ASOR, records might exist for them in a central archive, making it far simpler to track the 'object habits' of Biblical Archaeologists. But, as the committee's potential never came to fruition, artifact distributions remained at an interpersonal level. Thus, the locations of additional collections distributed by loans and gifts in this period can, for the moment, only be guessed at.

DISCUSSION

Though clear that loans and gifts were commonplace and widely accepted collection building strategies, the question remains as to why scholars would be so willing to distribute artifacts and why loans and gifts were so actively pursued at a time when artifacts were easily purchased on the antiquities market.⁴⁸

A primary motivation for the Beth Shemesh Museum's loan program might have been constraints on display and storage space at Haverford College. Haverford's museum occupied only a portion of one floor in an academic building. Surviving descriptions of the museum state that it displayed only the, 'best materials,' suggesting that thousands of objects exported to the United States went unused and were kept in storage.⁴⁹ Whereas large and wealthy schools, such as the University of Chicago, could accommodate their growing collections by building new museum buildings, for a school of Haverford's size, building a museum building with significant storage space would have represented a serious and likely impossible investment.⁵⁰ The same explanation might hold true for the other institutions that were willing to give away artifacts as Cast Committee distributions.

This explanation is further suggested in May's correspondence with John W. Flight, wherein Flight specifically referred to Haverford's '*quantities* of materials (Flight 1940).' Flight's willingness to send May any number of artifacts he wished also lends credence to the idea that the objects in storage at Haverford College were rarely used and could reasonably be shipped somewhere else in great quantity without affecting the completeness of Haverford's collection. Read this way, it would appear not only that Flight was willing to send May a greater number of objects, but also that he was actively trying to circulate artifacts which typically went untouched in storage at Haverford. While the original agreement between Haverford and Oberlin stipulates a five-year loan period with option to renew, the absence of evidence for such a renewal in May's archive at Oberlin combined with the fact that the six known loan collections, including Oberlin's, remain at the institutions they were loaned to, suggests that these loans were in fact permanent. This lends additional credence to the theory that Haverford's program may have been directly associated with a desire to reduce storage burdens. Though archeology's difficulties with curation and storage have been highlighted in recent decades, this example suggests that such issues are hardly recent developments in the field.⁵¹

Examining Engberg's correspondence with Glueck concerning the dispersal of sherd study collection, Engberg's specific use of the term 'disposal' might indicate that for Glueck, retaining

⁴⁸ Kersel, "the Trade", 25–26.

⁴⁹ Friends Historical Association. "Summer Meeting Friends Historical Association." *Bulletin of Friends Historical Association* 25, no. 1 (1936), 4.

⁵⁰ Teeter, "a History.", 68.

⁵¹ Kersel, "Storage Wars."; William H. Marquardt, Anta Montet-White, and Sandra Scholtz C. "Resolving the Crisis in Archaeological Collections Curation." *American Antiquity* 47 no. 2 (1982): DOI: [10.1017/S0002731600061308](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0002731600061308).

these objects was entirely undesirable. Prior to the 1960s, sherds were utilized almost exclusively for chronological and typological analyses.⁵² In this sense, in the archaeological understanding of that time, once Glueck used his sherds to date the sites he surveyed, most of what he collected would no longer serve a purpose and would instead sit unused in storage at Hebrew Union College. That Glueck already split his sherds into separate ‘collections’ suggests that he not only wanted to mitigate this potential storage problem, but that he was also aware that numerous other Biblical Archaeologists, without access to institutionally excavated collections, would value his sherds as significant contributions to their own archaeological teaching collections.

On this point, Biblical Archaeology differed from many other archaeological subfields in that most of its practitioners did not actually maintain or even participate in field projects. While several American excavations conducted from the 1950s and 60s onwards were often supported by institutional consortiums, each of whom would receive artifacts through partage, during the interwar period, most excavations were run by single institutions.⁵³ Further, as most Biblical Archaeologists were at small seminaries rather than wealthy museums, they often did not possess significant financial resources for purchasing collections from the antiquities market. This alone may have been a primary reason that institutions attempted to avoid purchasing artifacts. In May’s case for example, throughout his correspondence, it is clear that one of his primary concerns was related to the overall cost of acquiring artifacts. The fact that loans and gifts could be used to acquire objects of similar quality to those found on the antiquities market with the added bonus of strengthening academic connections would have made them particularly attractive.

Lastly, as argued by Davis, the purpose of Biblical Archaeology as a discipline was to demonstrate the veracity of the Hebrew Bible through use of realia, or the materiality and sense of actuality provided by archaeological artifacts.⁵⁴ As a result, in order to convey these broader points most successfully to students, it would have been necessary to have actual artifacts in the classroom. Equally, a desire to perpetuate the field’s theological message of biblical truth might have played some role in the willingness of schools and scholars to disperse objects to other Biblical Archaeologists. This point however requires further study related to the unique relationship between Biblical Archaeologists and artifacts as mediated by theology.

The cases of the Haverford College Archaeology Museum Loan Program and Nelson Glueck’s sherd study collections reveal that the use of loans and gifts for Biblical Archaeology collection formation was practiced by many within the discipline. The relatively few institutions and figures that carried out permitted excavations or surveys in Mandatory Palestine returned to the United States with large artifact collections. Even though these institutions had archaeological programs and museums, the number of actively utilized or displayed artifacts was miniscule compared to their total holdings. By giving away archaeological objects as loans and gifts then, scholars and institutions with access to collections could mitigate their own storage problems while sharing antiquities with scholars who could not acquire collections of their own. Though sherds and certain complete objects might have been considered extraneous to an institution or scholar’s needs, these objects would be highly valued by the biblical scholars who received such objects as loans and gifts and thereafter made them the centerpieces of their personal teaching collections. The addition of such objects to these collections likely had theological underpinnings, though these require further study.

CONCLUSION

From Herbert May’s retirement in 1973 until the past few years, the history and composition of the ONESC were almost entirely unknown.⁵⁵ Whereas schools that undertook excavations and

⁵² William Foxwell Albright *From the Stone Age to Christianity: Monotheism and the Historical Process*. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1940), 20–23; David P. S. Peacock “The Scientific Analysis of Ancient Ceramics: A Review.” *World Archaeology* 1 no. 3 (1970): DOI: [10.1080/00438243.1970.9979454](https://doi.org/10.1080/00438243.1970.9979454).

⁵³ Dever, “Syro-Palestinian,” 47; King *American Archaeology*, 77–82, 141–45.

⁵⁴ Davis. *Shifting Sands*, VIII.

⁵⁵ Hirsch, “the Oberlin Near East Study Collection.”

acquired artifacts via divisions of finds maintain a place in the disciplinary history of Biblical Archaeology, the origins of collections assembled by other means have in many cases been forgotten or overlooked. Through an intensive examination of Herbert May's archive at Oberlin combined with the historical accession and field numbers provided by the artifacts in ONESC, it is now possible not only to reconstruct the collection's origins, but also to expound the collecting strategies commonly employed by May in acquiring artifacts between the 1930s and 1950s.

May was far from alone in his collecting methodology. While few schools and scholars were the recipients of artifacts via British Mandatory partage laws, as indicated by the records of the CAST Investigation Committee, a much broader group of Biblical Archaeologists wanted to build study collections through loans and gifts. While this methodology served to reinforce the social ties of Biblical Archaeologists, that artifacts moved through personal rather than along institutional networks has led to a situation in which certain gifts, including that made by Glueck in the early 1950s to Oberlin, were never documented.

Discovering the forgotten history of Oberlin's collection and the rediscovery of its objects' provenance has increased the value of the collection incalculably, allowing it to be used for a myriad of new educational purposes at the college in recent years. These have included sharing object's stories during object handling workshops and using them as the basis for student research.⁵⁶ It is hoped that the research presented here will also serve as a demonstration that other collections of unknown origin may similarly be unlocked to recover the stories they hold. This is especially vital as provenance research is often limited to objects in museum collections and high-profile art objects rather than the teaching collections languishing in departmental storage at universities. As a result, the full depth of the object habits of scholars working in the Near East and Eastern Mediterranean worlds in the first half of the 20th century have yet to be fully explored. Lastly, the rediscovery of artifact's provenance means that collections dispersed by loans and gifts might be reunited through online platforms such as open context.

Though May's interactions suggest that his collecting strategies were open to all members of the Biblical Archaeology community, the relatively close distance between Oberlin, Ohio and Cincinnati, might have made Oberlin College an especially convenient place for Nelson Glueck to place sherds extraneous to his needs. In addition, as a University of Chicago educated Biblical Archaeologist with excavation experience in Palestine, May might have been particularly privileged to receive artifacts. Thus, while the research done on ONESC represents an important first look into the object habits of Biblical Archaeologists, further research on a greater number of collections will be necessary in order to clarify the range of collecting strategies open to Biblical Archaeologists during the first half of the 20th century. Additional research is needed to fully understand the unique intersections between Biblical Archaeologists, objects, religion, and materiality; however, it is hoped that the research presented here has brought light to an as of yet undiscussed phenomenon.

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The author has no competing interests to declare.

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