MEGIDDO

A CITY UNEARTHED, A PAST IMAGINED

SEPTEMBER 18, 2025–MARCH 15, 2026

THE MEGIDDO EXPEDITION
FOURTEEN SEASONS, TWENTY CITIES

Megiddo is a place of deep time—an ancient city layered with stories of kings and empires, of military conflict and cultural exchange—strategically located on a key land route linking Egypt and the Mediterranean world with West Asia. Excavated by the University of Chicago between 1925 and 1939 under the British Mandate in Palestine, and now located within the modern State of Israel, the site of ancient Megiddo (modern Tell el-Mutesellim), in the Jezreel Valley, hosted the first major field expedition of the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures.

The discovery, documentation, and interpretation carried out over fourteen seasons of fieldwork at Megiddo laid the groundwork for modern archaeology in the southern Levant. Working stratum by stratum, monument by monument, object by object across multiple excavation areas, the expedition ultimately recorded a sequence of twenty cities at Megiddo, spanning from the Neolithic through the Persian period. Its innovative, scientifically grounded excavation methods produced a rigorous dataset that continues to shape our understanding of the region's deep history.

This exhibition marks the centennial of that campaign, revisiting not only what was unearthed but also what was imagined: a site transformed into a stage for institutional ambition, philanthropic vision, and global storytelling.

Excavation of the water system by local and regional workers, with a visit from expedition staff, May 16, 1931 (Megiddo SA 460)

Staff and spouses, 1929. *Front:* William Staples, Yemima Guy, P. L. O. Guy, Margaret Staples, Ivan Terentieff. *Back:* Harry Parker, Edward DeLoach, Olaf Lind, Robert Lamon, Geoffrey Shipton (Megiddo A 133)

Ali Muhammed Musa el Kusseri with local assistant reconstructing pottery forms, 1927 (Megiddo B 273)

Women carrying baskets near the expedition headquarters, 1926 (Megiddo A 88)

Megiddo staff, including Clarence Fisher (center) and Egyptian workmen (Quftis), 1926 (Megiddo SA 158)

THE MEGIDDO TEAM

The Megiddo Expedition was led by three successive field directors: Clarence S. Fisher (1925–1927), P. L. O. Guy (1927–1934), and Gordon Loud (1935–1939). In 1925, Fisher, an American archaeologist, wrote to ISAC director James Henry Breasted urging American excavations in British Mandate Palestine, citing the potential of Megiddo—a site on which Breasted had already set his sights. Fisher oversaw the initial seasons, establishing pioneering archaeological methods. Guy, a British Archaeologist, advanced those methods through detailed, layer-by-layer studies and helped define the site's chronology. Loud, also American, expanded the excavations, recorded major architectural complexes, and produced foundational studies that shaped the interpretation of Megiddo's intricate history. Americans Geoffrey Shipton and Robert Lamon, along with Canadian William Staples, joined the expedition in 1928. Though initially untrained, Shipton and Lamon similarly made lasting contributions, later authoring key publications on the site.

Behind the names of directors, institutions, and patrons were the hundreds of local workers—men, women, and children—whose essential contributions made the excavation of Megiddo possible. Hired seasonally from nearby Palestinian villages, they were joined by skilled Egyptian workmen (Quftis), who were brought in for their excavation expertise. These local and regional team members dug trenches, sifted soil, transported water, and maintained the expedition headquarters. Some also assisted in labeling, organizing, and restoring finds, blurring the lines between manual labor and archaeological process. While their names were largely excluded from the Western-centric narratives of official communications, publications, and media reports, their contributions are preserved in daily logs, annual lists, photographs, and payroll records. Some families returned year after year, with multiple generations contributing to the dig. The skill and knowledge of these individuals was indispensable to the expedition's success.

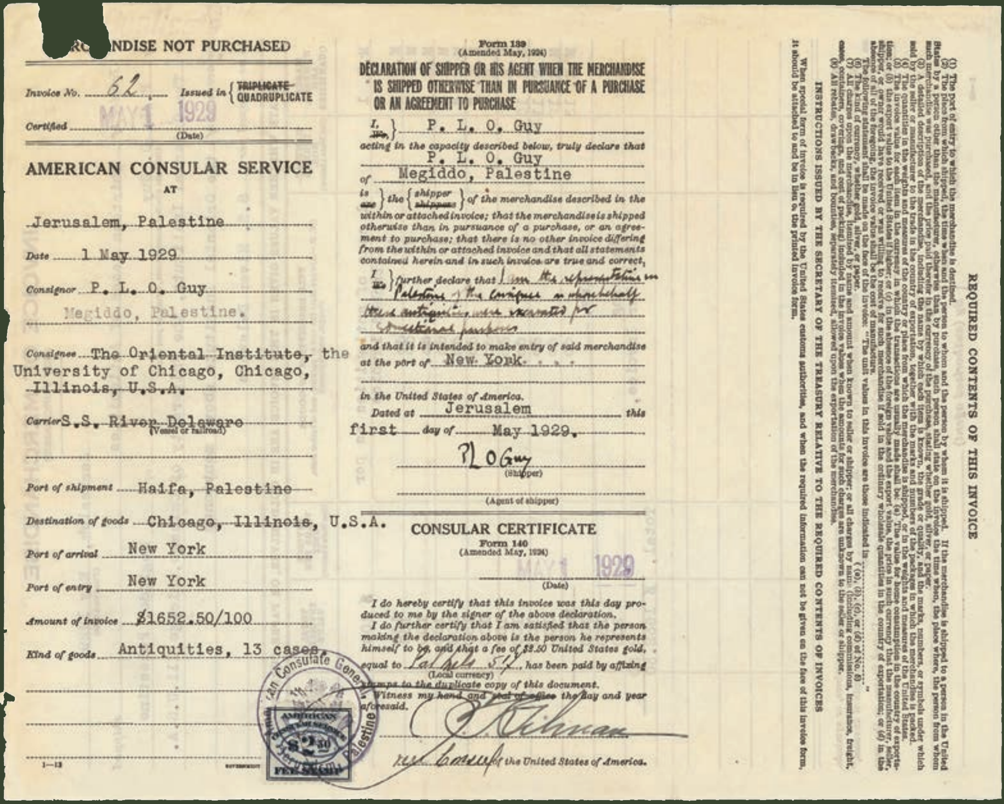
SIGNED, SEALED, DIVIDED

The system of partage—through which excavated artifacts were divided between local authorities and foreign institutions—shaped what was collected, exhibited, and valued. Such arrangements were common for archaeological projects in West Asia during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, reflecting antiquities laws designed to protect archaeological sites and vest cultural heritage ownership in the state.

The University of Chicago's licenses to excavate at Megiddo, granted under the Antiquities Ordinance, permitted the division of finds between ISAC and the British Mandate government in Palestine. Objects selected by the Department of Antiquities were shipped to Jerusalem for the Palestine Archaeological Museum (now the Rockefeller Archaeological Museum), which opened in 1938. Items allotted to ISAC were shipped to Chicago via Haifa and New York. Over the course of fourteen seasons, ten shipments were sent to Chicago. The first arrived in July 1929, the last in June 1939. Each shipment received a unique accession number. Accompanying identification lists detailed each object's field number, description, material, provenience, and period. Once at ISAC, the artifacts received museum registration numbers. In total, approximately 8,000 objects excavated by ISAC's Megiddo Expedition became part of the museum's rapidly growing collections.

Top: One of two registration rooms in the expedition headquarters (Megiddo B 234)

Bottom: Consular invoice for the 1929 shipment (accession 866)



…NDISE NOT PURCHASED

Invoice No. 62 Issued in { ~~TRIPLICATE~~ QUADRUPLICATE

Certified MAY 1 1929 (Date)

AMERICAN CONSULAR SERVICE

AT

Jerusalem, Palestine

Date 1 May 1929

Consignor P. L. O. Guy
Megiddo, Palestine.

Consignee The Oriental Institute, the University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A.

Carrier S.S. River Delaware (Vessel or railroad)

Port of shipment Haifa, Palestine

Destination of goods Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A.

Port of arrival New York

Port of entry New York

Amount of invoice $1652.50/100

Kind of goods Antiquities, 13 cases.

American Consulate General … Palestine

AMERICAN … $2.50 … FEE STAMP

Form 139
(Amended May, 1924)

DECLARATION OF SHIPPER OR HIS AGENT WHEN THE MERCHANDISE IS SHIPPED OTHERWISE THAN IN PURSUANCE OF A PURCHASE OR AN AGREEMENT TO PURCHASE

I, ~~We,~~ } P. L. O. Guy
acting in the capacity described below, truly declare that P. L. O. Guy
of Megiddo, Palestine
is ~~are~~ } the { shipper ~~shippers~~ } of the merchandise described in the within or attached invoice; that the merchandise is shipped otherwise than in pursuance of a purchase, or an agreement to purchase; that there is no other invoice differing from the within or attached invoice and that all statements contained herein and in such invoice are true and correct,
I ~~We~~ } further declare that I am the representative in Palestine of the consignee on whose behalf these antiquities were excavated for [illegible] purposes
and that it is intended to make entry of said merchandise at the port of New York
in the United States of America.
Dated at Jerusalem this first day of May 1929.

P L O Guy
(Shipper)

(Agent of shipper)

CONSULAR CERTIFICATE
Form 140
(Amended May, 1924)

MAY 1 1929
(Date)

I do hereby certify that this invoice was this day produced to me by the signer of the above declaration.
I do further certify that I am satisfied that the person making the declaration above is the person he represents himself to be, and that a fee of $2.50 United States gold, equal to [illegible] (Local currency), has been paid by affixing stamps to the duplicate copy of this document.
Witness my hand and seal of office the day and year aforesaid.

[illegible signature]
[illegible] Consul of the United States of America.

REQUIRED CONTENTS OF THIS INVOICE

INSTRUCTIONS ISSUED BY THE SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY RELATIVE TO THE REQUIRED CONTENTS OF INVOICES


PALESTINE
(Continued)
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"WE STAND AT ARMAGEDDON,
AND WE BATTLE FOR THE LORD"
Page 53
EXCAVATION DEBRIS IS PIPED TO MOUNDS, EACH MOUND REPRESENTS A YEAR'S DIGGING
1 ALL THAT IS LEFT OF SOLOMON'S ARMAGEDDON: STABLES FOR 450 HORSES
2 SOLOMON'S STABLES LOOKED LIKE THIS MODEL RECONSTRUCTION
3 SOLOMON'S THOROUGHBREDS ATE BARLEY FROM THIS STONE MANGER
25 STORY WIDE FOLDS OF AT ARMAGEDDON, 71 MILES NORTH OF JERUSALEM
WHITE LINES ON THIS CUT THROUGH ARMAGEDDON'S MOUND OF RUINS MARK THE PASSAGE OF NEARLY THREE THOUSAND YEARS OF ANTIQUITY


THE NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE, AUGUST 24, 1930
11
DIGGING UP THE "GLORY" OF KING SOLOMON
Excavations at Megiddo Recall the Splendor of the Monarch Who Was Also a Poet and a Philosopher
By J. W. Wilson
King Solomon.


638
THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS
Oct. 16, 1937
A RELIC OF WORSHIP IN PALESTINE THREE THOUSAND YEARS AGO: A CLAY ALTAR OR SHRINE FROM THE PALACE AT MEGIDDO, WITH DECORATION TYPICAL OF THE LATE BRONZE AGE.

GLOBAL STORYTELLING

Correspondence between Megiddo's field directors and ISAC leadership discussed remarkable discoveries and their strategic circulation to media outlets. They timed sensational headlines, crafted evocative language, and staged artifacts for dramatic photography. The result was a carefully orchestrated media campaign across global outlets, each proclaiming the finds vital to understanding early civilizations and the broader human story. Central to these features were embellished artifact biographies linking them to famed kings, wealthy princes, and biblical figures, with ties to well-known dynasties and religious narratives.

In 1928, under Guy's direction, the expedition quickly identified a structure as the stables of the legendary King Solomon (tenth century BCE)—a dramatic link to biblical history that captured public imagination. News of "Solomon's Stables" made headlines, celebrated as proof of Scripture confirmed in stone. Renewed excavations in the late twentieth century, however, redated the building to the ninth–eighth centuries BCE (Omride dynasty or Jeroboam II era), with alternative interpretations of its function. This episode underscores the importance of approaching Megiddo not solely through the lens of biblical tradition, but as a site with a layered, multifaceted history—shaped by many rulers, cultures, and narratives over millennia.

Top: Life feature on the Megiddo Expedition, August 1938

Bottom left: New York Times feature on Solomon's Stables, August 1928

Bottom right: Drawing by ISAC architect Charles B. Altman in the *Illustrated London News*, October 1937

GOLD AND IVORY HOARDS

Excavations in the Late Bronze Age phase of Megiddo's north palace yielded what Loud initially called "the find of the season." Buried for millennia beneath a thick destruction layer in an outer room of the palace was a hoard of finely worked objects: jewelry, vessels, decorative spoons, and cylinder seals made from gold and semiprecious stones. In a letter to Loud shortly thereafter, ISAC director John A. Wilson exclaimed, "Newspapers are waiting with tongues hanging out for feature pictures of the gold objects and an imaginative story to go with this." Not far away, in an annex of the same palace, an equally astonishing discovery emerged—a cache of 386 carved ivory pieces, similarly concealed beneath layers of debris.

While early reports of these palatial finds made headlines, Loud and Wilson were already strategizing around the impending division of artifacts and the idea of a loan. Ultimately, a generous share of the gold hoard was granted to ISAC along with a one-year loan of numerous ivories during the 1937 division of finds. These decisions paved the way for groundbreaking exhibitions first in Chicago, at the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures Museum, and then in New York, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. These exhibitions not only showcased extraordinary wealth but also symbolized Megiddo's princely elites and their participation in the vast Late Bronze Age networks of exchange, trade, and diplomacy.

Top left: Associated Press feature in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, March 15, 1937 Public domain.

Top right: Twin heads with spoons (A21055)

Bottom: Photograph of the gold hoard taken for media circulation (Megiddo B 3206)

EGYPTIAN GOLD OF 1400 B. C. DUG UP IN PALESTINE

Chicago U. Expedition at Megiddo Also Finds Cosmetic Jars and Jewelry.

By the Associated Press.

CHICAGO, March 15.—Dr. John A. Wilson, director of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, announced yesterday a large hoard of Egyptian gold had been discovered in a Palestinian palace of about 1400 B. C.

The discovery was reported by Gordon Loud, director of the Megiddo expedition of the institute in a cable received here Friday. Dr. Wilson said the cable told of Egyptian cosmetic jars and jewelry.

"It is premature to make any further comment on the discoveries reported until we have had added information from our expedition," Prof. Wilson said. "But the place and the time suggested by the cable give rise to interesting conjectures." Dr. Wilson stated he thought the gold had been found in the palace of the Prince of Megiddo. The Megiddo expedition, excavating the famous mound of Armageddon, opened its field work for the season early this winter. The Megiddo site has already produced such important finds as Solomon's stables.

THE MEGIDDO IVORIES: A GROUP FORMING THE MOST COMPREHENSIVE EXAMPLE KNOWN OF "PHŒNICIAN" ART IN THE 13TH CENTURY B.C.

[Continued from preceding page.]
been hastily cleared of most of its treasures just before the destruction of the palace, after which it was never rebuilt. In the excitement of plunder, necklaces had been torn apart and beads of gold and carnelian [Continued below.

AN EXAMPLE OF INCISED WORK FROM THE GREAT COLLECTION OF IVORIES, DATING FROM THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY B.C., RECENTLY DISCOVERED AT MEGIDDO: A DECORATED TUSK. (*Length of original, 8 inches.*)

scattered here and there. Earrings were dropped or overlooked. Alabaster jars were broken, and their fragments left behind (see illustrations on page 710). But, most fortunate for us, ivory was considered of too little intrinsic value to warrant removal. It was therefore cast aside, more than two hundred carved and incised pieces being tossed carelessly into the corners of the rooms, while the gold was carried off, perhaps to be melted down for recasting. This collection of ivories, spurned by the invaders of Megiddo some three thousand one hundred years ago, presents in a single group what is probably the most comprehensive example of 13th-century B.C. [Continued opposite.

AN IVORY PLAQUE INCISED WITH AN UNUSUALLY FINE SCENE OF CAPTIVES AND OFFERINGS BEING PRESENTED TO THE PRINCE SEATED ON A THRONE, THE SIDES OF WHICH ARE COMPOSED OF SPHINXES. (*Length of original, 10½ inches.*)

AN EXQUISITE IVORY COMB CARVED ON BOTH SIDES WITH AN IBEX ATTACKED BY A BEAST OF CANINE TYPE SHOWING FINGER-LIKE CLAWS—THE EYES OF BONE INLAID.

ADORNED WITH A BEAUTIFULLY CARVED FIGURE OF A GRIFFIN WITH OUTSPREAD WINGS: AN IVORY PLAQUE, WHICH WAS POSSIBLY A FURNITURE INLAY OR ONE SIDE OF A SMALL CASKET.

FINELY CARVED WITH A SCENE OF ANIMAL COMBAT: ONE FACE OF A FOUR-SIDED IVORY BAR, OF WHICH TWO OTHER SIDES REPRESENT SIMILAR COMBATS, AND THE FOURTH (SHOWN ON THE PRECEDING PAGE) FIGURES OF GODS. (*Actual size.*)

Continued.]
"Phœnician" art that is known to-day. The enormous variety of form and design shows clearly the influences playing on this coastal area from all sides. For figures, sphinxes, lotus and palmette designs suggest Egypt. Facial features, coiffures, and crowns are more closely associated with the north country. Mesopotamian influence may be noted in the treatment of animals, which also suggests the art of the Mediterranean islands. The fact that these foreign characteristics are not represented as they would have been in their native region establishes the local origin of these combs, boxes, bowls, ornamental plaques, and furniture fittings. The skill with which they were wrought is as remarkable as its [Continued overleaf.

A FINE ... FIGURE: AN IVORY PLAQUE FROM MEGIDDO PROBABLY CARVED ORIGINALLY AS AN INSET TO SOME PIECE OF FURNITURE.

REPRESENTING A HUMAN-HEADED SPHINX CLASPING A CUP: AN IVORY PLAQUE OF REMARKABLE COMPOSITION, DOUBTLESS FASHIONED AS FURNITURE ORNAMENTATION.

CARVED IN RELIEF WITH A SCENE OF FEASTING: AN IVORY PLAQUE ORIGINALLY FASTENED TO A BACKGROUND WITH IVORY PEGS, THE HOLES FOR WHICH ARE VISIBLE. (*Length of original, 15 inches.*)

A RELIC OF INDOOR PASTIMES AT MEGIDDO 3100 YEARS AGO: A GAMING-BOARD OF IVORY INLAID WITH GOLD.

DECORATED ON ALL ITS FOUR SIDES WITH CARVED FIGURES OF SPHINXES AND LIONS: A SMALL IVORY BOX FROM MEGIDDO. (*The inside dimensions measuring 12 by 14 by 8 centimetres.*)

FROM GROUND TO GALLERY

Collectively, the Megiddo ivories reflect the web of cultural exchange and internationalism that shaped Canaanite elite society. Likely fragmented before their deposition, with many deliberately stripped from the wooden objects they once adorned, their careful collection and concealment—accompanied by gold and stone jewelry, fragments of stone vessels, pottery sherds, and weapon points—suggest either a ritualized act of safeguarding amid the political upheaval and uncertainty that marked the end of the Late Bronze Age (mid-twelfth century BCE) or grave goods placed in a tomb. Like the gold hoard, they offered audiences a rare glimpse of Late Bronze Age luxury.

Of the 386 ivories, 100 pieces were approved for the one-year loan. Hailed by *The Illustrated London News* as "the most comprehensive example known of 'Phoenician' art in the 13th Century B.C.," the carved ivories captured public and scholarly acclaim alike when exhibited in Chicago and New York. Ranging from furniture inlays and containers to hair combs, handles, and game boards, the ivories reflect a remarkable diversity of styles—Assyrian, Hittite, Egyptian, Mycenaean, Syrian, and local Levantine. When the ivories were divided during the 1938 division, 262 ivory pieces were allotted to ISAC for its permanent collections, and the remainder joined the collections of the Rockefeller Archaeological Museum.

Top: Ivory plaque with female sphinx holding cups (A22213)

Bottom: Illustrated London News feature on the Megiddo ivories, October 1937

MEGIDDO'S OPULENCE

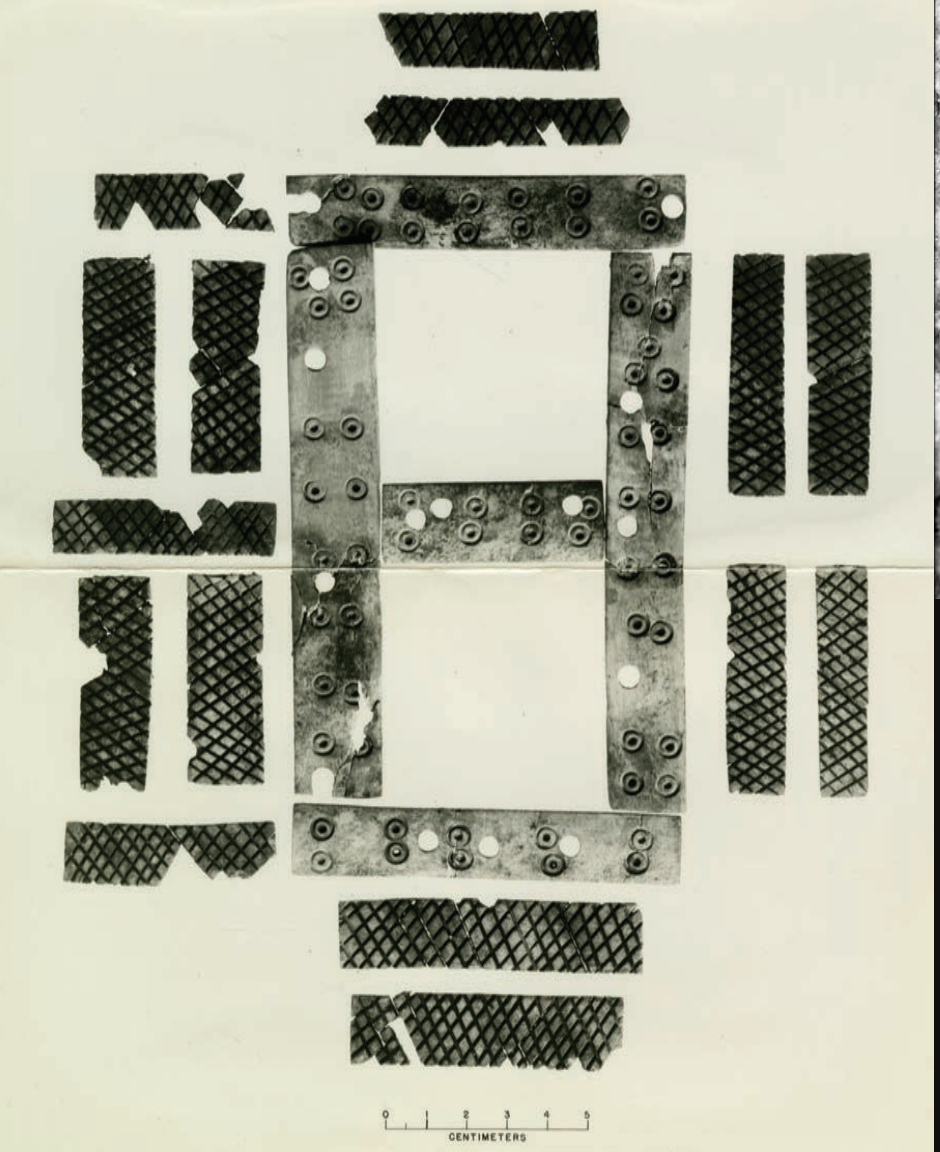
Excavations at Megiddo uncovered numerous burials, both in a cemetery near the base of the mound and within houses in the settlement. In 1934, Breasted wrote to Guy of his desire to acquire a complete tomb group for exhibition in Chicago—ideally one "left complete and not mutilated by the division." That goal was partly realized in 1936, when ISAC was allotted nearly all of Tomb 2117, a Late Bronze Age burial (ca. 1550–1400 BCE) excavated on the site's northeastern slope. The tomb held the remains of an adult woman, richly adorned with a suite of luxurious jewelry and interred with fine ceramic vessels and a bone-inlaid box.

When the jewelry appeared in *The Illustrated London News*, it vividly illustrated Megiddo's Late Bronze Age wealth. The text linked the burial to the "great siege of Megiddo in 1479 B.C."—a loose historical association, but one that captured public interest. The present exhibition's display fulfills Breasted's vision, reuniting the tomb assemblage with photographs of the burial as it was uncovered; such images provide essential context for understanding Late Bronze Age funerary practices. It also pairs the tomb group with the 1936 *Illustrated London News* feature, reflecting how objects, interpretation, and media converge to create a picture of the past.

Top: Bone inlay strips from a wooden box (A18579A–Y)

Bottom left: Pendant earring (A18587)

Bottom right: Deceased individual and her burial goods, Tomb 2117 (Megiddo A 2367)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CENTIMETERS

Base of Ramesses VI (M 6014)
Collection of the Israel Antiquities Authority
Photo © The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, by Elie Posner

ONE BASE, MULTIPLE AFTERLIVES

A copper-alloy statue base—excavated in 1934 and inscribed with the cartouche of Ramesses VI (ca. 1143–1136 BCE)—is the latest evidence of Egyptian royal presence in the Levant. Likely deposited shortly before Megiddo's Late Bronze Age destruction, its discovery was cause for celebration—another link between Megiddo and royal power. Before the object's division, the Department of Antiquities agreed to a one-year loan to ISAC for conservation. Believing it would ultimately remain in Jerusalem, Guy advised Breasted that an electrotype be made for Chicago. ISAC made two replicas, one of metal and the other of plaster. Breasted quickly drafted a report with a translation of the hieroglyphs, published posthumously in *Megiddo II* (1948). For Breasted, the object confirmed Egypt's continued influence on, and perhaps dominance of, Canaan "in the period of the Judges"—a conclusion that aligned with his broader vision of archaeology as a bridge between imperial history and shared historical memory.

POPULAR(IZING) RELIGION

A 1934 *Illustrated London News* feature, "Megiddo 'Finds' and the Bible: Astarte Worship in Solomon's Day," and another in 1936, "A Megiddo Shrine of the 11th Century B.C.; and Cult Objects," introduced readers to Iron Age religious practices through captivating photographs of recently excavated ritual equipment and associated objects. Paired with brief explanatory text, these images made complex cultic traditions accessible to a broad audience. Objects such as four-horned altars, offering stands, model shrines, and vessels revealed a shift in the Iron Age from the temple-based worship of the Bronze Age to smaller shrines situated in domestic or other contexts. Religious practice at Megiddo—deeply embedded in the complex cultural networks of ancient West Asia—was both locally rooted and regionally connected.

A MEGIDDO SHRINE OF THE 11TH CENTURY B.C.; AND CULT OBJECTS.

Illustrated London News, June 1936
Photographs © ISAC. Reproduced under fair use for educational and illustrative purposes.

Four-horned altars in situ, including A13188A (Megiddo B 185)

ARMAGEDDON, BY ANOTHER NAME

Linking Megiddo's ancient ruins to biblical Armageddon—the site of the prophesied battle between good and evil—was a familiar media hook. Headlines such as "Spoils of the Spade at Armageddon" turned archaeological discoveries into prophecy-tinged spectacle, while excavations of Megiddo's levels continued to uncover fortifications, weapons, and destruction layers that testified to real conflicts peppered across the ages. Yet, over time, the historical and imagined have diverged. Today, "Armageddon" conjures for many not a place but an idea: a final reckoning, vividly reimagined in books, films, and pop culture. The final section of the exhibition reflects on this transformation—of a historical crossroads becoming an enduring symbol of the world's end.

SONG FOR ARMAGEDDON

Filmed at Megiddo and scored by composer Ophir Ilzetzki, *Song for Armageddon* reflects on the site's layered identity—not only as an archaeological landmark but also as the imagined stage for apocalypse. It explores the confusion of place and event, history and prophecy. Over the course of a night, a group of workers methodically set up thousands of chairs, wiping each one down, preparing an auditorium for an unknown audience. In an age marked by wars, displacement, climate crisis, and collective uncertainty, *Song for Armageddon* becomes a meditation on our shared anxieties about the future and our struggle to fully grasp endings. As artists Nick Crowe and Ian Rawlinson note, "The fear that everything might end . . . it's like the sublime—it's too big a thing."

croweandrawlinson.net/song-for-armageddon

Screenshots from *Song for Armageddon*
Nick Crowe and Ian Rawlinson, 2017
4K video installation, 51 minutes
Commissioned by Forma and University of Salford Art Collection,
in association with BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art
On loan from the artists

The past became a story, framed as much by cameras and captions as by excavation reports.

Curated by Kiersten Neumann

Organized by the ISAC Museum: Susan Allison, Rob Bain, Denise Browning, Laura D'Alessandro, Anne Flannery, Marc Maillot, Helen McDonald, Kiersten Neumann, Josh Tulisiak, Alison Whyte, and Elisheva Yardeni

With contributions from Eric Cline

Our sincere thanks to artists Nick Crowe and Ian Rawlinson, whose generous loan of their work enriches the exhibition.

We gratefully acknowledge the support of ISAC members and ISAC Museum visitors, whose contributions made the exhibition possible.

Visit the exhibition webpage:

isac.uchicago.edu/megiddoimagined

This brochure includes an image of human remains, presented to provide historical and archaeological context. We acknowledge the deceased individual with respect.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF ANCIENT CULTURES MUSEUM
West Asia & North Africa