

Time Sifters

December 2013



A Chapter of the Florida Anthropological Society

PO Box 5283, Sarasota FL 34277

Editor: Sherry Svekis • ssvekis@gmail.com • (941) 359-0683

Production: Sherry Svekis and Jack Brown

You are Invited!

Time Sifters Holiday Party

Come celebrate good friends, yummy food, and archaeology-themed fun

When: December 11th, 6pm - 8pm

Where: The gracious home of Marion Almy, a Time Sifters founder
2100 McClellan Pkwy, Sarasota

What to bring: \$6 per person and a dish to share

Members are welcome to bring guests.

Call Sherry at 504-7130 if you have any questions.



The house is located at the south end of Orange Ave where it becomes McClellan Pkwy. There is a large ivy covered wall out front. Please use the circular drive located on McClellan to drop off dishes and guests. Please park on either Seminole Drive, which is across McClellan Pkwy, or park on Oriole or Mallard behind the house. There is a garden gate that will be open to come in through the back. Lanterns and/or balloons will be out to mark the front and back entrances.

Notes from a Time Sifter

Archaeology is an art that uncovers evidence which can verify or prove false some historical events. Tradition is doing something that has been done by a particular group of people for a long time (www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary). Christmas is both historical and traditional but not always in agreement.

There is not a lot of historical evidence for the life of Jesus. It is, of course, documented in all four gospels of the New Testament but the only extra biblical written evidence is from 1st century historian, Josephus (*Antiquities*, 18: 3, 3), who places Jesus' life in the Levant, as do the biblical sources. Archaeology provided evidence for both by uncovering biblical sites as well as a great number of Christian churches in the Levant from the early Christian era, but it is Matthew 2 and tradition that place the birth in Bethlehem of Judea. Archaeological evidence suggests a more northern Bethlehem, near Nazareth, as the place of Jesus' birth, and other scholars choose Nazareth itself as the birthplace.

The date for the birth of Jesus, December 25, year 1, is based almost entirely on tradition rather than historical evidence. The year was decided upon by a Greco-Roman monk, Dionysius Exiguus, in 525 c.e. as he was preparing a new calendar. The Romans counted time from the founding of Rome, and Dionysius, a Christian, wanted to exchange Roman tradition for Christian tradition. He based his study on the biblical Gospel of Luke that said Jesus was born when Augustus was Emperor, 762 years after the founding of Rome. From that, he calculated year 1. But Dionysius ignored the Gospel of Matthew that puts the birth of Jesus during the reign of Herod the Great who died in 4 b. c. e., so the birth had to occur sometime before that. Both the month and day were calculated earlier by Sextus Africanus in 221 c. e. He assumed that the date of conception took place on the first day of the new year, March 25. That would make the birth nine months later, December 25. The Eastern Church moved it slightly, choosing April 6 for conception, and January 6 for the birth. January 6 is still celebrated as Epiphany, the arrival of the Magi. The twelve days between the birth and the Epiphany became the "twelve days of Christmas" (*Biblical Archaeology ebook, The First Christmas*).

This brings us to another tradition, the visit to the infant Jesus by the "three kings," the Magi. This story is told in the Gospel of Matthew and describes the Magi as following a star to find the infant Jesus. The Magi were real. They were Persian intellectuals and priests from ancient Babylonia. They are mentioned in many ancient documents (*Behistun texts, the Avesta, Herodotus' Histories, Philo's Every Good Man*) but none associates them with Jesus nor do they say they were kings. Matthew does not say the Magi were kings either. He says only that they were following a "star." The Persian word for "star" can also mean "unusual constellation" and scientists have found several "unusual" stellar happenings from that time, but none gives us a date that matches the right time, so there really is not much historical evidence for the visit.

Archaeology cannot find answers to these questions, but it doesn't really matter because the message of Christmas, peace on earth, is timeless and global. Merry Christmas everyone!

In 2012, the Israel Antiquities Authority announced the discovery of a 2,700 year old bulla bearing an inscription reading "Bethlehem" on Wednesday, May 23rd. The discovery marks the earliest known mention of ancient Bethlehem, a city best remembered as Jesus' birthplace centuries later.

A bulla, or stamped piece of clay used to seal a document or container, was used to mark the identity of the sender or author of a document, and was an essential means of marking ownership in ancient transactions.

Ancient Bethlehem plays a central role in the Hebrew Bible before its New Testament prominence as Jesus' birthplace. First mentioned in the Bible as Ephrath in Genesis 35 during the burial of Rachel,* ancient Bethlehem played an important role in the life (and birth) of King David.



This First Temple Period bulla, found in the City of David, is the earliest known mention of ancient Bethlehem. This artifact extends the archaeological history of Bethlehem closer to its Hebrew Bible narratives.

Before the Jews of Sarasota/Manatee: Some Thoughts on Public Memory and Florida's Jewish Heritage

Uzi Baram
Professor of Anthropology, New College of Florida

Public Memory

In November 2013 the rare Thanksgiving-Hanukkah convergence (the last time it occurred was 1888) led to Thanksgivukkah as neologism. For American Jews, the convergence was a fun overlap, worthy of wide-spread, even if fleeting, notice. The next time, due to the fluctuations of the calendars, is projected for thousands of years in the future, but that does not negate the celebration as a meaningful social event. Thanksgivukkah captured people's imagination, with a meal combining latkes (fried potato pancakes) with turkey and recognition of the historic and continuing positive experience of the United States for Jews.

Florida has many reminders of its constitutive groups. The most prominent might be the heritage trails, started by the state's Division of Historical Resources in 1991 and now including the Black, Civil War, Cuban, Jewish, Native American, Women's, Spanish Colonial, World War II, and French heritage trails; other Florida trails include Maritime, 1733 Spanish Galleon, Shipwreck, and Golf. The trails connect sites on a thematic basis, stressing continuities and connections, diversity and multiculturalism, economic opportunity and a group's heritage pride.

The Jewish Heritage Trail is a public reminder of the significance of Jews in the state's history (available online at <http://www.flheritage.com/preservation/trails/jewishheritage/index.cfm> or as a booklet). For Sarasota, the Florida Jewish Heritage Trail includes the Edwards Theater, Temple Beth Sholom and its cemetery, and the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall. The buildings are listed for their function, architect, or benefactor. But there is more than buildings for the Jewish heritage of the region.



<http://www.flheritage.com/preservation/trails/jewishheritage/index.cfm>

Sarasota-Manatee

Just this year (2013), Kimberly Sheintal published *Jews of Sarasota-Manatee* through Arcadia Press. *Jews of Sarasota-Manatee* is a richly illustrated history that traces the development of the region's contemporary Jewish community. According to Sheintal (2013:10), on December 8, 1913, twenty people formed a social organization called The Community Center of Sarasota; thirteen years later, the Jewish community celebrated Yom Kippur at the Tyler Building on Third Street (now Fruitville Road). The photographic documentation for the history of the Jews of the region is superb. The Community Center led to Temple Beth Sholom as a Conservative synagogue and in 1956 Temple Emanu-El offered the Reform Movement a home in Sarasota. Today the Jewish Federation of Sarasota-Manatee and ten Jewish congregations make up a vibrant community. But as an archaeologist, I find fleeting traces are as interesting as the trajectory that formed the present.

Typically archaeologists delve into ground to recover settlements and artifacts as the material remains of history. But standing material culture is also part of archaeology. And over the last decade archaeologists have increasingly turned their attention to monuments, commemorations, and other materializations of history that constitute public memory as objects to study. When casting the net deeper into the past, there are some traces of the Jewish presence in what is today Sarasota-Manatee. They are not part of the trajectory that created the present Jewish community, but this essay will consider two figures, both of whom left traces of their fleeting involvement with this region. The official name for a local state park makes Judah P. Benjamin a recognizable name to those who know the commemorations of the region; the other is found only in the archival record but Moses Elias Levy is intriguing for this initial exploration of a broader, more diverse heritage in the region. **Read the full article at www.timesifters.org.**



OF INTEREST

If you enjoyed our September lecturer, Marvin Mills, check out his course at the Academy of Lifelong Learning, starting in January: **Asian art and architecture through the ages**
For more information: <http://thelifelonglearningacademy.com>

Membership

Individual:	\$20
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2014 MEETING CALENDAR

January 14, 6pm: Lecture at Selby - Speaker to be announced

February 19, 6pm: Dr. Robert Tykot - Bronze Age Sardinia

March 19, 6pm: Student Grant Winners

Selby Library: downtown Sarasota, Central Ave and 2nd Street

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