

Colby



Colby Magazine

Volume 89
Issue 1 *Winter 2000*

Article 10

January 2000

Faculty File

Gerry Boyle
Colby College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/colbymagazine>

Recommended Citation

Boyle, Gerry (2000) "Faculty File," *Colby Magazine*: Vol. 89 : Iss. 1 , Article 10.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/colbymagazine/vol89/iss1/10>

This Contents is brought to you for free and open access by the Colby College Archives at Digital Commons @ Colby. It has been accepted for inclusion in Colby Magazine by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Colby.

What a Long Great Dig It's Been

Professor Tom Longstaff sheds new light on Jesus's world

By Gerry Boyle '78

Partway through a recent discussion of his archaeological work in the Near East, Tom Longstaff, professor of religious studies, dropped a bombshell. The Sea of Galilee, Longstaff says, is about the size of China Lake, east of Waterville—a water body eight miles long and five miles wide. Known also as Lake Kinnaret, the Sea of Galilee is a favorite recreation spot for many local residents, who water ski on its historic waters. “For these places,” Longstaff said, “the images in our minds don’t compare very well with reality.”

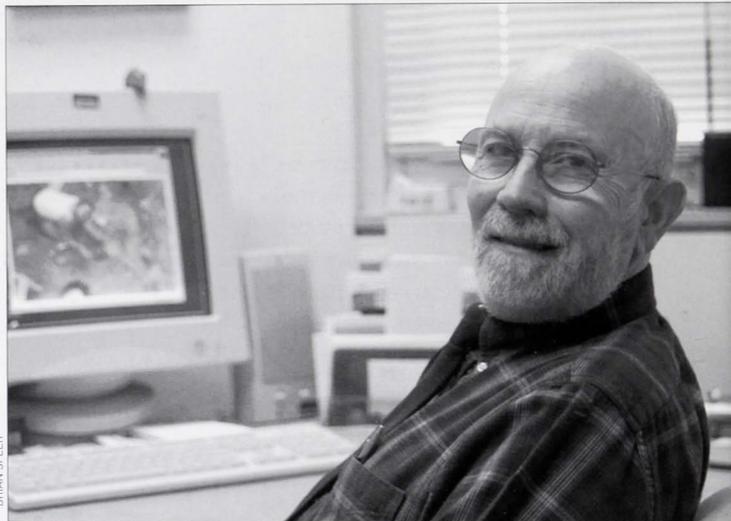
That people use Jet-Skis on the Sea of Galilee, that the mighty River Jordan of the Bible is no wider than Messalonskee Stream, which bounds the Colby campus—none of this has diminished Longstaff’s sense of wonder as he has helped uncover antiquities. In fact, much of his archaeological work has shed new light—quite literally—on the Biblical world.

Longstaff, the Crawford Family Professor of Religious Studies, first went to Israel in 1974, five years after arriving at Colby. He attended a post-doctoral seminar at Hebrew Union College, where he met some of the most influential figures working in archaeology in the Near East. Longstaff also worked on digs then ongoing in Meiron in northern Israel. For the then-39-year-old professor of religious studies it turned out to be a defining event. “That did it,” he said. “That got the dirt under my fingers and I never got it out.”

Longstaff returned to Israel in

1977 and, with the exception of one or two years, has returned to the digs every summer since then, taking as many as three Colby students to work with him. Longstaff’s sabbaticals have been spent studying archaeology at Harvard and Oxford and at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Longstaff’s years in the field have been spent troweling through ruins rich in history: his archaeological dig sites have included Jewish burial caves, a Byzantine-period synagogue, the remains of forts built by Crusaders. Since 1983, he has been associate director of a dig that has exposed much of the Roman provincial capital of Sepphoris, in Galilee, where 20,000 people lived in the time of Herod the Great—and of Jesus. The work has unearthed a 4,000-seat amphitheater, sidewalks inlaid with mosaics, an elegant villa. And they have revealed some surprising aspects of life at the time—



Crawford Family Professor of Religious Studies Tom Longstaff.

and place—of Jesus’s life.

“We see how people lived together in the area,” Longstaff said. “Jews, Christians and others living in close proximity to one another, interacting with each other and evidently getting along pretty well.”

Nazareth, which tradition has identified as the home of Mary,

Joseph and Jesus, is just four miles away. Mary is said to have been from Sepphoris, the big city. “We’re talking about Jesus growing up four miles, as the crow flies, from a major provincial Roman city,” Longstaff said. “Jesus did not grow up in Aroostook County. He grew up near Times Square.”

In the city were Roman baths, a complex system of roads and a bustling marketplace two-thirds the size of a football field, much of which has been exposed. Longstaff, who arrived at the site when it was just grazing land, said he will return to Sepphoris this summer, though the work there is winding down.

Twenty-five years after his first dig, Longstaff is not planning on winding down at all. “We are projecting to open a site within the walls of the old city of Jerusalem,” he said, asking that the specific location not be disclosed. “These [opportunities] are rare. In some ways, it’s an archaeologist’s dream.” ♦



Fred Corso '96 on an archaeological dig in Sepphoris, Israel, four miles north of Nazareth, on a site believed to date back to 1200 B.C. Sepphoris was a Roman provincial capital at the time of Herod the Great.

Recognizing Lebanese Baloney

In October 1998 in an academic journal called *Middle East Policy*, Associate Professor of Government Guilain Denoeux published a critique of then-Prime Minister of Lebanon Rafiq Hariri's national reconstruction plans.

The effects of Denoeux's article, co-written with Robert Springborg, now working for the U.S. State Department, were far-reaching and stirred considerable controversy. Before the brouhaha



Guilain Denoeux

was over, the Lebanese Embassy in Washington had accused the journal of spoiling Lebanon's bond rating, and widespread support for Hariri among the international aid donor community had largely evaporated.

Prime Minister Hariri, one of the wealthiest men in the Middle East, had his finance minister, Fuad Siniora, write an article to rebut Denoeux and Springborg's arguments, but *Middle East Policy* declined to publish it. Instead the journal published a lengthy letter to the editor that tried to refute the original article, but, according to Denoeux, it contained "no evidence" to counter criticism of the political and economic costs and shortcomings of the Hariri model.

Subsequently Hariri was forced to resign what had been considered a secure position, and, said Denoeux, Lebanese politics have been swept by a sea change, "which, to spare you the details, provides ample vindication for our arguments." And, he added, "Siniora is now in trouble with the Lebanese justice system."

Finally, to add approbation to advocacy, Denoeux and Springborg learned in November that their article had won the Second Annual Lebanese Paper Award for "the most original, scholarly and fruitful" paper about Lebanon published last year. ♦

Lay On—Again—Richard Sewell

Richard Sewell (performing arts) has wended his way through Great Birnam Wood before.

The production of *Macbeth* staged at Strider Theater in November and December was the ninth *Macbeth* in which Sewell has taken part, either as director or actor or both.

Sewell first memorized the play in high school, where he directed and performed the lead role. Subsequently he directed the play at Maine's Theater at Monmouth and at Colby, some 25 years ago.

This fall's production, with Stacy Erickson '01 and Todd Miner '01 in the lead roles, was entered in the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival. While the judges' decision was pending as *Colby* went to press, Sewell expressed high hopes for this cast, which had performed demanding plays before. "This is the harvest of the plowing and harrowing of those works," Sewell said.

The production featured a macabre set by James Thurston (performing arts) and eerie costumes by visiting artist Pamela Scofield. And this one played to sold-out houses each night, unlike an early Sewell production that also boasted an eerie setting. In the early 1970s, Sewell directed *Macbeth* at an open amphitheater in Camden. "We opened to sixteen uninterrupted days of rain and fog," he said. "In thunder, lightning and in rain' became a real joke in that performance." ♦

pundits & plaudits

"Colby Art Museum has long presented art fans with one of the best deals to be found in the world of Maine art—and it just got better. It's hard to come by a greater bargain—aesthetically speaking—anywhere north of Washington, D.C."

Down East magazine (October 1999), reporting on the official dedication of the museum's Lunder Wing.

"[The Kama Sutra] was written by an ascetic who probably never had sex. It's kind of hard to imagine."

Nikky Singh (religious studies), on The Learning Channel's series *The History of Sex* (August 1999), in an episode on "The Eastern World."

"Logically, they had to do this. For the Communist Party, the greatest threat is a nationally organized force."

Suisheng Zhao (East Asian politics), on page one of the *New York Times* (Nov. 4), talking about the Chinese government's crackdown on the Falun Gong spiritual movement.

"Under Mr. Cotter's leadership, Colby has retained its family sense of intimacy while vastly expanding its scholarship and diversity. . . . Today, reflecting our more mobile society, the college's 1,800 students consist of kids from 47 states and as many foreign countries."

"People and Politics" columnist **Albert R. Hunt (H'99)**, in *The Wall Street Journal* (May 27), writing about Colby's 1999 commencement, where he received an honorary doctor of laws degree.

"King Hassan very early on tried to pressure other Arab heads of state to come to terms with the reality of Israel's existence. At a time when the mood in the Arab world was towards no negotiations—no recognition of Israel—King Hassan understood, I think, that Israel was there to stay."

Guilain Denoeux (government), on NPR's *All Things Considered* (July 23), talking about the death of King Hassan II, who ruled Morocco for 34 years.

"I felt obligated to follow my London broil with a slice of pizza. It had a chewy, fresh-dough crust and was topped with fresh bright white mozzarella cheese, roasted red peppers and deliciously salty black olives. Beats Pizza Hut anytime."

Portland Press Herald reporter Ray Routhier (Nov. 8), in a review of Colby's dining hall food, after it was ranked sixth best in the nation by The Princeton Review.

"He rarely misbehaves. Only once did he get in any kind of exchange with opposing players, and he red-carded himself."

Mark Serdjenian '73 (associate dean and soccer coach), in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (July 16), on uber-soccer-fan **Charlie Bassett** (American studies).