



PEABODY MUSEUM  
*of* ARCHAEOLOGY & ETHNOLOGY

# **Pseudo-Archaeology: Supermarket Aisle Archaeology and the Bible**

## **PRESS RELEASE**

**What:** FREE Seminar and Open House, no registration required

**Where:** Lectures in Geological Lecture Hall, Harvard University, 24 Oxford St., Cambridge  
Open House follows at the Semitic Museum of Harvard University, 6 Divinity Avenue

**When:** Sunday, Nov. 23, 2008, 9:00 AM–12:30 PM

**Contact:** 617-496-1027 (Public Information)

*Welcome and Introductions by Peter Feinman, Institute of History, Archaeology, and Education, NY*

**(Cambridge, October 23, 2008)** From Noah's Ark to the family tomb of Jesus, supermarket aisle tabloids have been selling tales of biblical pseudo-archaeology. Three presentations distinguish pseudo-archaeology from real archaeology.

### **Presentation 1: A Tale of Two Tombs: Looking for Jesus and Herod's Burial Site**

Early in 2007 two press conferences were held: one in New York announced that the family tomb of Jesus had been discovered in Jerusalem, and one in Jerusalem announced that the tomb of Herod the

Great had been found. Why did all archaeologists instantly dismiss the former as a publicity stunt but cautiously engage the other as serious archaeology? This slide-illustrated lecture will contrast the presentation, peer review, and publication of both discoveries in order to distinguish pseudo-archaeology from real archaeology, noting along the way the dubious legacy of more than a century of biblical archaeology's quest for relics. *Speaker: Jonathan L. Reed, Professor of Religion, University of La Verne, So. Calif.*

### **Presentation 2: There Were Giants in the Earth in Those Days (Gen 6:4): The Sad Tale of the Cardiff Giant**

In October 1869, Stub Newell, a farmer in upstate New York, uncovered the remains of what appeared to be a giant, recumbent man whose body had turned to stone. Geologists and archaeologists immediately declared it to be fraudulent, but such pronouncements meant little to the hordes who descended on the Newell farm to see the giant for themselves. Circus impresario P.T. Barnum was so impressed by the archaeological fake that he tried to purchase it for his sideshow. The perpetrator confessed just a few months after the giant's discovery, but the giant himself continues as a tourist attraction at the Farmers Museum in Cooperstown, New York. Though not nearly as well known as the Piltdown Man hoax, the Cardiff Giant fraud is one of the most instructive in the history of archaeology. *Speaker: Ken Feder, Dept. of Anthropology, Central Connecticut State University.*

### **Presentation 3: Raiders of the Faux Ark: From Noah's Ark to the Ark of the Covenant and Beyond**

The amount of pseudo-scientific nonsense that has been published on so-called "mysteries" of the Bible is overwhelming. The vast majority of this work has not been produced by professional scholars but by amateur enthusiasts. Indeed, the work of such enthusiasts frequently meets the criteria of "junk science," especially when it "advocates a cause, pays little attention to the investigative process, ignores

contrary evidence, and advertises a high moral purpose." Cline will use material from his book [From Eden to Exile: Unraveling Mysteries of the Bible](#) (National Geographic Books, 2007) to present and debunk examples of such junk science--especially as it pertains to the possible locations of Noah's Ark, Sodom and Gomorrah, the Ark of the Covenant, and the Ten Lost Tribes--while at the same time taking a brief look at what we really do and do not know about these biblical mysteries. *Speaker: Eric Cline, Associate Professor of Classics and Anthropology (Ancient History and Archaeology), George Washington University.*

### **Sponsors**

The seminar is sponsored by the American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR), the Peabody Museum, and the Semitic Museum of Harvard University, and is offered in connection with ASOR's Annual Meeting in Boston, Nov. 19–22.

The American Schools of Oriental Research supports and encourages the study of the peoples and cultures of the Near East, from the earliest times to the present. Founded in 1900, ASOR is a not-for-profit organization. It is apolitical and has no religious affiliation. ASOR communicates news of the latest research findings in its publications and through lectures at its Annual Meeting, bringing together scholars from around the world to present their latest findings and discuss their research. ASOR's independent overseas institutes in Cyprus, Israel, and Jordan facilitate research in the field by students and scholars.

The Peabody Museum is among the oldest archaeological and ethnographic museums in the world with one of the finest collections of human cultural history found anywhere. It is home to superb materials from Africa, ancient Europe, North America, Mesoamerica, Oceania, and South America in particular. In addition to its archaeological and ethnographic holdings, the Museum's photographic archives, one of the largest of its kind, hold more than 500,000 historical photographs, dating from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to the present and chronicling anthropology, archaeology, and world culture.

The Semitic Museum is Harvard's Museum of Near Eastern Archaeology, housing collections of archaeological materials from the Ancient Near East. Current exhibits explore everyday life in ancient Israel during the Iron Age; a 2nd millennium BCE Hurrian city, located in modern-day Iraq; magic and the afterlife in Egypt; and the history of ancient Cyprus through ceramics, glass, and metal objects. All exhibits are free and open to the public.

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