

Dig uncovers ancient arc of the covenant

By Carmina Brooks
special writer

A Biblical archaeologist brought a sense of discovery and excitement to Southfield last week — all the way from the ruins of an ancient synagogue in Upper Galilee.

Dr. Eric M. Meyers, a Duke University professor of religion, was in town to lecture on his discovery of the oldest fragment of a Torah Shrine ever found. Nearly 300 people attended the Rabbi Morris Adler Memorial Lecture on March 9 at Congregation Shaarey Zedek. Meyers showed photographs of his find and described how the discovery culminated more than a decade of his archaeological investigations into life in Roman Palestine.

It was 7:30 a.m. July 2, 1981, in the town of Nabratein near the Lebanese border and the Golan Heights. Meyers and 35 of his student excavators had been digging since 5 a.m. in the remains of two stone foundations used as prayer platforms in what once was an ancient synagogue, built before 306 A.D. It had been destroyed and rebuilt three times following earthquakes. At least one of the platforms was thought to be a podium where scrolls were read as part of the synagogue liturgy.

Attention was centered on a large, half-ton stone thought to be significant because of its size. Workers were using a tripod and chain-fall to lift it off the ground, where it had rested for nearly 2,000 years, to get a cable underneath so the stone could be turned over.

When it was lifted a few inches Meyers stooped and felt underneath. He thought he was touching carving.

The stone was turned over, and all work stopped. The stone fragment, which had been found face down, revealed carvings that showed what the fragment had once been a part of.

Nearby was Ruth Lefkowitz of Franklin Village, who had joined the dig a month before with her husband, Julian.

"WE KNEW ITS IMPORTANCE immediately," Ruth recalled Saturday. "At first there was a great silence."

They stood staring down at a huge piece of limestone nearly five feet long. What they had found was the oldest symbolic version of the Holy Ark of the Covenant, "the most distinctive part of the internal architecture of a synagogue building to store the scrolls of Hebrew scripture." And it was 10 centuries older than any other that has been found to date.

"Simply described," Meyers later wrote in a faculty newsletter, "we saw carved on the stone two rampant lions

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flanking a gabled roof. The gable was decorated with rosettes and an egg-and-dart molding enclosing a scallop shell.

A small L-shaped hole had been drilled into the top of the shell for the insertion of a chain. An ever-burning or eternal light, part of the furnishings of the Biblical Temple and of all subsequent synagogues as well as many eastern rite and Latin churches, would have been suspended from that hole by a chain.

"Such an arrangement is known from the ancient graphics and provided the clinching point for our identification of this piece," Meyers wrote.

The Lefkowitzs had selected the Duke dig from a catalogue of six being offered to those who could qualify. About 600 persons had vied for dig jobs on the expedition, but only 55, "a bus load," were chosen.

The dig cost \$80,000, borne by Duke University and several private foundations. Students paid their own fare and tuition expenses.

"GOING ON A DIG had always been our fantasy," Ruth said.

Ruth is a librarian. Julian has a degree in fine arts and is the president of L&L Concession Co. in Tinley Park. Another area resident, Gary Anderson of Dearborn, a graduate student at Harvard, now studying for his doctorate, also worked the dig, Ruth said.

Ruth and Julian were assigned to different sections. Ruth was given the job of sorting and boxing the artifacts. She kept a personal notebook.

Julian said he did not want to be confined to a desk job or drafting board during the dig, but modern society, he said, had him in its hands and knees in the soil. But they became pressed for time. The man in charge of his section asked him if he was capable of making a drawing of a wall that had just been uncovered. It had to be done to exact scale showing every stone of more than two centimeters in diameter. He agreed to do the drawings.

Julian said he was impressed with the new technology used in archaeology. They now employ the talents of geologists, soil scientists and bone experts and use computers in the field to maintain a running record of all artifacts found. At Nabratein, the computer expert was James F. Strange, a Baptist minister and dean of the College of Arts and Letters at the University of South Florida.

ON THE DAY OF THE discovery, Julian was working a two-acre site adjacent to the one where the ark was found, but Ruth was standing about two feet away from the stone.

"Following the silence, there was shouting and hugging, then everybody came running," Ruth recalled.

Eric Meyers' wife, Carol, was on an errand at the time of the discovery. She is described by Ruth Lefkowitz as a "reserved, scholarly, marvelous teacher."

Meyers instructed his students, "Don't say a word to Carol."

An hour later, "we" Carol saw the stone, she was hyperventilating," Ruth said. "Then she let out such a blood-curdling scream. She was magnificently affected."

By Joanne Mallazewski
staff writer

Farmington Hills officials are making the final payment on the city hall's latest remodeling including reconstruction of the main lobby, clerk's and finance offices that were damaged when the roof collapsed in February 1982.

City Council members Monday authorized final payments of approximately \$160,000 in construction costs and about \$1,200 in architect fees for the remodeling and reconstruction, projects started in 1982.



Ruth Lefkowitz, in the center foreground, watches as a huge piece of limestone is pulled from the rubble. The stone, nearly five feet long, turned out

to be the oldest symbolic version of the Holy Ark of the Covenant.

ed, I will never forget it."

The find was kept secret until the stone could be trucked to the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem. The summer before, when a skeleton was uncovered, Orthodox Jews protested the dig until it could be proven they were not disturbing a burial place.

Parents of three grown sons and a daughter, the Lefkowitzs recalled that they were at the dig when Israel

bombed the Iraqi reactor. She said parents of the students were "scared to death for them."

SWEAT AND DIRT were constant companions. Scorpions, pit vipers and unexploded bombs from the 1948 Israeli war of independence were perils of the dig.

Ruth said the experience taught her what shards and artifacts represent

culturally in the social conditions of the time, and that gave her a better understanding of how we have evolved.

Julian said the ark discovery contributes to better understanding of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity in early years.

Meyers said the Duke find "is astounding in that it is the first and only

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City hall remodeling bills are paid

By Joanne Mallazewski
staff writer

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Of the total \$160,000 bill, remodeling the council chambers (including carpeting and wintering) cost approximately \$30,000; new heating units for the chamber and city administrative office totaled approximately \$40,000; and a new vehicle port and cell improvements in the police department that were ordered by the state Department of Corrections, cost approximately \$56,000, said William Costick, assistant city manager.

Work had already begun on remodeling the chamber and administrative offices when the city hall's roof collapsed on Feb. 7, 1982, Costick said.

Although reconstruction of the areas damaged by the roof collapse, as well as a new roof, cost the city about \$25,000, the city's insurance carrier paid an additional \$50,000 of the almost \$80,000 cost of repairs, Costick said.

THE WEIGHT of the snow caused the roof's main steel I-beam over the lobby to collapse, pulling down a masonry wall, plaster, electrical conduits and ducts, according to construction engineers, Costick said.

City officials failed to order a reu-

tine weight test in 1981 before the roof's collapse.

The test, considered standard procedure by roofing contractors, is designed to determine how much weight a structure can support.

Representatives of three firms the city contracted with in 1981 to add a second roof to correct heat loss and leaking problems in the building said the check was never requested by city officials.

The final payment of construction costs will be taken from the city's current building improvements budget.

Cameras in courtroom: Will it click in Michigan?

By Sharon Dargay
staff writer

Do television and press cameras belong in the courtroom?

The jury is still out on the question in Michigan. But the State Bar Association soon may press for an answer. The organization's media committee has drafted a policy asking the state Supreme Court to permit an experimental program, allowing cameras in state-controlled courts. The request must gain state bar approval before being sent to the Supreme Court.

TWO MEMBERS of that committee, attorneys Seymour Posner of Lathrup Village and Richard Russell of Birmingham, will take part in a panel discussion with media representatives at a program Wednesday, March 23, sponsored by Women in Communications. It will be at the Book Cadillac Hotel, 1114 Washington Blvd., Detroit. The evening will begin with hors d'oeuvres at 5:30 p.m., followed by the program at 6:30 p.m. Cost is \$10 if reservations are made by Friday and \$11 at the door.

Michigan is among a handful of states without a policy or experimental program allowing cameras and microphones at court proceedings. Its canon of judicial ethics, which governs state-controlled courts, bars live broadcast, video tape and press cameras in local, district, circuit, appellate and supreme court proceedings. Likewise, federal codes prohibit picture-taking in its courts.

THE STATE Supreme Court three years ago ignored the association's request for cameras at the appellate level.

But Russell believes the new proposal will fare better because it focuses on an experimental program and because more states ("in excess of 40") now permit broadcast and press cameras.

"There were some fears expressed three years ago. But the experience we've had with a lot of states has shown that it wasn't the disaster some people predicted," Russell said. "It's been a benefit to the public in general."

BUT POSNER CLAIMS the defendant's welfare should win out in the tug-of-war between the press' First Amendment right to free speech and the accused's Fifth Amendment right to a fair trial.

Calling the media's portrayal of courtroom drama "checkbox journalism," Posner claims that greed for advertising dollars would prompt coverage of only the most sensational trials.

"It's not fair to the defendant," Posner said. "I don't trust the media. This is a profit-oriented issue. They're not news people. They package paper."

HE SAID cameras invade the privacy of jurors as well as the parties involved in the case. And participants may unfairly influence a case by "acting differently" in front of cameras.

Posner claims that pictures taken inside a courtroom tend to "show the accused in a defensive position."

He also worries that the press may overstep the

bounds of good taste and publicize touchy cases such as rape.

"Courtrooms are open and anyone can watch. Why do we need to pipe it into homes? The courts are rarely filled up."

But Russell contends that the media generally "exercises editorial discretion" over sensational trials or such cases as rape. And he says that studies made by the Florida court system refute the theory that "attorneys and clients play to the cameras."

"THE CAMERAS HAVE dispelled a lot of public misconceptions about the courts," Russell said. "And there have been cases where people have come forward (as witnesses) after seeing a picture of the criminal defendant."

"Two hundred years ago when you had villages of 300 people, everyone would attend the trial. In a large, modern society, most people get their information from the media. This just enhances what can be covered."

Posner admitted that televised trials may be acceptable as long as they are "shown in total without exposing the jury" or other participants to unfair influence or danger.

But he doubts whether televised proceedings would attract an audience.

Judge Norman Feder, 46th District Court, Southfield, disagrees.

"ONE OF my recent cases had standing room only. There was a lot of public interest, and if it had been televised more people might have watched."

Calling cameras "disruptive" and an invasion of privacy, Feder doesn't favor photographs or broadcast of courtroom proceedings.

Judge Robert Shipper, Rochester District Court, isn't certain whether it's a good idea.

He routinely permits cameras at wedding ceremonies in his courtroom, but went beyond that policy last month, when in a surprise move, allowed two photographers, including David Frank of the Rochester Eccentric, to take photos at an arraignment.

But Shipper emphasized that the photo session wasn't intended to set a precedent.

"I LET THEM sit in the jury box and take pictures. If they hadn't done it in the courtroom, they would have taken them out in the hallway, and I was afraid (a woman in the hallway) would attack them. She was threatening them, and I just wanted to provide a safe place," he said.

Shipper pointed out that cameras encourage participants to "ham it up for viewers." He also suspects that television ratings — not judicial qualifications — could become a factor in an election.

"There used to be a judge in Detroit who held traffic court on television. He was re-elected because of the popularity of the show," Shipper said.

HE POINTED to the popularity of "People's Court," a nightly television program. Essentially a Hollywood-style game show cloaked in judicial trappings, the program solves small claims litigants' battles it out before a retired judge, cameras and commercial sponsors.

Shipper doubts whether the public would watch lengthy courtroom trials.

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