

Interview with Dr. Megan Daniels, 2017-2018 IEMA Postdoctoral Fellow

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Dr. Megan Daniels is currently the Postdoctoral Fellow at the Institute for European and Mediterranean Archaeology at the University at Buffalo, SUNY. She received a Masters in Classical and Near Eastern Archaeology in 2009 from The University of British Columbia. Her Doctorate in Classics was completed in 2016 at Stanford University, with a dissertation entitled, "The Queen of Heaven and a Goddess for All the People: Kingship, Religion, and Cultural Evolution between Greece and the Near East. She currently works as a pottery analyst on the Burgaz Harbors Project in Turkey and the Zita Project in southern Tunisia.

Dr. Daniels, what are your current research interests and goals, and what projects are you currently working on?

Overall, my research goals involve striking a balance between producing big history narratives of the formation of ancient Mediterranean societies and conducting finer-grained analyses that examine the nuances and trajectories of local developments. My two primary research interests speak to this goal, and center on the social roles of religion in the eastern Mediterranean in the Iron Age and Archaic period and on the broader study of migration and mobility in human history. I am currently working on several articles and book chapters that stem from my dissertation work, along with two edited volumes – one on data sciences and social sciences approaches to ancient Mediterranean religions and the other stemming from the IEMA conference on human migration and mobility. I am also crafting a monograph proposal for my dissertation, which examines the long-term history of ideologies of divine kingship between Greece and the Near East. Finally, I am involved in ongoing studies of ceramics from various sites in the Mediterranean for projects that examine local dynamics of maritime economies and cultural transitions across various periods.

Your work as the IEMA post-doc has centered on human mobility and migration in archaeological studies. How did you get interested in this subject?

Much of my work examines long-term cultural interrelations between Greece and the Near East through the intersection of shared political ideologies and religious practices. One area I am constantly challenged on is the mechanisms by which these shared ideas and practices get disseminated – e.g., through trade, diplomacy, population movement, or the amorphous concept of “diffusion”. In many ways, we see the effects of long-

term interaction between different cultural groups, but lack the framework to articulate how and why such interactions took place in specific times and places. There has been a lot of fascinating work going on in related fields (e.g., biological sciences, skeletal biochemistry, etc.) along with new models of Mediterranean history on human mobility. I saw a great opportunity with this conference to bring together scholars working within and across these fields to discuss how we can best approach the question of how to study and account for past human movements.

Whose work did you find the most inspiring for your own?

My mentors and advisors at Stanford, in particular my dissertation advisor Ian Morris, were always an inspiration for me, especially through their willingness and enthusiasm to work far beyond the confines of classics and to produce research that was both ambitious and assiduous in making arguments about human developments over the long term. I have also been inspired by scholars who have boldly paved the way towards much bigger histories of the Mediterranean – for instance, Sarah Morris, Carolina López-Ruiz, Cyprian Broodbank, among others – histories that take into account the numerous human groups who made up life in this fascinating part of the world. Finally, I am inspired by earnest attempts by various scholars to engage classics, ancient history, and archaeology with modern-day concerns. I think as scholars we should strive, in some capacity, to act as public intellectuals throughout our careers. I am very excited to have a spokesperson from the International Organization for Migration speak at our conference to frame our conversations on the causes and consequences of human migration in modern-day terms.

What have been the most rewarding aspects of the IEMA Postdoctoral Fellow position?

What have been the most challenging?

The most rewarding aspects have been working across anthropology and classics, in both teaching the graduate seminar and planning and implementing the conference. The interest in and enthusiasm for the conference and its subject matter from students, faculty, and staff has been energizing and rewarding, and I have truly enjoyed my time here because of the people and their support. The opportunity to engage with graduate students from anthropology and classics through the graduate seminar as well as through professionalization workshops has been extremely rewarding. The most challenging aspect is coming up now – namely, bringing all the nuts and bolts of the conference together, from the grand vision and goals right down to the nitty-gritty aspects such as travel logistics and catering. It definitely takes a village!

How do you think your work as the IEMA postdoctoral scholar will add to archaeology and related fields?

Human movement is a phenomenon that lurks in the background of all that we study as classicists, ancient historians, and archaeologists. In many ways, we are still hamstrung by outdated paradigms in accounting for these movements and their effects on communities over time. I hope that this conference and the edited volume that results from it, both of which draw together scholars tackling this issue in innovative ways, will act as a resource for further discussions and research on human migration and mobility. The ultimate goal is to provide robust interdisciplinary studies on this topic that can enable theorizing comparisons across time and space.

What advice would you give current graduate students working on their dissertation?

Feedback and criticism are your friends! Always look for opportunities to have your work assessed, whether that be through

reaching out to your advisor(s) on a regular basis, workshopping ideas with your peers, presenting at conferences, or submitting work for publication. Soliciting feedback and criticism is one of the best ways to grow as a scholar, but it is also a huge hurdle for graduate students (it certainly was for me). I wish I had done it more often and earlier on in my career. Some of my greatest critics have helped me become a better, more reflective, and more accountable scholar – and ultimately more confident in my work. Try not to look at critical feedback (including your dissertation defense) as some awful hurdle you have to overcome, but rather as a calling or an opportunity to grow as an intellectual. This outlook will help you find joy in your work, and you will eventually look forward to critically engaging with others over it, as well as acting as a thoughtful and reflective critic yourself, both for your own work and the work of others in your field.

What projects or research endeavors do you hope to pursue in the future?

I'm working on developing a new digital humanities project that examines the development of cross-cultural religious practice in the Iron Age eastern Mediterranean. This project would bring together several decades-old physical site reports in an online database format to compare trends in assemblages over the course of the ninth to sixth centuries BCE. This work dovetails with my monograph project on ideologies of divine kingship between Greece and the Near East, namely in looking at sanctuary assemblages across different sites as proxies for elite investment in and control over religious practice in the formative period of the Iron Age. Overall, I am interested in exploring, through my monograph and this new project, the cognitive and cultural roles of religion in information and reforming ideas of sovereignty and divinity in Mediterranean societies over the long term. I am also continuing work as a ceramicist on assemblages from Turkey, Greece, and

Tunisia, and am planning a new fieldwork project with colleagues from Simon Fraser University on the island of Kephallonia in western Greece, which would investigate patterns of Bronze Age diet and mobility through settlement and mortuary/skeletal evidence.