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Religious Evidence for Iron Age Jordan
(Religion / Arts and Sciences)

Biblical and inscriptional texts identify ancient Israel's neighbors east of the Jordan as Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites, each with their own political kingdoms during the Iron Age (1200–550 B.C.). An appreciable amount of archaeological evidence represents the religious beliefs and practices of these populations and shows many similarities to Israelite religion. In addition to shedding light on the religious life of contemporary Israelites, the study of religion east of the Jordan is important in its own right. That evidence includes a range of visual artistic depictions in the form of stamp seals, ceramic figurines, statuary, and decorative elements of incense altars, terra-cotta architectural models, and other cultic items recovered through excavation and now available in museums, archaeological storage facilities, and excavation sites throughout the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. These objects present an array of visual depictions of deities, divine symbols, cultic objects, and human devotees engaged in various worship activities. The category of evidence represented by these objects has yet to be fully incorporated into scholarly discussions of the religion of ancient Israel and of its neighbors east of the Jordan.

This project treats archaeological evidence for the religion of Iron Age Jordan with a focus on terra-cotta architectural models. Building on the gains of recent studies by archaeologists and art historians, this project accounts for the social setting, function, and representational meaning of these artifacts. Such an analysis includes attention to the iconography of the objects and to understanding their depiction of architectural features in relationship to their archaeological contexts and to excavated architectural remains. This study aims thus to advance the scholarly understanding not only of what these artifacts depict but also of their socio-religious implications for religious belief and practice.

To this end, the project involves visiting various archaeological sites and museums in Jordan in order to examine and photograph religious artifacts and related architectural and site features. In support of that project, I have received an external (CAORC) fellowship that covers most of the expenses for the project. As supplementary (and not overlapping) funding in addition, this URC grant application seeks funding for travel and living expenses within Jordan that are integral to the work but that will exceed the fellowship funds; the requested URC funds are not duplicate funding but rather are needed for additional budget items that lie outside those already covered by the external funding.