

RESEARCH PAPER

# Digging with Petrie: Gerald Lankester Harding at Tell Jemmeh, 1926–1927

Rachael Thyrza Sparks

Gerald Lankester Harding (1901–1979) was an influential archaeologist and epigrapher whose field career began in 1926, when he set out to work for Flinders Petrie at Tell Jemmeh in British Mandate Palestine. Harding's experiences on this, his first dig, were captured through his personal diary and photographs, which form part of a larger archive now housed in the UCL Institute of Archaeology Collections. This material is presented here for the first time, exploring how Harding came into archaeology, what it was like to work and live on a Petrie excavation, and to show how personal histories like this can contribute to a wider understanding of historic archaeological practice and methodology.

## Introduction

Gerald Harding was a British archaeologist and epigrapher who spent most of his professional career working in the Southern Levant. This paper explores the beginnings of that career, when he went with the renowned archaeologist Sir Flinders Petrie to investigate the site of Tell Jemmeh. Harding had never been to Palestine before, let alone on a dig, but it proved to be the beginning of a life-long fascination with Arab culture and language, and led to him eventually making the Middle East his home. Using material from Harding's personal archive, now held in the UCL Institute of Archaeology Collections, I will explore how Harding came into archaeology and his role on the Tell Jemmeh excavations. I present Harding's digging diary and photographs from the field, seen here for the first time (see **Figures 1–15** and Appendix A), and examine what these can tell us about the site, contemporary field practices and attitudes to the past, as well as the overall 'mythology' of a Petrie excavation.

By the 1920s, when Tell Jemmeh was first excavated, Flinders Petrie was a well-known figure, used as a focal point for publicity and fundraising, and sufficiently in the public eye that even his departures abroad were reported on in the popular press (e.g.: Sparks 2013b: fig. 2)—a profile that his own prolific publication rate helped maintain (Uphill 1972). As a result, the figure of Flinders Petrie has tended to dominate archaeological narratives, overshadowing the roles played by those who worked alongside him. This paper aims to redress the balance by moving the focus to Harding, a member of Petrie's excavation team, who embarked on his career in archaeology at a time when Petrie's own career was nearing its end. It will provide an insight into Harding the man, as well as Harding

the student and burgeoning professional, and through his eyes contribute to our understanding of this formative and important period in the development of the archaeology of ancient Palestine.

## Archival Sources

The Gerald Harding archive was donated to the Institute of Archaeology in 2015 by Harding's close friend and executor, Michael Macdonald. Harding had bequeathed all his papers and academic work to Macdonald, more in the hope that they might be personally useful to him than with any idea of them becoming formalised in an academic institution (Macdonald 2014). However, the research value of this collection as a testament to a long and varied career in archaeology was readily apparent, and so it was decided to house it at UCL as a valuable resource for future research. The archive comprises photographs, slides, film footage, correspondence, diaries, research notes and ephemera, reflecting Harding's personal history as well as his work in Palestine, Transjordan and Aden. The film footage has already received considerable attention, as the focus of the *Filming Antiquity Project* (Thornton 2016; for research on other material in the collection, see also Thornton 2014). The documentation that has proved particularly relevant to this article comprises Harding's personal diary, recording the early part of the 1926–1927 field season at Tell Jemmeh, and his 1926–1930 photographic album.

Harding's diary consists of 16 handwritten pages, perforated down one edge and clearly taken from a bound notebook, although the sheets are now loose. The diary ends abruptly, after only a few weeks on site and before the dig itself had been completed. While it is possible that further pages were kept, and have since been lost, the fact that the last diary entry is complete, and ends partway down a page, makes it seem more likely that Harding simply abandoned his journal, either because dig life became too busy,

or he did not feel there was enough to record; entries become increasingly brief towards the end. Harding does not seem to have kept this style of diary again; between 1933 and 1979, he moved to using smaller, pocket-sized diaries, with only brief notes on his activities, and later in his life, seemed to have forgotten that he had ever kept a journal-style diary at all (Harding 1979: xi).

Harding's photographic album includes images captured between November 1926 and early 1927: seven photographs taken en-route to Palestine (Figures 1 and 2), 12 photographs of Gaza, three from a visit to Beersheba, and 25 black and white images from the Tell Jemmeh excavations (Figures 3–15). Several of the latter might be considered documentation of the site from an archaeological point of view, presenting different aspects of the tell and surviving landscape (Figures 3 and 4), and various views of excavations in progress (Figures 7–9, 15). But there are also more personal images: a group photograph of Harding and his European team members (Figure 12); colleagues taking a break by the side of the trench (Figure 11); Hilda Petrie, swagger stick in hand, listening to a Bedouin woman (Figure 14); staff attending a *fantasia* (Figure 13), and views of the dig house where they lived and worked (Figures 5 and 6). There were also images of a local house, and a man using a camel to plough his field (Figure 10).

These prints were stuck into the album with only minimal captioning, either labelling an entire page of images—e.g. 'Jemmeh 1926–7'—or pointing to a specific image—e.g. 'House building', or 'Prof. Petrie'. The viewer is therefore often left to guess what specific item or activity was being observed, or why the photograph had been taken. The quality of the images is variable: some of the prints lack sharpness or are poorly lit, and several are now faded or creased. They were, of course, only ever intended as a private record, and although Petrie occasionally made use of photographs taken by his staff in his site publications, none of the Jemmeh images that appear in Harding's archive made it into the official record in this way.

The information gleaned from Harding's Jemmeh diary and photographic album can be fleshed out from a number of other sources. The excavation has its official record, in the form of published material (Petrie 1927a, 1928), as well as unpublished field notebooks, glass slides and some black and white photographs held in the Petrie archive at the UCL Institute of Archaeology. There are also unofficial records of what went on, as represented by oral histories and biographical notes in the UCL Harding Archive (Anon. n.d. 1; Macdonald 2014), Petrie's personal pocket diary for that year (Petrie 1926–27; Del Vesco 2013), private letters written during the course of the work (Drower 2004; Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology Drower Archive), and even some stereoscopic images taken of the dig during a site visit (Library of Congress 2018). These different sources often complement or corroborate each other. Thus Harding's photographs provide a good counterpoint to Hilda Petrie's written descriptions in her letters home, while his daily journal helps us understand the more enigmatic notes in Petrie's brief pocket diary

entries or things that receive only a brief mention in the site publication, as well as showing us a different perspective to events described elsewhere by Hilda. Interesting differences may also be noted between the private and official records of the dig. While Harding's trench shots, for example, incorporate the human element while capturing work in progress, Petrie's are more static, focusing on the architecture rather than the excavation process. Out of the 20 images Petrie published of excavated areas, only three include people, and they tend to be peripheral to the scene. Harding and Petrie's photographs appear to have been driven by different sets of priorities.

### A Short Biography of Gerald Harding

Gerald William Lankester Harding was born in Tianjin, China in 1901, but spent his childhood years in Singapore, before returning to London just before the First World War (Winnet 1980: 127). After his father was killed in the landing at Gallipoli (Starkey 1936a), Harding supported himself with a number of jobs, working variously for a printing company and as a furniture salesman (Eyre and Spottiswoode n.d.; Anon. n.d.: 2). He came to Middle Eastern archaeology through a passion for ancient Egypt, first inspired by reading issues of *The Children's Encyclopedia*, and further developed by reading widely on the subject as a young man. He taught himself elementary hieroglyphs, and during a chance meeting with Francis Griffith at the Egypt Exploration Society exhibition at Burlington House in 1924, was encouraged to visit Petrie's annual exhibition at Gower Street, where he saw a notice for evening classes in Egyptology (Anon. n.d.: 2). This led to him studying under Margaret Murray at University College, who persuaded him to write to Flinders Petrie about a career in archaeology (Anon. n.d.: 2). Petrie wrote an encouraging letter in reply: 'If you can put up with the chance of a bad year or two, without pay, then excavating is a good opening, and it may lead to American posts afterwards', and suggested that they meet (Petrie 1926). It was later arranged that Harding would go on Petrie's next dig, with Petrie reportedly paying his fare and board; Harding cashed in a life insurance policy to provide further financial support (Anon. n.d.: 2). While Harding was disappointed to find out the dig would be in Palestine, not Egypt, it did not put him off (Anon. n.d., 2), and he would go on to become an important member of Petrie's field staff for the next few years, excavating for him at Tell Jemmeh (1926–1927), Qau (1927), Tell Fara (1927–1930) and Tell el-'Ajjul (1930–1932).

His subsequent career also proved highly successful. He went off to assist James Leslie Starkey in excavations at Lachish (1932–1936), before taking up the post of Curator of the Department of Antiquities of Transjordan in 1936. Correspondence in the Harding archive shows how reluctant Starkey was to lose Harding, although he fully supported what was then a major advance in his career (Starkey 1936b). The subsequent impact of Harding's presence and work on the development of archaeology in Transjordan cannot be underestimated. He played a key role in the successful recovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, set up the National Museum in Amman, and established the

*Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Transjordan*. On leaving his post, he conducted the first Archaeological survey of Aden, and did extensive research into North Arabian inscriptions. Even after his death in 1979, Harding continued to have influence, not least through his seminal guidebook, *The Antiquities of Jordan* (1979): as a young student on my first dig in the Middle East in the late 1980s, this was considered *the* book to have when touring archaeological sites, and we would go nowhere without it. It is strange then, to think of this authoritative figure having a younger, more inexperienced self; but all archaeologists have to begin somewhere.

### A Background to Petrie and the Archaeology of British Mandate Palestine

Before embarking on an exploration of Harding's time at Tell Jemmeh, it is worth examining the regulatory structures and organisation underlying British work in Palestine at the time the dig took place. Petrie had last worked in the region in 1890, when he excavated the site of Tell el-Hesi for the Palestine Exploration Fund (Drower 1995: 159–163). Much had changed since that time. The Ottoman Empire had been dissolved, and in the aftermath of the First World War, the Department of Antiquities for Palestine was established in 1920 as part of the British colonial administration, under the direction of John Garstang, a friend and former colleague of Petrie's (Moorey 1991: 49; Gibson 1999: 115). A new antiquities law was developed, with the guidance of representatives from the French, American and British schools of archaeology in Jerusalem, who were to maintain an advisory role to the Department (Bentwich 1924: 252). This framework very much favoured foreign excavators and colonial interests. Amongst the provisions of the regulations that came into force, was an agreement that finds from fieldwork would be divided between the Department of Antiquities and the excavator (Antiquities Ordinance 1920: part V section 5.1). The acquisition of portable antiquities that could be sold on to museums or collectors was an important source of income for many excavations, and this seems to have been a major factor in Petrie's decision to move his sphere of operations in 1926 from Egypt, where such object divisions were no longer allowed, to Palestine (Drower 1995: 355–356, 363–364; Sparks 2013b: 2–3; for a discussion of the impact of this policy of 'partage' in Egypt, see Stevenson 2013).

When he returned to Palestine, Petrie would have found not only a new government, but also a new Palestinian archaeology. He could no longer be considered a pioneer in this field; his early work at Hesi had been added to by several decades of excavation and accumulation of knowledge. Petrie has been criticised for having little awareness of current field methods or results at this time (Moorey 1991: 60), although it may be more accurate to say that he was aware of the work that others were doing, without necessarily being influenced by it himself (Sparks 2007: 4). This is not to say that the 72-year old Petrie was no longer capable of innovation. At Jemmeh, he was to modify his previous excavation techniques, exposing, planning and then removing large horizontal layers of occupation,

rather than simply recording and backfilling them, as had been his practice on many of his Egyptian sites (Sparks 2007: 5). Moreover, the broad strata that Petrie identified are generally viable (e.g. Van Beek 1993), although there was no attempt to separate occupation debris from fills and constructional layers, preventing any detailed understanding of the way the site developed; the quality and incompleteness of surviving field records is also an issue. It is not known how much of the strategy at Jemmeh was Petrie's own, and how much can be attributed to his field director, Leslie Starkey, or indeed any other member of his staff. When reconstructing field practice and decision making, the Petrie *mythos* tends to obscure local realities. It is often only when we get to examine the private record, as represented by letters and diaries, that we can obtain a more complete understanding of actual events. For more detailed discussion of Petrie's field methods, see Sparks (2007) and (2013a).

### Setting out for Jemmeh

Harding travelled out to Palestine with the Petries, leaving London by train on 14 November 1926, getting off first at Paris, then travelling on to Marseilles, where they boarded the *SS Champollion*, destination Alexandria (Petrie 1926–27). Although Harding did not keep a travel diary, he took several photographs during the trip that help document what we know about it from other sources. These show Harding on board ship, posing casually by the handrail (Figure 1), a lifeboat drill, 1920s style (Figure 2),



**Figure 1:** Harding on board the *SS Champollion*. At this point, he was clean shaven; he was to grow a beard during the course of the dig. Image courtesy of the UCL Institute of Archaeology.



**Figure 2:** Lifeboat drill on board the SS Champollion, en-route to Alexandria in Egypt. Professor Petrie stands talking in the background. Image courtesy of the UCL Institute of Archaeology.

and a view of the coast on arrival. The party landed in Alexandria on the afternoon of 20 November, and were in their hotel in Cairo by that evening, where they met up with Leslie Starkey, who was to be Petrie's field director during the coming excavation. The next few days saw visits to the Step Pyramid of Zoser, and lunch under the Great Pyramid; Harding duly photographed both (Petrie 1926–27; Drower 2004: 215; Harding album). From there, it was an overnight train trip to Gaza, where the team put up at the Rest House, an impressive stone building with arched doorways and a marble-paved courtyard (Drower 2004: 216; Harding album). Starkey had already arrived with their seven Egyptian workmen, who were to provide digging expertise for the enterprise (James 1979: 76 and pl. VII; Drower 2004: 216).

Petrie had not yet determined where he would be excavating that season, and so the next few days were spent exploring the area and looking for potential sites. He settled on Tell Jemmeh as the most likely prospect, a site located on the banks of the Wadi Ghazze in the northwestern Negev, around 12 km to the south of Gaza (Ben-Schlomo and Van Beek 2014: 1; **Figures 3 and 4**). Accordingly, on 5 December, Harding and Starkey went ahead with some of the workmen to build the dig house and prepare the camp for the coming field season (Petrie 1928: 1; **Figures 5 and 6**). Materials were sent down from Gaza as needed, with their corrugated iron roofing coming all the way from Jaffa (Drower 2004: 222). The Petries and other members of the team remained behind at Gaza, doing some digging and general archaeological prospecting, until the camp was ready. The field season only officially began when Petrie arrived at the site on Friday 17 December.

While Petrie would have been required to get an excavation permit from the Department of Antiquities for any soundings or excavation work (Antiquities Ordinance 1920: part V articles 27–28; Bentwich 1924: 253), it is not yet clear how or when this was arranged—or indeed, if it was arranged for his impromptu investigations around Gaza. No formal report of this work appears to have survived. Where Jemmeh was concerned, however, Departmental officials were involved with a division



**Figure 3:** View of the east face of Tell Jemmeh. Image courtesy of the UCL Institute of Archaeology.



**Figure 4:** View from the top of the tell, showing the landscape around Jemmeh. Image courtesy of the UCL Institute of Archaeology.



**Figure 5:** The Tell Jemmeh dig house under construction in early December 1926. Image courtesy of the UCL Institute of Archaeology.



**Figure 6:** View of the finished dig house, with the tell rising up sharply behind. One of Harding's early jobs was to cut a staircase from here up to the top of the mound. Image courtesy of the UCL Institute of Archaeology.

of finds at the end of the season, lists of which may be found in the Israel Antiquities Archives (Mandate File ATQ/9/6), and so his paperwork must have been in order. The existing timeline suggests that arrangements must have been made fairly hastily at the start of the season, considering that the decision to excavate at Jemmeh was not taken until after the team arrived in Palestine.

### Excavating Jemmeh

Harding's Jemmeh diary begins on 17 December 1926—nearly two weeks after he had first arrived at the site. His decision to begin keeping a daily record of events coincided with Petrie's arrival in the camp. In itself, this implies that the purpose of the diary was to document the excavations and dig activities, rather than as part of an ongoing record of Harding's life. His entries cover logistical activities such as the final stages of building the dighouse, cutting steps up the side of the tell, and making the road into the site navigable for cars; as well as day to day discoveries on the excavations, the different archaeological roles he took on, and the impact weather had on his work, punctuated by a few personal comments on his colleagues and descriptions of social events—including a long comic poem describing the dig's Christmas festivities. Whatever impulse drove Harding to begin the diary, he did not continue it for long, with the last entry being made on 19 January 1927, well before the official closing date of the dig on 15 May (Petrie 1928: 1). For an annotated transcript of the diary entries, see Appendix A.

Harding's diary is revealing in many ways. On the one hand, it provides insights and further information about the actual process and progress of the dig, from the point of view of a new hand, fleshing out and sometimes even correcting the published record. On the other, it gives us historical perspective, allowing brief glimpses into the social life of a Petrie excavation and the Gaza expatriate community, and filling out in a more personal way the various characters that contributed to Harding's experiences. Combined, they allow us to better contextualise the Tell Jemmeh excavations, and this formative period in the history of archaeology in the region. The following discussion will now explore some of the content of the diary in more detail, demonstrating how it contributes to our understanding of different aspects of the Jemmeh project, and bringing in evidence from other sources where possible to help understand its significance.

### Archaeological aspects

The Jemmeh team dug six days a week, for at least 18 weeks, employing anything up to 360 workers at a time (Petrie 1928: 3). As a result, a great deal of material was uncovered, with six major strata exposed in an estimated 2,300 sq.m. area of the tell (Ben-Shlomo and Van Beek 2014: 4), in addition to work done in other areas. Most of the time Harding appears to have been involved in supervising men digging different parts of the tell

(Figures 7–9), either on the top, where the main excavations were, or down the side of the southern face; he also appears to have worked in an area south of the tell, where Roman remains were found. Friday was 'the weekend', with no digging, but even then, we hear that sometimes Harding helped Petrie with his surveying, or did levelling or pottery sorting, suggesting that work could be expected of staff even on rest days.



**Figure 7:** View of the main excavation area on top of the tell. Image courtesy of the UCL Institute of Archaeology.



**Figure 8:** Two staff members sit engrossed on the left, while workers carry away baskets of spoil on the right. Image courtesy of the UCL Institute of Archaeology.



**Figure 9:** One of the deep areas of excavation on the tell. A survey point is visible in the top right corner. Image courtesy of the UCL Institute of Archaeology.

We get a good sense of what Harding thought was exciting or important about the site by what he chose to discuss in his diary. Excavated features receive the occasional mention—from uncovering walls and rooms, to working on the ‘round tower’, which appears in his diary entries for 21 and 22 December. Petrie’s pocket diary entry for the former also makes reference to this, with the term ‘tower’ crossed out and replaced with ‘granary’ (Petrie 1926–27). It is therefore probably safe to assume that this was one of the circular late Persian/Hellenistic period granaries that were excavated at the site—most probably granary AA, which would have been the first of those dug (see Petrie 1928: 4, 8–9, pls XIII–XIV). The team eventually excavated 11 of these structures (Petrie 1928: 8; Van Beek 1993: 673).

Complete or intact pots recovered during excavations also raise some interest, as do sporadic other finds, such as ground stone tools, beads, glass vessels, and objects made of gold, often with some reference to who actually made the discovery.

Mohammed finds a set of pots on the cemetery site during the morning, and Hofneh finds a set almost identical on my work during the afternoon (diary entry 27 December 1926).

Chance finds are likewise considered worthy of note, from the scarab found right outside the dig compound gate, to Madge Starkey’s scarab in two halves (diary entries 22 and 26 December 1926). As might be expected, more mundane material, such as the basket-loads of sherds the excavators must have been finding on a daily basis, do not make an appearance. Also missing is any clear description of the contexts for most of the items reported, or any discussion of their significance. In this, the material tends to be presented as treasure, rather than evidence, probably reflecting the state of Harding’s still limited knowledge. This said, there are aspects of his phrasing and word choice in some entries that suggest he was beginning to develop a more professional vocabulary:

In the afternoon I struck a small pottery dump heap, also found a piece of onyx bead, and a haematite weight, which greatly excited Prof.: he says it weighs exactly 4 shekels—quite a discovery (diary entry 23 December 1926).

Harding is presumably picking up some more archaeological turns of phrase from listening to his excavation colleagues.

Neither Harding’s photographic album or diary includes images of these or other artefacts from the dig, and he rarely gives any detailed information about the objects themselves—they tend to be rather generically described—e.g. ‘pots’ or ‘a piece of gold’. Unfortunately, this means that we cannot clearly identify most of the finds that he mentions in passing—not even the 4 shekel hematite weight referenced in the preceding quote. One suspects that some of the objects that Harding mentions had become noteworthy because, like this one, they had raised Petrie’s interest in some way, and so became the subject of

further discussion. We know, for example, that Petrie was particularly interested in ancient weights and measures; he carefully weighed and recorded all the objects he identified as such, with lists of weights appearing in several of his field notebooks, and a full page of his site report being devoted to the subject (Petrie 1928: 25–6, pl. LXVIII). Similarly, the ‘piece of Greek pottery’ Harding refers to in his diary entry for 21 December was probably mentioned because of its perceived importance in establishing the date of the granary deposits (Petrie 1928: 4, XIX.20). The scarab of Tuthmosis III picked up ‘right outside the gate’ is another such case (diary entry 22 December 1926); Petrie valued inscribed material as providing possible chronological anchors for his sites, and so used another scarab with a cartouche of Tuthmosis III to date his lowest stratum, J–K, to the 18th dynasty (1928, 4–5, pl. XIX.20). In the end, this date proved too early, as later research has shown the scarab in question was actually produced in the 19th or 20th dynasties; that particular stratum more properly dates from the LBII to Iron IA periods (Keel 2013: 29, Tel Gamma cat. 61; Van Beek 1993: 669; Ben-Shlomo and Van Beek 2014: 4).

Harding’s diary entry for 30 December implies that the hopes of the dig season lay in finding pre-Roman remains:

As per usual: nothing very special appeared. Umbarak found a few beads with a child burial on the Roman cemetery, and one large tomb was found to contain about 20 bodies. What appears to be a tomb has been struck at a considerably lower level than the Roman ones, so there’s hope yet.

This bias—in which even a Roman burial containing 20 bodies is not considered special—most probably originated with Petrie, who had already passed up the chance to dig Roman material at Gaza, and was looking for an earlier period site (1928: 1). In one of his letters, Petrie speaks of how ‘Happily there is no Ro[man] or late G[ree]k layer on the tell’ (Drower 2004, 232). Despite this, some Roman period remains were excavated on the flat plain a quarter of a mile to the south of the mound, which included parts of four mosaic pavements and a cistern (Petrie 1928: 24). It would appear that Harding supervised cleaning at least one of the mosaics, which he described in typically restrained fashion as being ‘quite a nice affair’ (see diary entry for 29 December). It is not clear why this area became the focus of work, considering Petrie’s interest in earlier periods; perhaps it was initially explored as part of efforts to locate early period tombs. Petrie did not publish any detailed descriptions or photographs of the mosaics, and lack of funds meant the pavements remained *in situ* (Petrie 1928: 24). As Petrie explained in a letter to his son John:

I reckon that it would cost at least £100 to take one up and pack it in sections; else more than that to lay it down properly elsewhere. As I do not know of any place that would house it, I fear these will be left to the plough. I tried to persuade the dis-

strict Inspector to put up a guard house here, and so make use of the pavings, but he would not rise (Petrie 1927b: 3).

The mosaics were accidentally re-exposed in 1945, and photographed by the Department of Antiquities before being backfilled; an image is now on file in the Israel Antiquities Authority archives (Husseini 1945). The fate of these mosaics, and their invisibility in the published record, serves as a reminder of how much control archaeologists have over the creation of 'evidence'; they decide what should be recorded as significant, and what may be passed over and forgotten (El-Haj 2001: 13).

Petrie also excavated an ancient cemetery, although it is not clear from the site report exactly where this was located, or what was found there, and unusually, no tomb cards appear to have been filled out for any of the graves within it. Harding's diary entries do give us some further information. The area was opened up on 26 December in the hope of finding tombs, but was not on the main tell. It may have been somewhere in the region of the Roman mosaics, although this was never explicitly stated. It sounds as though Harding did not work in the cemetery himself, as he usually describes it as something distinct from 'his work'. At the same time, he frequently reports on what happened there, perhaps because it offered more exciting finds than his own area (diary entries 27–28 and 30 December 1926; 2, 10 January 1927).

According to Petrie, the cemetery contained a series of narrow chamber graves, roofed with limestone slabs, supposedly without bones or objects (Petrie 1928: 24). However Harding's account contradicts the official one, as shown by the child burial and large multi-use tomb described in his diary entry for 30 December, and cited earlier. Other objects were also found in the cemetery area, although it is not clear if any came from inside graves, including a 'set of pots', a piece of gold, and glass bottles (entries for 27 December and 2 January). A rubbish pit nearby was said to contain glass fragments, a Byzantine lamp and some little cups (Petrie 1928: 22, 24–25); this may be the *medowa* Harding mentions in his entry for 10 January.

Later period remains were also discovered on the top of the Jemmeh tell (or *kom*, as Harding calls it), in the form of a series of 'grain pits' and burials. Petrie calls these 'medieval Arab'; several contained Islamic glass bracelets (Petrie 1928: 25, pl. LXVIII.4–8), and further study of these may be able to provide more precise dating (e.g.: Spaer 1988). Subsequent excavations of the site by a team from the Smithsonian Institute in the 1970s and 1980s also found several burials in their uppermost phase; these were difficult to date because of lack of finds, but could have been anything from the Mamluk period to the present day (Ben-Shlomo and Van Beek 2014: 146; 574). Harding tells us his 'Arab' burials were encountered on 30 December, and treats them as a great inconvenience, an attitude quite likely picked up from his colleagues: the lack of a modern cemetery to 'obstruct work' is one of the reasons Petrie gives for choosing to dig at Jemmeh in the first place (Petrie 1928: 1).

Several Arab burials appeared on top of the Kom, hindering work considerably, but fortunately the locals don't realise that they're Arab, so we can remove them all (diary entry 30 December 1926).

Harding's suggestion that removal would not have been possible had the locals realised the burials were Arab implies that the excavators resorted to a certain amount of subterfuge with their workforce when clearing this area. He shows no moral qualms at digging up historic, possibly even modern human remains; expresses no empathy for local cultural sensitivities, and does not consider the possibility of reburial. The ethics behind this deceit are not considered; Harding's only concern seems to be one of successful concealment. This attitude and approach would be unconscionable today.

It is worth noting here that, according to the Palestine Antiquities Ordinance of 1920, which the Jemmeh excavations were subject to, objects dating after 1700 AD were not deemed to be antiquities (Antiquities Ordinance 1920: part III, article 8.1), and so therefore could be safely disregarded by excavators, according to the official perspective. This definition of 'antiquity' remained active in subsequent ordinances. While human remains were not specifically covered at that time, the revised ordinance of 1929 stated that only human remains earlier than 600 A.D. were to be considered antiquities, suggesting that the Mandate authorities held a similarly dismissive attitude to Islamic and Ottoman period remains (Government of Palestine 1934: 1). This attitude demonstrates the bias underlying the colonial framework in which British archaeologists like Petrie and Harding were operating, in which certain categories and periods of cultural heritage were prioritised over others (El-Haj 2001: 71–72).

While Petrie was clearly interested in finding earlier period graves, in the end only one was discovered, on a rise southwest of the cemetery, and of Middle Bronze Age date (Petrie 1928: 22, 24, pl. LXII, 'Cem. 1'). None of the other burials excavated, whether Roman or Arab, appear to have been assigned numbers or recorded in any way, which is odd, considering that Petrie had excavated many tombs previously in his work back in Egypt, and usually had good systems in place for managing information about them. Again, it may well reflect his own lack of interest in the material. The Arab burials receive only a passing mention in the site publication, by which time they have been defined as 'medieval' (Petrie 1928: 25); some of the human remains from these are now in the archives of the Duckworth Laboratory in Cambridge (As.66.1.1–4).

In his last diary entry, Harding talks about Petrie setting up a separate dig at Tell es-Shari'a (Tel Sera'), another site along the Wadi Ghazze (diary entry 19 January 1927). In the event, this project never materialised. Petrie had shown an interest in this site when he first started prospecting for somewhere to excavate that season, believing it to be the site of ancient Sharuhin, but preferred Jemmeh because of the lack of a 'modern' cemetery (Petrie 1928: 1). Tell es-Shari'a was eventually dug by Eliezer Oren

between 1976 and 1979 and found to have occupation ranging from the Chalcolithic down to the Mamluk period (Oren 1993). Petrie did correctly anticipate the impact of later period burials across the site on work there, with several hundred Muslim burials cutting into the archaeological levels immediately below (Oren 1993: 1335). It is no longer thought that Shari'a was the ancient city of Sharuhen; two other Petrie sites, Tell el-'Ajjul and Tell Fara, have subsequently been suggested as more likely candidates for this site (Kempinski 1974; see also Rainey 1993: 183\*–184\*).

### **Dig discomforts**

Life on a dig was not always comfortable. The weather could be difficult and unpredictable, leading to some unpleasant days in the field, which Harding mentions in his diary. Petrie's pocket diaries also contain frequent notes about the weather, although his primary concern was its impact on the excavations. Drought was a major problem that year (Drower 2004: 241), and there had been little rain at the start of the season, so that high winds occasionally led to dust storms that stopped digging (e.g.: diary entries 5 and 8 January; Drower 2004: 232, 235).

Slight wind started to get up about 10.30, gradually increasing in power until by 3.30 there was another blinding duststorm raging. Fortunately Starkey managed to get another load of large stones on the roof, so I hope it won't blow off. I go first if it does (Diary entry 21 December 1926).

The drought had also impacted local farmers, and it was only when some rains came—which also interrupted work—that they were able to start sowing their crops (**Figure 10**; see diary entries for 12–14 January 1927).

Health could also be an issue. While Harding doesn't actually report on any ill health of his own, he does tell us that Hilda was ill on five occasions, Petrie once, and that Starkey came down with jaundice mid-January,



**Figure 10:** A local man ploughs his fields, using a camel and what Hilda Petrie described as a 'Roman plough' (Drower 2004: 235). Image courtesy of the UCL Institute of Archaeology.

which left Harding in charge of managing field operations for several days (16–19 January). Petrie's pocket diary tells us that diarrhoea was sometimes an issue; the poor water quality at Jemmeh seems to have been a factor here (Drower 2004: 227, 230), although others have attributed ill health on Petrie digs to the poor diet (Seton-Williams 1988: 41). Later that season, there would also be an outbreak of mumps among the workers (Drower 2004: 241).

Harding's diary shows a strong interest in food, not an uncommon theme in Middle Eastern digs, both past and present. This was probably made more acute by the Petries' notorious parsimony in this respect. It is said that Guy Brunton and Reginald Engelbach used to bribe their foreman to smuggle in alcohol and cheese when working for Petrie in Egypt (Smith 2003). Trips to Gaza provided a welcome respite for Harding from the monotonous diet, which sometimes had an adverse effect on the dig morale (see diary entries 31 December 1926 and 14 January 1927).

Harding's illicit late-night meal of fried onions and toast (diary entry 13 January 1927), and the reference to 'onionless stew' on Christmas day similarly reminds us of Petrie's infamous ban on onions in his dig kitchens (diary entry 25 December 1926; Drower 1995: 384). Food is certainly a major theme of Harding's Christmas poem, although the satirical tone makes it difficult to determine which of the treats described were actually present:

The feast is spread on the table:  
There's soup and onionless stew;  
And rice hot and cold with syrup of gold  
Peaches and gooseberries too.  
Then mince pies fresh from the homeland  
And cake with icing pink  
And candy and sweets, which are both special treats  
Then nuts and wine—I don't think.

However we can probably depend on the soup, stew, rice and golden syrup, all attested elsewhere. From Hilda's account of the same party, we learn that the main course was 'a grand stew and veg.', and that the mince pies were apparently real, brought in by Dr Parker (Drower 2004: 226). But the wine was probably *not* present, as the Petries disapproved of alcohol (Drower 1995: 388). While Harding appears to have continued the party outside—we are told he and the guards made 'music in the desert by turns'—Hilda turned to publication proofs to round off the evening (Drower 2004: 226).

### **Social networks and personal relationships**

All digs have internal hierarchies, which can be based on professional experience as well as time spent within a given project. But as Quirke has noted, excavations in the late 19th and early 20th century tend to have hierarchies based on principles both of colonisation ('us' versus 'the native') and social class (2010: 27–28, 47–48). Petrie's excavations had a structure that was fairly typical for their period, with Petrie and Hilda at the top of



the organisation, as the first and second in command of operations, followed by a small European staff whose individual status probably depended on their experience and actual value to the dig (**Figures 11 and 12**). At Jemmeh, Leslie Starkey was the most senior of these: he had previously worked with Petrie at Qau, and directed his own excavations at Karanis in Egypt (Bierbrier 2012: 523–524); he could stand in for the Petries in dealings with the Department of Antiquities, and was in fact to be the sole director at Fara for two seasons, when Hilda stayed in England fundraising and Petrie was sent to Italy for his health (Petrie 1930a: 1; Drower 1995: 370, 375).

The remainder of the ‘staff’ were made up of ‘students’, as Hilda calls the younger members of the dig team (e.g. Drower 2004: 226, 229 and 235). In reality, only two of Petrie’s Jemmeh staff would qualify as current students—Harding and Risdon both being members of Margaret Murray’s hieroglyphs class back in London. Starkey’s wife Madge, and Risdon’s wife Lucy were at Jemmeh in support roles that included sorting and drawing pottery (Drower 2004: 230); neither appear to have had any



**Figure 11:** Denzil Risdon, Leslie Starkey and Madge Starkey sitting on the side of the trench. Image courtesy of the UCL Institute of Archaeology.



**Figure 12:** Part of the Jemmeh team. Left to right: unidentified man, probably a site visitor; Leslie Starkey, Madge Starkey, Denzil Risdon, Lucy Risdon and Gerald Harding. Image courtesy of the UCL Institute of Archaeology.

formal archaeological training. Dr George Parker, who had been brought in for medical assistance, was a physician and medical lecturer in Bristol (Venn 1922: 24); it is not clear how he came to find himself working in archaeology, and he is usually treated as distinct from the ‘students’, perhaps because of his age and profession. In any case, it would appear that the term ‘student’ may well have been used simply as a generic term for Petrie’s young field staff, rather than carrying any implications of academic endeavour.

As an inexperienced new member of the team, Harding would have come into this hierarchy at a comparatively low level, although as Petrie seems to have valued individuals on their usefulness and hard work, it does not seem to have taken Harding long to secure his place in the system and to work his way up in both Petries’ esteem. He quickly became essential to the smooth running of Petrie’s digs, as Starkey commented in a later letter to Henry Wellcome (Starkey 1936b).

Beyond this, there was a sharp divide between the English and Middle Eastern staff, a divide Quirke frames as between the so-called ‘skilled’ labour of the foreign, supervisory staff, and ‘native’ labour of the greater workforce, with the real dividing line being one between literacy and supposed illiteracy in writing English; the former were given responsibility for documenting dig activities, the latter excluded from that role (2010: 46). This division is also mirrored visually, through cultural differences in attire. In Harding’s photographs, the clothing worn allows one to easily distinguish between the foreign archaeologists and Middle Eastern workers, as well as between Egyptian and local Bedouin, who differ in the manner of wearing their *keffiyeh*, or head scarf—the Egyptian workers wrap their headgear differently and do not wear an *agal* over the top. Representatives of all three groups may be seen seated in the foreground of **Figure 13**. Similarly, the sticks adopted by both Flinders and Hilda Petrie in



**Figure 13:** Harding attends a local *fantasia*. This was one of two such events he attended, the first on 9 January, and this one in April, to mark the end of Ramadan (Drower 2004: 243). Unlike the first occasion, this *fantasia* took place in the daytime, and so Harding was able to capture it visually. Image courtesy of the UCL Institute of Archaeology.

the field seem to serve as some sort of symbolic marker of authority, although they probably were also of practical use (Figures 14 and 15).

At the top of the Middle Eastern hierarchy were trusted long-term members of Petrie's dig team, including his



**Figure 14:** Hilda Petrie listens to a Bedouin women, while another woman and her children look on. Image courtesy of the UCL Institute of Archaeology.



**Figure 15:** Professor Petrie visiting the work, which he did several times a day during the Jemmeh field season (Drower 1995: 366). His diary tells us he also did much of the levelling, planning and photography. Image courtesy of the UCL Institute of Archaeology.

cook, Mohammed Osman el-Kreti, and seven workers from Quft who were brought in from Egypt to train the local bedouin in archaeological techniques—Hassan Osman, Umbarak, Sultan Bakhit, Mohammed Said, Ahmad Ali, Hofny Ibrahim and Sadiq Abdeen (James 1979: pls VII.4, XIV.2; Drower 2004: 216). Just as some of these men gain recognition and identity in the pages of Harding's diary, as well as in Hilda and Flinders Petrie's private letters, they also feature in some of the official documentation surrounding Petrie's digs, such as post-Jemmeh correspondence relating to their rail travel from Egypt to Palestine, now in the British Mandate archives of the Israel Antiquities Authority (e.g.: ATQ/17/6). Informed by the invisible status created by a person's role on the dig and previous relationships with Petrie, and the visual status marker of how one dressed, a more physical boundary was also created by the architecture of the dig, in the form of the '*hosh*', or dighouse courtyard, a space outside the various rooms used for sleeping and working, defined around its perimeter by a low mudbrick enclosure wall (Fig. 5). Its height made this more of a symbolic than an actual barrier, but it helped create a liminal space between the world of the foreign archaeologists and the local workforce, with Europeans and select Middle Eastern staff authorised to work within its boundaries, and others largely kept without. This kind of physical separation has been noted on other projects in the colonial Middle East (Butler forthcoming; Carruthers 2019: 7).

Another aspect of the social structure underlying the Petrie excavations is revealed somewhat incidentally by Harding's diary, when he describes how the workers were paid. This complex process is mentioned a couple of times, initially as a visual spectacle (17 December 1926), then as something of a difficult occasion (7 and 13 January 1927).

Men paid off at 5: great business. A table is brought out into a large open space near the tent, at which Starkey and I sit, me with my little black book, S[tarkey] with the money. All the men and boys, about 36 in all, assemble and divide into their various villages. They then squat on the ground round us, and we do them village by village, one man from each taking all the cash and doling it out to the others afterwards (diary entry 17 December 1926).

Harding's account gives us a glimpse into something of the social hierarchies within the team, with representatives from each village coming forward to receive pay for their own members, pointing to the maintenance of local power structures within the wider dig organisation. This was more than just an organisational tool however; Petrie was not above punishing all the men from one village for an individual member's transgressions (Petrie 1904: 31; Quirke 2010: 31). This would not have been an empty threat: the economic impact of the dig on local communities should not be underestimated (Barmby and Dolton 2006), although in the case of Jemmeh the work only lasted for a few months. The desirability of gaining

a place on the dig is made clear when Harding recounts how a couple of would-be workers tried to trick their way into employment (diary entry 9 January 1927), as well as by the large numbers that turned up in hope of selection (diary entry 19 December 1926). As well as the community framework behind the Jemmeh team, Petrie's field notebooks also show how family names recur across lists of workers, a reminder of the existence of parallel social networks across the workforce.

Within these concurrent systems, it should be noted that Harding appears to have had largely cordial relations with his Jemmeh co-workers. His shortening of some names in his diary seems to suggest a certain amount of affectionate camaraderie—he talks about 'Starks', and 'Ris', or 'the Prof.', and he was clearly choosing to socialise with some of the dig team in his time off, as attested by his New Year's Eve trip up to Gaza, and the parties held in his room (see entries for 31 December 1926, and 1, 3 and 11 January 1927). He also drank coffee with the workmen and other locals (7 and 14 January), entertained the men with his ukelele playing (19 December), and attended at least two local *fantasias* (9 January; **Figure 13**). It also seems significant that many of the Egyptian workmen feature in his diary entries by name, suggesting he had a friendly and easy-going relationship with them; their prominence may of course reflect their special status within the wider group of workers, because of the value Petrie placed on their skills, and the probable role of some as mentors to help Harding adjust to the requirements of fieldwork. Harding's diary entries also help return some agency to his Egyptian and bedouin co-workers—whose names or activities almost never appear in the public records for the site.

At the same time, it seems clear that Harding had a difficult relationship with at least one of the dig team—Hilda Petrie. He must have spent some time with her prior to the Jemmeh dig, as he had been to Wales to learn surveying with the Petries in August 1926, before travelling out from England with them (Drower 1995: 364). But by the time of the actual dig, he seems to have developed some dislike of her company, judging by his diary entries, rejoicing at her absences—'H. still in bed, so comparative peace reigns' (diary entry 13 January)—and actively avoiding her company—'At dinner we had to listen to all H.'s adventures up north; I escaped as soon as possible' (diary entry 22 December). Despite this, Harding does acknowledge her pivotal role in sorting out the complex dig accounts and pay, when she was ill and they had to do this without her (diary entry 6 January; Drower 2004: 229). A matching antipathy is not evident in Hilda's writings, although Harding does not feature in her letters to any great degree. It is also difficult to know if his feelings about Hilda were shared by other members of the Jemmeh dig team, but his attitude may have contributed to the underlying tensions within the Petrie camp that were to come to the fore a few years later, when they were working together again at Tell el-'Ajjul in the 1931–1932 field season. Hilda's autocratic approach did not rest well with the younger staff and was probably a prime factor in the departure of Harding and other key members of the team to join Leslie Starkey on

his new excavations at Lachish the following year (Drower 1995: 387–388, 390). However, efforts made by the Petries to regulate the work ethic and behaviour of their 'students' in the aftermath of this season also suggest that Hilda may have been subject to considerable provocation (Drower 1995: 392).

### Harding as Linguist

Harding occasionally drops an Arabic word into his diary entries—*kom* (an ancient mound, more usually called a 'tell' in Palestine), *miskeen* (poor, pitiful), *gafir* (guard), *suq* (market), *zummarā* (a musical instrument), and *medowa* (something round, used here to describe circular features like pits). This is a common practice with English-speakers working in the Middle East, particularly those who are just picking up the language; we also see it in Hilda and Olga Tufnell's letters home from this period, and in the tomb cards that Harding and others filled in on site. In Harding's case, however, this was to become more than a superficial borrowing of terms that had entered dig house parlance; we learn from a reference that Petrie wrote for Harding a few years later that he had become fluent in Arabic (Petrie 1930b; for Petrie's views on the importance of learning Arabic, see Maiers and Muratov 2015: 45–50). On one occasion, the story goes that Harding and one of the bedouin workers rode off on camels to El Arish to buy some reed baskets for the dig. On arriving, they overheard a small boy say in Arabic 'That one at the back, he's a bit odd, I don't think he's a Bedouin at all', while another replied 'No, no, he's just a Bedouin who's learned a few words of English'. This interchange is said to have pleased Harding no end (Macdonald 2014).

Gaining fluency in Arabic was not something that happened casually. While much would have been learned from his daily encounters with Arab-speaking workers in the field, Harding probably also worked at his language skills in private; we may see traces of this in the fact that he ended up with a copy of Petrie's own handwritten Arabic word list, used to train staff in archaeological and practical phrases (now part of the Harding archive at UCL). Later, during the second 'Ajjul field season, Harding took evening lessons in Arabic from a man in Gaza, along with Olga Tufnell and Ralph Richmond Brown (Tufnell 1932), and he also may have improved his fluency by living with a Bedouin tribe in the Gaza area for a time (Carswell 2000; Winnet 1980, 127). As a result of these early influences, Harding spoke with a notably South Palestinian Bedouin accent (Macdonald 2014). Of course, languages were one of Harding's great strengths; he had learnt Malay as a child growing up in Singapore (Macdonald 2014), and after returning to London, taught himself Egyptian hieroglyphs so well that he was sent straight on to the advanced class when he eventually joined Margaret Murray's language course (Anon n.d.). Later in his career he became an expert in Safaitic and Thamudic inscriptions (Winnet 1980; Harding 1952, 1971; Winnet and Harding 1978).

His communication skills were probably one of the reasons that Harding became such a key member of the Petrie team, as he could be relied upon to take charge

when needed, and coordinate workers in a variety of tasks, from building the dig house and improving the roads (diary entries 19 December and 9 January) to standing in for Starkey in the field (16 January). He was said to be someone who 'could do anything if he really set his mind to it' (Tufnell 1985, 6). Being able to ask workers about the specific findspots of objects, and understand their answers, would also have increased the accuracy of his field recording. At Jemmeh, then, we probably see the beginning of Harding's transition from inexperienced digger to confident professional. It is worth noting that Harding's role is not made clear from the official, published record of the dig, which focuses on archaeological discoveries, rather than the logistics of how they were arrived at. This is where personal accounts such as diaries and letters are so important; the published record, including how a dig is represented in the media, tends to speak with the voice of the director, which can lead to an excavation being seen as an individual achievement, rather than a collaborative effort. Private records help balance out the account.

### **Petrie as Mentor: Help or Hindrance?**

Flinders Petrie was an important influence in Harding's career, giving him his first opportunity to take part in fieldwork abroad, and promoting his academic credentials and practical skills when recommending him to others:

He has studied Egyptian archaeology and language since his coming to University College six years ago. He is well acquainted with the archaeology and the dating of objects, which is essential in field work. He does drawings, plans, and photographs efficiently [...] I do not know any one better fitted to exercise a firm control over the safety of sites, and to be vigilant in conservation and understanding of the importance and meaning of new discoveries (Petrie 1930b).

In practical terms, though, what did Petrie's support actually mean? When it came to field training, Harding's diary makes it seem as though he was very much thrown into excavation, and apart from his brief time learning how to survey in Wales with Petrie, it is not clear exactly when or where he picked up all the skills he is later praised for. In all probability this was done on the job. Leslie Starkey, as Petrie's field director, would most probably have acted as his immediate supervisor and source of instruction. In addition, Harding's diary does tell us that he was working with at least two of the Egyptian workmen whom Petrie had brought from Quft to help train the local workforce: Hofny Ibrahim, and when he was unavailable, Sadiq Abdeen. This suggests that there may have been a policy of making sure the more inexperienced of Petrie's European staff had at least one good workman in his trench to keep an eye on him and provide some guidance. Certainly, within his Middle Eastern workforce, Petrie advocated putting 'new' men to work alongside more experienced hands (Quirke

2010: 47); this would be a similar approach, although the colonial framework in which digs were run at the time, with hierarchical separation of supervisor and workman, probably meant the effectiveness of this strategy would depend very much on the so-called supervisor's willingness to take advice. Harding's interest in learning Arabic, his practice of socialising with 'the men', and his general attitude to his Middle Eastern co-workers, as revealed in his diary entries, suggest he was not particularly interested in maintaining social or cultural barriers, and one suspects he was open to learning from his more experienced Qufti colleagues. There are also hints of Harding learning new skills elsewhere: and so Petrie subsequently describes Harding as 'practising my squeeze drawing' back in London (Petrie 1927c), and inking and making up plates for publication (Mackay et al. 1929: 36). His drawing work may also be recognised in several of Petrie's subsequent publications, thanks to the practice of his illustrators initialling their own work (e.g.: Petrie 1930a: pls XXXII, XXXIV).

Petrie's approval of Harding can also be seen in their relations after the Jemmeh dig season, where he appears to have kept him working for him in London on a salary of some £200 per year, using him to help organise the annual exhibition (Thornton 2015), prepare publication material and so on. This was enough to allow Harding to continue on in archaeology, support his widowed mother and, it is said, run a car in London and Palestine (Michael Macdonald pers. comm.). Later on, he was to receive an annual salary of £275 working for Starkey on the Lachish project. These amounts were modest, however, in comparison to the £700 per annum he was eventually to be offered for the Inspectorship of Transjordan (Starkey 1936b). These sums demonstrate that in the 1930s one did not have to be wealthy and self-funded to take part in archaeology, if you were able to get the right support. Despite the difficulty that Petrie encountered in raising his own dig funds (Sparks 2013b), he did find ways to pass money down the line, in order to keep good staff in his employ. In a similar vein, Petrie would later use a private donation by Lord Wakefield to his excavations at 'Ajjul to fund the presence of young archaeologist Noel Wheeler on his dig at 'Ajjul (H. Petrie 1933).

Petrie's support, however, was not always an advantage outside his own circle, as there were those who disparaged his methods or found his views and working habits out of date. In 1932, one of his own team at Tell el-'Ajjul, Harris Colt, met privately with the Director of Antiquities, E.T. Richmond, to complain about Petrie's working methods, including the use of inexperienced staff who were inadequately supervised (Drower 1995: 388; Richmond 1932). Harding himself may also have begun, by that time, to feel that the Professor was becoming too set in his ways (Macdonald 2014); certainly, at this point in his career Petrie was becoming increasingly out of step with the antiquities authorities, failing on numerous occasions to satisfy the not-unreasonable conditions of his excavation licenses (e.g.: Drower 1995: 380, 399). So when Harding applied for the post of Inspector of

Antiquities of Transjordan in 1936, despite praise from numerous sources, it is not perhaps surprising that his appointment did not go completely unopposed. One document reveals that the Assistant Secretary of the Colonial Office, C. Clouston, did not think Harding at all suited for the job, describing a Petrie dig as 'a thoroughly bad school to learn in.' He also dismissed Harding's background in what he viewed as 'Pre-history' (anything before the Classical period)—an ironic reversal on Petrie and Harding's expressed lack of interest in later period remains (Anon n.d. 2).

While Petrie might be considered Harding's mentor, there were other figures in his career that probably had an equal, or even greater impact on him. As his first teacher of ancient Egyptian language, Margaret Murray was his first access point into academic study, and it was through her encouragement that he made his first contact with Petrie and talked his way into a place on one of his digs. The two had experienced similar colonial upbringings—Harding in Singapore, Murray in India (Thornton 2014), and remained friends for life (Macdonald 2014).

Another figure who is likely to have had an impact on Harding's development as an archaeologist was Leslie Starkey. Starkey acted as Petrie's deputy on his Palestinian projects, directly supervising work in the field and standing in for Petrie in his absence—most notably in the first and third field seasons at Tell Fara when Petrie was in Rome (Drower 1995: 370, 375). It would seem that Petrie gave his deputy a good degree of autonomy, allowing him to change their working methods, even when Petrie thought his own system preferable:

This Ramadan, Starkey tries a new plan of working up to 1 pm and then stop, pay 1 p[ias]t[er] over half pay. It is economical, though not quite as much work as my stop at 3 pm on full pay (Petrie 1929: 7, entry for 22 February).

Harding went on to be Assistant Director for Starkey at Lachish, and Starkey proved very supportive when he decided to apply for the Inspectorship position, going so far to say of him that 'his is the type of genius which is born and not made' (Starkey 1936c). Starkey himself would have been seen very much as Petrie's man, through long association with his projects, and so his recommendations would not have persuaded those who were firmly in the anti-Petrie camp; however, as Harding got the post, it would seem that the voices of support were greater than those of dissent.

### Personal Records as a Source of Public Insight

Harding's diary and photographic archive document his personal experience on the first dig of his career, and were of course never intended to be a public record of events. Perhaps because of this, they show a refreshing honesty about the archaeological experience, as Harding records what was of interest to him, without the pressure of audience expectation—differing from other forms of private documentation, such as letters, where there is both

sender and recipient to be considered, or Petrie's site publications, which were aimed at a particular readership.

Private histories interact with public actions, and so have a value that goes beyond a mere documentation of the mundane or everyday. They reflect the social contexts in which they were created. Harding, as an individual, also to some extent acts as a proxy for a generation of archaeologists, some of whom followed similar paths of personal mentorship and opportunity into the profession. These kinds of personal records also offer an informal and unguarded take on the past, which can complement and contrast with official forms of documentation. Thus in Harding's diary we get to see beyond the mask of public statements to a more honest expression of opinion that offers a different perspective on public figures, such as Flinders and Hilda Petrie. It also offers a glimpse into the way a Petrie excavation was run, as seen through the eyes of one of its participants, rather than those of its creator. This is particularly valuable in the case of Petrie's work, as while we have many statements from Petrie himself as to his field or research methods and their success, these do not always seem to match his actual actions or outcomes in the field, as has been discussed elsewhere (Sparks 2013a). Anything that provides an alternative record or take on events is therefore welcome.

### Conclusions

Harding came to work in Palestine through lucky chance; had Petrie still been working in Egypt, that is most likely where he would have come to spend his life and career. Instead, he developed a strong connection with the Palestinian landscape and people, to the extent that within a few years he had made the area his permanent home. And while the Harding archive provides us with one man's personal experience of an excavation and moment in time, it forms part of a much larger mosaic of contemporary events and developments, with a value that extends beyond the purely biographical. It was through experiences such as these that archaeologists like Harding learnt practical field techniques, from how to dig to how to manage a workforce, while absorbing something of the attitudes and philosophies of their mentors, in Harding's case, Petrie and Starkey. Personal experience formed the basis of future practice and agendas, influencing the way in which the discipline of archaeology would develop in the future.

Petrie's archaeology was, like that of many of his peers, an archaeology of colonialism that excluded its Middle Eastern participants from intellectual involvement with the end product—research and publication—a position that is arguably still often in force today (Quirke 2010: 1–2, 11). In a similar way, the legal mechanisms for managing Palestinian archaeology and antiquities that emerged in the 1920s were designed and controlled by foreigners, and it was British archaeologists and administrators who set the practical agenda for the coming decades and defined how the past was to be prioritised.

In the light of all this, Harding's subsequent career in the Department of Antiquities of Transjordan can be seen

in some ways as transitional. He took his post there as part of the British apparatus of control, until he was removed as Director in 1956, in a political act designed to replace foreign administrators with local, Jordanian ones. And yet, while in post, he worked closely with his Jordanian colleagues, and had attempted to lay the groundwork for the development of local agency within the profession by including Arab-authored papers in the newly founded *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan*; its predecessor, the *Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities of Palestine* had been equally inclusive. Harding also persuaded the government to finance higher academic training of Jordanian archaeologists at the Institute of Archaeology in London (Macdonald 2014). The latter had limited success, although one of his successors as Director in the Department, Awni Dajani, did indeed attain his doctorate through this route, as well as being a major contributor to the early issues of the *Annual* (Dajani 1956: iii). However it was not until Dajani took over its editorship that an Arabic-language section was incorporated into the journal (Corbett 2014: 164).

Petrie's excavations at Tell Jemmeh represent a key moment in Gerald Harding's career and life—the point at which he was introduced to both field archaeology and the Middle East. In many ways, his personal account of his experiences at the site are typical of a young student attending their first dig; one minute he is soaking up new cultures and experiences, and the next he is becoming exasperated at the many small irritants and occasional tedium of dig life. Yet this represents more than a personal snapshot of one man's life; Harding's words and images reflect the wider professional, social and cultural networks in which he operated, allowing us to better contextualise and understand his and Petrie's work. At the same time, this study validates the preservation and exploration of personal histories and archives, demonstrating the valuable role they play as an alternative source of information to the published archaeological record.

### Additional File

The additional file for this article can be found as follows:

- **Appendix A.** Gerald Harding's diary transcript. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5334/bha-609.s1>

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### Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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