



A little under five years ago, ASOR and the [Levantine Ceramics Project \(LCP; www.levantineceramics.org\)](http://www.levantineceramics.org) agreed to join forces. We agreed that for five years, ASOR would include the [LCP](http://www.levantineceramics.org) in its list of research projects on the ASOR website, and contribute \$10,000/year in support. In return, the [LCP](http://www.levantineceramics.org) would advertise its ASOR affiliation on our homepage, make special efforts to provide research support to ASOR-affiliated excavations, and help ASOR in its mission of outreach and international visibility. Below, I summarize the [LCP](http://www.levantineceramics.org)'s mission, where we started and where we are now, what this resource brings to ASOR and its members, and how this collaboration can continue to our mutual benefit.

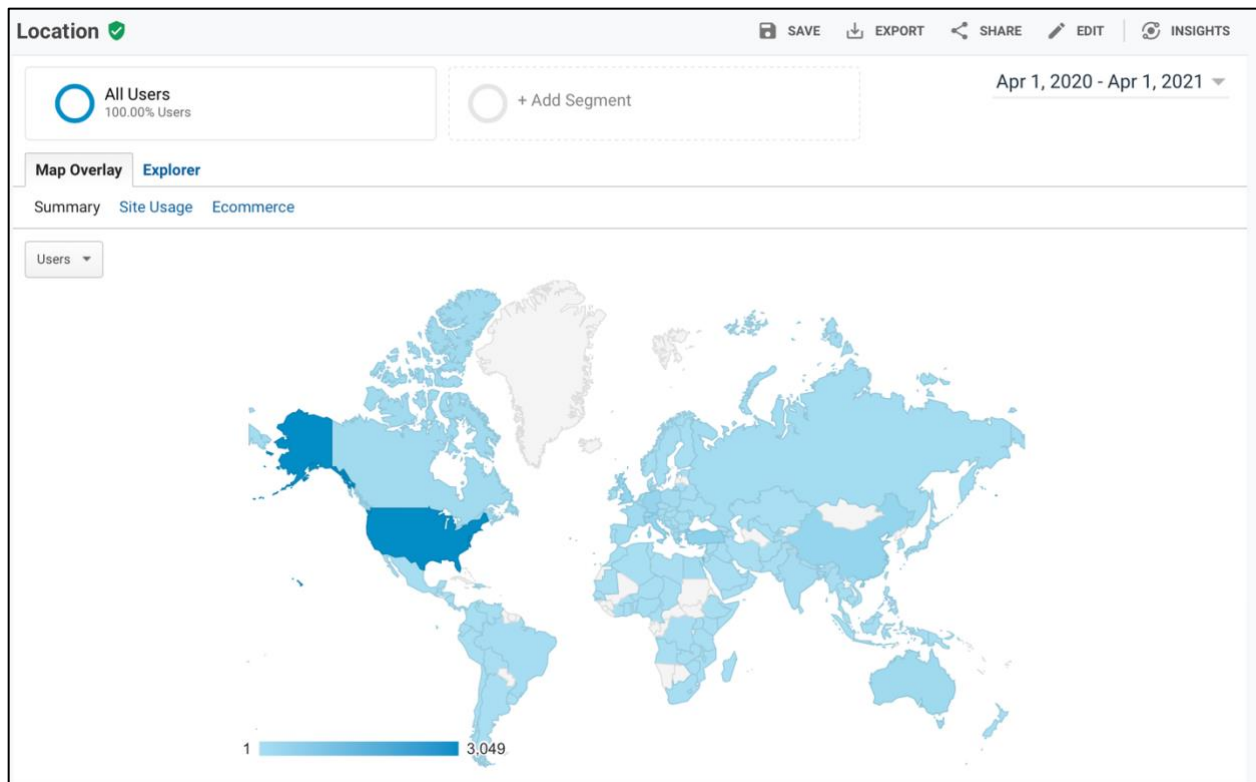
### **The [LCP](http://www.levantineceramics.org)'s mission**

The [LCP](http://www.levantineceramics.org) offers a new, sustainable research tool and model designed to foster the study of archaeological ceramics in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Why ceramics? Because they comprise the most abundant category of remains found throughout the Near East, and because every excavator must contend with identifying and publishing them, yet the mode by which that is done has not changed in a substantive way since William Flinders Petrie began working in 1880. Constant excavation since then has created unthinkable quantities of data, all disseminated via print (and now digitized versions of print) publications. Print is excellent for many things – but it is remarkably ill-suited for fast exchange of information, collaborative study, and especially the rapid recording of new or changing ideas. Since archaeology is a field that is *always* in a mode of discovery, we need tools that can keep up, that allow us to bring new material into dialogue with that long known, are easy to use, foster sharing, and enable us to readily learn from one other. The [LCP](http://www.levantineceramics.org) – a custom-built web application that can run in any browser – is such a tool.

### **Where are we now, and how did we get here?**

As ASOR EC members know, the [LCP](http://www.levantineceramics.org) has a wide range and a long span: the entirety of the Levant—Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Cyprus, and Egypt—from pottery Neolithic (c. 5500 BCE) through the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. I launched the [LCP](http://www.levantineceramics.org) in 2011 with a \$70k research grant from Boston University's Hariri Institute for Computational Research and \$20k of my own BU research funds. In our first year, we had 29 contributors, about 200 vessels, and less than 100 page views. Over the next five years, I ran 20 international workshops to increase the number of contributors and information on the site, and expanded its computational capacities via my own \$20k annual research fund plus over \$100k in private donations. When our ASOR partnership began in 2016, the number of contributors had risen to 194 and our annual page view count was around 50,000. Now, almost five years later, the [LCP](http://www.levantineceramics.org) has 500 contributors and over 12,000 vessels; in the last year the site received over 80,000 page views with representation from most countries and every continent except Antarctica and Greenland.

The annual budget for the [LCP](http://www.levantineceramics.org) ranges between \$60-\$70,000. ASOR contributes \$10,000; the remainder comes from private donations and my own BU research funds. The money goes for software development, student interns, oversight of computational connections, and server costs.



Colored countries are ones in which somebody consulted the [LCP](#) in the last year.

### What does the [LCP](#) do for ASOR and its members?

*Connects scholars to scholarship:* The [LCP](#) provides quick access to new finds and current ideas, and helps American researchers connect with foreign scholars. Most [LCP](#) contributors are based in Europe, Turkey, Cyprus, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, and Egypt, and are affiliated with foreign research universities or institutes. They are not members of ASOR, yet their enthusiastic embrace of the [LCP](#) helps ASOR members stay abreast of work they would otherwise have a hard time accessing or even knowing about in the first place. Keeping the [LCP](#) free and open access is critical; if there was a members-only access policy, we would lose the input of most of these foreign contributors.

*Inspires new resources:* The [LCP](#)'s affiliation with ASOR creates institutional reassurance in the site's longevity. One outgrowth of this occurred in spring 2020, when the Institute of Archaeology at Tel Aviv University established a new Laboratory for Ceramic Petrography, with all results to be submitted to the [LCP](#). To direct the laboratory, they appointed Dr. Paula Waiman-Barak, the [LCP](#)'s Editor for Petrography. In the laboratory, Institute students, including those in the international program, receive training, conduct research on materials provenance, and then submit their data to the [LCP](#). The lab has already begun to produce an array of new data, and the amount will only rise.

Another new initiative, also inspired by the affiliation with ASOR and promising tremendous utility to its members, is the creation by the Israel Antiquities Authority of an [LCP](#)-IAA Editor – Débora Sandhaus. Débora, a long-time IAA archaeologist and ceramics specialist, will work with excavators to add pottery from IAA excavations to the [LCP](#), even before that material is published in print. [LCP](#) links can then be added to the eventual IAA publications, ensuring mutual ease of access.

*Helps ASOR-affiliated excavators:* [LCP](#) student interns work with ASOR-affiliated excavators to prepare and submit their pottery to the site. Using the [LCP](#), interns also regularly make connections

with material from other sites that excavators had not known about. This has the double benefit of adding to the information knowable from excavated material as well as disseminating that information to scholars and students around the world.

### **What's next?**

We hope to continue and expand the partnership between ASOR and the [LCP](#). Below I describe two new initiatives that I believe would serve us well.

#### *Meaningful student research opportunities*

The [LCP](#) is a terrific platform for student research – and museums are excellent potential partners. Last year I began a pilot program with the University Museum at the University of Pennsylvania, in which student interns studied ceramic material in the museum's storerooms. We held zoom seminars to discuss the pottery and looked for connections on the [LCP](#), after which students submitted pottery to the site. Next year I will expand this program to the Harvard Museum of the Ancient Near East (an ASOR Institutional Member) and the Bade Museum at the Pacific School of Religion. This could be a worthy initiative to offer ASOR Institutional Members.

This program is an excellent format for student internships. With a fairly modest infusion of donor funding, these internships could provide opportunities for work-study students, which likely would widen the cohort. This initiative would expand ASOR's outreach footprint and potentially engage a new population of students. It would also advance knowledge by facilitating connections between long-excavated, out-of-view material and that from new excavations.

#### *A true partnership between print and digital publications*

The [LCP](#) offers a way to amplify the reach, utility, and long-term relevance of all of ASOR's print publications. By submitting ceramic data to the [LCP](#) in advance of publication, stable links can be included in published print and digital versions. Future readers could move directly from the page (whether printed or in digital form) directly to the [LCP](#) – even years after an article or book was published. Readers would learn about new or changed identifications or ideas, be able to connect older published material to new material found since, map the data, etc. [LCP](#) links would help maintain the relevance of print, and enhance its utility in both the present and the long-term.

The enormous reach of the [LCP](#) – both in numbers, and in terms of its global span – could also mean that readers would find out about those ASOR publications by first encountering the links on the [LCP](#) itself. That could drive interest in those publications, along with a concomitant interest in joining ASOR in order to be able to access them fully.

This idea to establish a true print-digital partnership would benefit from the support of the ASOR EC. I have proposed versions of such a print-digital partnership in the annual meeting of the Committee on Publications for several years running. It meets with general approval every time, but then stalls out, perhaps because no individual journal or series editor feels a particular call to introduce such a step. Doing so requires an interest in thinking long-term and organization-wide. Such an interest is the purview and responsibility of the EC; it may be that this initiative needs your advocacy to proceed.

### **In Sum**

ASOR's investment in the [LCP](#) helps the organization meet its goals of international engagement and outreach, the dissemination of fundamental archaeological data, and the creation of scholarly resources for scholars and students, now and in the future. The [LCP](#) grows every single day; it offers a vivid demonstration of the disciplinary vitality that defines ASOR's scholarly *raison d'être*. For all of these reasons, I ask that the EC vote to continue the ASOR-[LCP](#) partnership.