George Bass Photographic Collection

Collection Overview

Creators: George F. Bass (1932-2021)

Dates: December 1955-January 1956 (inclusive)


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Cite collection as: The George Bass collection at the American Center of Oriental Research (ACOR), Amman, Jordan.

Related materials: The ACOR Library collection includes works about, written by, and featuring the work of George Bass. View search results here. The ACOR Photo Archive website regularly shares articles about its collections. Read more here.

Physical location: ACOR Archive, Amman, Jordan.

Collection processing notes: Processed 2017-2019 with funding from a Title VI Fiscal Year 2016 American Overseas Research Centers grant from the U.S. Department of Education.


Scope and Contents

The George Bass Photographic Collection features 64 photos of cultural heritage sites, landscapes, and people in Jordan, the West Bank, Syria, and Lebanon. The physical collection is comprised of 64 35mm Ektachrome slides and 19 pages of copies (typed on a word processor) of Bass’s letters home, held in a grey binder with two CDs, one containing a Word Perfect copy of the text (un-openable) and another containing copies of the UN pamphlet on Palestine that Bass refers to in his letters. Bass gave the collection the title: “Christmas Eve at Bethlehem Near East Trip 1955-1956”.

Bass described the collection as: “A collection of slides taken on a trip I took to the Holy Land from the
American School of Classical Studies at Athens, accompanied by fellow students Margaret Larson and Elizabeth Courtney, during the Christmas/New Year’s break of 1955-1956. The photos are accompanied by copies of letters, mostly or all to my parents, describing the trip, through Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon, as it transpired.” (Deed of Gift, February 2019.)

Biographical Note

George Bass trained in Near Eastern and Classical archaeology before pioneering techniques for excavating underwater archaeology at Texas A&M University. Bass is now known to many as the founding father of this field. Bass was the director of the first archaeological expedition to excavate a shipwreck (the Bronze Age wreck found at Cape Gelydonia, Turkey in 1960). Bass also directed the University of Pennsylvania museum’s excavations of the Byzantine shipwreck at Yassi Ada (1961-64) in Turkey, which was the first of its kind to be completed on the floor of the Mediterranean and on a wreck with substantial hull remains. Bass founded the Institute of Nautical Archaeology (INA) in 1972. The INA began excavating the Late Bronze Age shipwreck on the eastern shore of Uluburun (Grand Cape/Kas) with Bass as director in 1984.

The collection is useful as a visual document of sites, showing many prior to urban development or restoration (e.g. Jarash, Jordan), and also as a record of the role of such field visits in Bass’s early scholarly academic life may have influenced his later career trajectory. Bass’s letters mention influential figures in regional archaeology such as Dr. Albright, who described Bass as “one of my best students” and who was Bass’s MA professor at John Hopkins, where Ray Cleaveland (who features in Bass’s photos and letters) was also a graduate assistant; Rev. Msgr. Patrick Skehan (Bass refers to as Father Skehan), Director of the Albright Institute in Jerusalem in 1955 when Bass visited; and Kathleen Kenyon (Bass refers to as Miss Kenyon), who excavated in Jericho (Tell es-Sultan, 1952-58) on behalf of the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem.

Publications by George F. Bass

Books

Publications about the George Bass Collection

Articles

Language: English with Arabic transliteration for place names.

Subject Headings

In accordance with the Library of Congress Subject Headings and Place Name authorities.
Organization and Arrangement of Collection

The collection is arranged by geographic region. The George Bass collection includes photographs from Jordan, the West Bank, Lebanon, and Syria.

Series 1: Jordan
Series one includes photographs of cultural heritage and archaeological sites and landscape photography in Jordan. Subjects include: Jerash (Hadrian’s Arch, Oval Piazza, Roman Theater, Temple of Artemis, Byzantine church, Nymphaeum, Temple of Jupiter), Bedouin tents, The Dead Sea, Amman (Roman Theater).

Series 2: West Bank
Note on Metadata: ACOR Archive uses the ‘West Bank’ to refer to the areas in Historic Palestine that Bass visited in 1955-56. Where possible, ACOR has included place names in English, transliterated Arabic, and Hebrew describing sites in Jerusalem.

Series two includes photographs of architecture, landscapes, people, and cultural heritage and archaeological sites in the West Bank. Subjects include: Jerusalem (Al Aqsa Mosque/Masjid Al Aqsa, Dome of the Rock/Qubbat al-Sakhrah/Kippat ha-Sela, Mount of Olives/Jabal al-Zaytn/Har ha-Zeitim, Gethsemane /Aljusmania/Gat Shmanim), Bethlehem, Jericho/Ariha (Hisham’s Palace/Khirbet al Mafjar).

Series 3: Lebanon
Series two includes photographs of cultural heritage and archaeological sites in Lebanon. Subjects include: Baalbek (Temple of Jupiter, Temple of Bacchus, Temple of Venus), Byblos/Jubayl, and an in-flight aerial shot of a mountain range in between Beirut and Amman.
Series 4: Syria
Series two includes photographs of architecture, landscapes, people, and cultural heritage and archaeological sites in Syria. Subjects include: Damascus (Azem Palace, Museum of Damascus), and Palmyra/Tadmur (Great colonnade, Triumphal Arch, Arab Castle).

Condition Notes
Due to sellotape affixed to the original slide mounts, some of the images in the George Bass collection show the effects of the adhesive on the film, distorting the color into orange halos. ACOR Archive has uploaded these complete images, as well as cropped copies, to share the history of the slides in the collection as photographic objects worthy of study themselves.

About this finding aid:
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