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This short introduction to the special edition of the *AHL* journal celebrating Dr. John Curtis' 65th birthday seems an appropriate place to review how and why it came about.

Following a small but successful exhibition in the British Museum on the rescue excavations in downtown Beirut which followed the end of the war in Lebanon, it was suggested by the incumbent Lebanese Director of Antiquities, Dr. Camille Asmar, that the museum might like to explore the possibility of excavating a suitable coastal site in Lebanon. Relations between the two departments of antiquities have always been cordial, especially under the keepership of the first head of the BM department, Dr

Richard Barnett, and his counterpart, the Emir Maurice Chéhab then Lebanese Director of Antiquities. The relationship was renewed through the exhibition and when it moved to the Institute *du Monde Arabe* in Paris, a meeting was held whereby Dr. Curtis agreed that it would be appropriate for a small party from the British Museum to visit Lebanon in February 1997 on a reconnaissance mission seeking to find a viable archaeological site to explore. As we know, Lebanon is a treasure trove of untouched ancient sites, a good number of which have been inhabited since antiquity which makes potential sites particularly difficult to excavate. The Lebanese government, aware of the importance of the city of Sidon in antiquity, acquired the ancient mound and its surrounding areas and set them aside for future excavation. A number of small soundings had been carried out in the past and among the objects found were the remains of a column and a double protome capital of two bulls back to back in the true Achaemenid style, material evidence of the known connection between Sidon and the Persian Empire. This may have been part of the reason that Sidon appealed to Dr. Curtis – his special interest is in the field of Iranian archaeology. Sidon was therefore the most promising choice.



There have now been twelve seasons of excavation on the site with Dr. Curtis acting as Special Adviser and occasionally participating in the excavations. We have been able to trace the development of the city from what was probably a small Early Bronze Age village with a good harbour into a cosmopolitan city with connections not only to its neighbours to the North, South & East but also to the Aegean world and especially Egypt, the latter two being especially close. There have been some surprises, among them a Minoan vessel found among the Middle Bronze Age graves, a vessel with the cartouche of an almost unknown Egyptian queen and a cuneiform tablet read by Dr. Irving Finkel of the British Museum, all of which highlight the international nature of the city and its traders. There is still much to learn from future excavation - each new season answers some of the questions raised in previous seasons but also gives rise to more questions, once again, hopefully to be answered in future excavations.