



Image: courtesy of the Lanier Center for Archaeology, Lipscomb University

Thomas William Davis (1956 – 2025)

The Institute is sad to lose another supporter and member of the *Buried History* Editorial Board. Dr Thomas William Davis was a Professor of Archaeology at Lipscomb University, Nashville, TN, and an Associate Director of the Lanier Center for Archaeology. He was the Director of the Kourion Urban Space Project (KUSP), which has excavated since 2012 at the site of Kourion, Cyprus. The Institute has been a member of the KUSP consortium. Tom was diagnosed with esophageal cancer in August 2024 and, after a period of remission, died on 28 September 2025.

Tom was born in Ridley Park, PA, the younger son of the Reverend Dr. E. Bradford Davis (1921–2014) and Edna Sayers Davis. Tom's family has a strong academic tradition. Bradford was educated at Yale Divinity School, and received a doctorate from Princeton Theological Seminary specialising in American church history. He was ordained in the Presbyterian Church, and served in pastorates in New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, and in New Jersey, where Tom spent his life up to the age of ten. Tom's older brother, Edward, who assisted me in

preparing this tribute, is a professor emeritus of the history of science at Messiah University, PA, and a fellow of the International Society for Science & Religion. By contrast, Tom's grandfather, William, worked for the Pennsylvania Railroad Company after immigrating from Ireland. While Tom followed his family's academic tradition, he kept an interest in railways with O-gauge model trains.

He attended Lansdowne-Aldan High School, PA, and then went to Wheaton College, IL where he graduated with a BA in History and Archaeology. He then studied at the University of Arizona, where he completed an MA in Syro-Palestinian Archaeology and, in 1987, he was awarded a PhD for a dissertation on the history of biblical archaeology. The PhD was supervised by Professor Bill Dever. As Professor of Near Eastern Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Arizona in Tucson, AZ, from 1975 to 2002, Dever supervised over twenty PhDs, consequently, Tom became a member of that community of scholars (Figure 1). While studying at the University of Arizona, Tom excavated in 1982 and 1983 at Tell el-Hayyat, Jordan, with Steve Falconer, and with



Figure 1: At Kourion in 2013, looking over the Earthquake House. From the left, Tom, as always on site wearing his Palestinian keffiyeh, with his teacher, Professor Bill Dever, and Dr Randall Younker, Director, Institute of Archaeology, Andrews University, who is another of Bill's students.

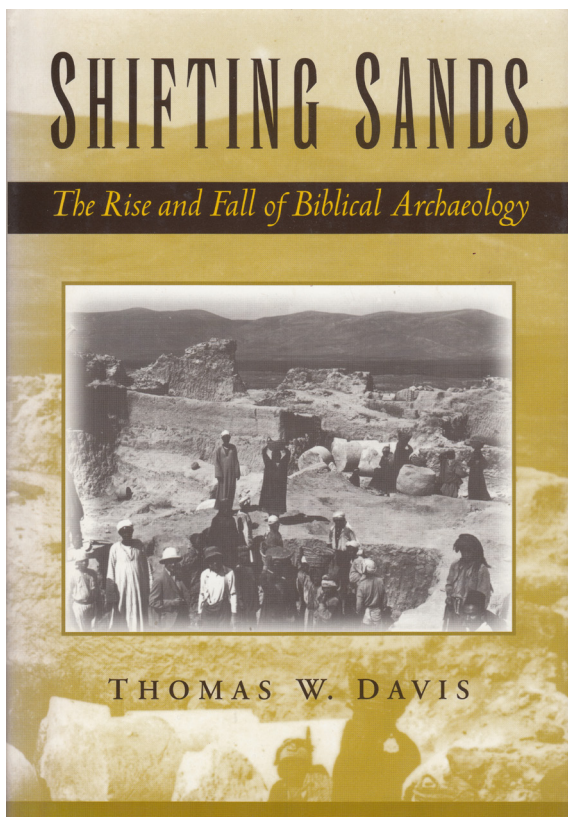


Figure 2: The dust jacket of *Shifting Sands* (Oxford: University Press, 2004).

David Soren at Kourion, Cyprus, amongst other sites. Tom's PhD dissertation was later revised and published as *Shifting Sands: The Rise and Fall of Biblical Archaeology*, (Oxford: University Press, 2004) (Figure 2).

At the conclusion of his studies, Tom took a position in cultural resource management for Goodwin & Associates in Frederick, MD. In 1998, he participated in the excavation of Tell el-Borg in northwestern Sinai, which was led by Professor James Hoffmeier, then of Wheaton College. This encouraged him to re-engage with eastern Mediterranean history and archaeology. In 2003, Tom relocated to Nicosia, Cyprus, to serve as Director of the Cyprus American Archaeological Research Institute (CAARI), a post he held until 2011. After leaving CAARI, he became a trustee. He was a member of several boards of the American Society of Overseas Research and the American Center for Research (ACOR), Amman, Jordan, and he often recruited colleagues to serve with him.

In August 2010, Tom embarked on a lecture tour of Australia on behalf of the Australian Institute of Archaeology (Figures 5 & 6). He spoke at the Universities of Sydney, Melbourne, Macquarie, Monash, La Trobe and New England, and gave the 2010 Petrie Oration at the Australian Institute of Archaeology. He had seven well-illustrated lectures to give:

- Saint Paul on Cyprus: The Transformation of an Apostle, which was published in *Do Historical*



Figure 3: At Kantara Castle on the north coast of Cyprus, 2014. Tom on tour with members of the Kourion excavation team, many of whom were also his students at SWBTS. From the left: Stephen Humphreys, Ian Randall, Paul Martin †, Armour Patterson, Laura Swantek, Lucas Grimsley, Erin Beatty, Bill Weir, Tom, and Benjamin Ioset.

Matters Matter to Faith? A Critical Appraisal of Modern and Postmodern Approaches to Scripture, edited by James K. Hoffmeier and Dennis R. Magary (Wheaton IL: Crossway, 405–426).

- Earthquakes and the Crises of Faith: Social Transformation in Late Antique Cyprus, *Buried History* 46: 2010, 5–16.
- The Sand Dwellers: New evidence from New Kingdom Sinai, later in *Ägypten und Levante/Egypt and the Levant* 26, 2016, 285–311, with James Hoffmeier and Rexine Hummel.
- Shaken and Stirred: Cyprus in the fourth century AD.
- An Amateur's Dream: George McFadden and the Excavation of Kourion, Cyprus.
- The Rise and Fall of Biblical Archaeology: towards a new paradigm; based on *Shifting Sands*.
- Current Cypriot Archaeology.

His visit raised the profile of Cyprus in Australian universities, and his enthusiasm for the visit encouraged other significant American archaeologists to make the journey to Australia to lecture. Professor Bill Dever, for example, visited two years later.

Soon after returning to Cyprus from Australia, Tom was appointed Professor of Archaeology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (SWBTS), Fort Worth, TX.

There he gathered a group of enthusiastic students who dug with him in Cyprus and elsewhere (Figure 3). He taught New Testament and Early Christian archaeology, while Professor Steve Ortiz, another Dever student, taught Old Testament archaeology. He directed the archaeological excavation of the Roman period site of Kourion, Cyprus, which began in 2012 and concluded in June 2024, a couple of months before his cancer diagnosis (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Tom at the CAARI Workshop in Nicosia on 16 June 2012. Image: Noël Siver.



Figures 5 & 6: *In Australia September 2010. Left, Tom giving a seminar at The University of Sydney. and Right, Tom with the author at the Australian Institute of Archaeology when the wattle was in bloom.*

In 2019, SWBTS decided to discontinue the teaching of archaeology and the entire program, teaching and research, moved to Lipscomb University, Nashville, TN. While at Lipscomb University, Tom was also involved with excavations in Jordan, Egypt, Sudan, and Kazakhstan. He retired from teaching at Lipscomb University in May 2025.

In many respects, Tom was a larger-than-life character. He had a clear sense of the theatrical and, when speaking, would sometimes stray from the text to make a point dramatically. He revelled in Shakespeare. One day, he directed the Kourion dig as Forrest Gump; when he tried a second day there was an outcry, so he desisted, for a time at least. Emeritus Professor Peter Machinist, now of Harvard University tells how, at the University of Arizona, Tom, his teaching assistant in a history of the ancient Near East class, dressed up as King David in a fake animal skin and sandals ‘to answer all manner of questions about his reign’, and how the class willingly comported themselves before him because they became so engaged in the play acting (<https://www.springhill-memorial.com/obituaries/thomas-davis>, accessed 27-12-2025).

Tom enjoyed being a tour guide but he was a notoriously bad driver, so after a first experience in a car with him, people often sought to travel in other vehicles. His wife, Jenny, had rules about his driving, such as not to use roads without white lines, which he generally observed.

In 1980, Tom had married his high school sweetheart, Jennifer (Jenny) Little, also of Lansdowne. They recently celebrated 45 years of marriage. Lately, Jenny had ceased working on excavations with Tom, and instead enjoyed travelling with him in Europe and the Middle East.

Tom was an avid reader. While he was an aficionado of JRR Tolkien, Sherlock Holmes, and medieval history, he was also a willing and conscientious reader of academic manuscripts, upon which he was able to offer trustworthy assessments and helpful advice. In this capacity, he was

an active and valuable member of the *Buried History* Editorial Board. One evening, I gave Tom the final draft of a paper for a festschrift with the comment that there was a sentence in it, which I did not identify, that should probably be omitted. Next morning at breakfast, he agreed, ‘yes it should, your argument does not need it.’

Tom was a committed churchman. He served as a Presbyterian elder, adult education teacher, missions committee member, and choir member, among other contributions. Tom was a member of Covenant Presbyterian Church in Nashville, TN, and was an active home church participant. In Cyprus, he had sympathy for eastern Orthodox practices and often attended the Episkopi Greek Orthodox church. The dig season always commenced with an on-site service of blessing conducted by the local priest. Kourion site departmental workers sometimes joined in and appreciated Tom’s respect for their local customs.

ACOR has inaugurated the Professor Thomas W. Davis Annual Lecture in his memory. The first speaker was the Director General of the Directorate-General of Antiquities and Museums of the Syrian Arab Republic. There will be other commemorations in due course.

A significant memorial to Tom will be the final publication of the Kourion excavation. The original intention was to explore part of the city-plan, but you publish what you find, which turned out to be a substantial building with a water system, marble socles and statues, mosaic floors and personal objects of wealth. It will be a fitting tribute.

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