Dear Friends

Research at the University and in cooperation with experts in other universities continues full speed ahead. Recent studies that have gained significant coverage in international and local media include a study led by Prof. Abraham Haim correlating the incidence of prostate cancer with exposure to artificial light at night and a study carried out by Dr. Guy Bar-Oz and a team of researchers that revealed archaeological “kite” forms in the desert that had been structured as hunting apparatus in ancient times. These two studies are featured in our newsletter this month.

We recently marked the eightieth birthday of Prof. Eviatar Nevo of the Institute of Evolution at a special symposium in his honor. We wish Prof. Nevo many more years of productive research and, of course, good health.

It was with great sorrow that we parted from Shimon Linial, a prominent and dear supporter of the University for over three decades. Shimon Linial was President of the University of Haifa Israel Friends Association and a member of the Board of Governors and the Executive Committee. He will be truly missed.

This season has been a time of renewal at the University of Haifa. Mr. Amos Gaver has been appointed Vice President for External Affairs and Resource Development, and in Canada Dr. Karen Mock has been appointed President of the University’s Canadian Friends. We wish our new staff much success in our joint purpose: developing and advancing the academic and research capacity of the University.

Prof. Aaron Ben-Ze’ev, President

Research: Artificial light increases prostate cancer risk

Countries in which nighttime artificial lighting is used more intensively tend to have a higher risk of prostate cancer in men, concludes a new study that was carried out at the University of Haifa. This joins a previous finding that was published in Chronobiology International that exposure to artificial lighting at night increases the incidence of breast cancer in women.

The study, carried out by Prof. Abraham Haim, Prof. Boris A. Portnov, and Itai Kloog of the University of Haifa together with Prof. Richard Stevens of the University of Connecticut, USA, was intended to examine the influence of various factors - including the amount of artificial light at night - on the incidence of three types of cancer: prostate, lung, and of the large intestine, in men around the world.

Data was collected from a database of the International Agency for Research on Cancer, on the incidence of these types of cancer in men in 164 countries. Data on the levels of lighting at night were gathered from DMSP (Defense Meteorological Satellite Program) satellite images. The researchers also examined additional factors, such as electricity consumption, percentage of urban population, socioeconomic status, and other variables.

At the very first stage of the study, it already became clear that there is a marked link between the incidence of prostate cancer and levels of nighttime artificial illumination and electricity consumption.

According to the researchers, there are a number of theories that could explain the increased incidence of prostate cancer due to exposure to lighting at night, such as suppression of melatonin production, suppression of the immune system, and an effect on the body’s biological clock because of confusion between night and day. Whatever the cause, there is a definite link between the two. “This does not mean that we have to go back to the Middle Ages and turn the lights out on the country. What it means is that this link should be taken into account in planning the country’s energy policies,” the researchers pointed out.
Dr. Karen Mock to lead Canadian Friends of Haifa University

Internationally recognized as an authority on multiculturalism and race relations in Canada, Dr. Karen Mock has been appointed President of Canadian Friends of Haifa University. In announcing her appointment at the organization’s recent board meeting, outgoing President, Peter Biro, remarked: “As one of Canada’s foremost specialists in anti-racist education, a psychologist and former professor, and initiator of several public education campaigns, including the Black/Jewish Dialogue, Women’s Interfaith Dialogue and Muslim/Jewish Dialogue, Karen is the perfect leader to represent the University of Haifa – the most pluralistic institution of higher education in Israel. Building on the progress and accomplishments we have achieved in the last few years, I have no doubt that the organization will grow even stronger with Karen at the helm.”

Presently a human rights consultant specializing in equity, diversity and hate crime, Dr. Mock served two terms as Executive Director of the Canadian Race Relations Foundation, following her 12-year tenure as National Director of the League for Human Rights of B’nai Brith Canada.

Mr. Amos Gaver, Vice President of External Relations and Resource Development at the University of Haifa, who was in Toronto for the board meeting, expressed his profound delight at the appointment of Dr. Mock. Commented Gaver: “With Karen’s background and remarkable accomplishments in the field of human rights, community leadership and education, I am confident that she will lead Canadian Friends to an even more successful future.”

On her appointment, Dr. Mock stated: “I am honoured to have been asked to serve in this capacity to promote and support the work of Haifa University. I have had several very positive encounters with Haifa faculty and students who are making an outstanding contribution to Israel and the world; and I look forward to working with the dedicated men and women on the board of Canadian Friends to enhance the profile of this important Israeli institution in Canada.”

A new Vice President for External Affairs and Resource Development

Mr. Amos Gaver was appointed Vice President for External Affairs and Resource Development at the University of Haifa. He is replacing Prof. Ada Spitzer, who has ended a four-year tenure. “I am conviced that Amos will continue the development of the department and the University,” said Prof. Aaron Ben-Ze’ev, President of the University of Haifa. Dr. Yossi Bachar, Chairman of the Executive Committee and Mr. Leon H. Charney, Chairman of the Board of Governors joined in congratulating Mr. Gaver on his appointment.

The new Vice President for External Affairs and Resource Development has extensive experience in fundraising: His previous position was Executive Director of External Relations at Bar-Ilan University and prior to that he was a representative of Keren Hayesod in London and Director of Resource Development for the New Israel Fund. He has also functioned as a community emissary for the Jewish Agency in the United States, Director of Municipal Community Centers, and Director of Marketing and Sales for Gesher Theatre.

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How did humans living in the third millennium BC manage to find sufficient quantities of meat in the arid desert regions? A new study of the “desert kites” that are spread across the expanses of Israel’s Negev and Arava region, carried out by researchers from the University of Haifa, unearths the answer to this riddle.

Already in the early 20th century, British pilots flying over the Middle Eastern deserts identified strange forms spreading over hundreds of meters, sometimes even over a few kilometers. The shapes looked like two long walls that meet at angles and at the meeting point of each wall was a round-shaped trench. To the pilots the shapes resembled kites, hence the name given to them: “desert kites”. A few such “kites” are known of in the deserts of Jordan, Syria, Israel, and Sinai. Archaeologists have suggested a number of theories as to the uses of these constructs, most supposing that they were used for hunting purposes, others suggesting that they served as cattle pens.

The field work for this study, funded by National Geographic, was headed by a University of Haifa team: zooarchaeologist Dr. Guy Bar-Oz, archaeologist Dr. Daniel Nadel, and landscape ecologist Dr. Dan Malkinson. It included a survey of all eleven “kites” of the Negev and Arava, archaeological digs in four “kites”, detailed documentation by means of state-of-the-art measuring instruments, aerial and ground photography, and dating by means of two independent radiometric methods.

The study’s findings have clearly shown that these “kites” were used as mass hunting apparatus, dating back no later than the third millennium BC. “When standing in one of these kites, it is astounding to see how it fits into the landscape and how the wild animals’ migration routes would converge into the hidden kite,” stated Dr. Bar-Oz. “Only then can one grasp how much energy and strategic understanding were invested in its construction. The prehistoric people living in this desert environment were highly capable of enduring it. They knew how to hunt and survive.”

Documentation and mapping enabled the researchers to reveal that the kites’ branches can reach over 200 meters in length. At the base of each kite, the branches converge and end in a chasm or large trench. According to the researchers, it is evident from the findings that the hunting method involved directing the indigenous wild animals and channeling them alongside the walled branches of the kite toward its tip and its trench, where hunters awaited them.

Chairman of the Board of Governors Leon H. Charney invited General Michael Walker, former British Chief of the Defence Staff, to visit the University of Haifa and become involved in the University’s National Security Studies Center. Charney met in London with General Walker, now Baron Walker of Aldringham, at the Royal Hospital, was given a tour of the premises and had lunch with the General and his assistant, David Hellens.

The University of Haifa and the Institute of Evolution celebrated Prof. Eviatar (Abie) Nevo’s 80th birthday with a scientific symposium that was attended by researchers of the Israeli academia. Prof. Nevo, a world-renowned researcher of evolution, is one of the founders of the Department of Biology in the Kibbutz Seminar College, and in 1974 he founded the unique Institute of Evolution at the University of Haifa.

To date, Prof. Nevo has published 1,200 scientific papers and 24 books. His research focuses on the evolutionary biology of species. Along with colleagues, he has discovered hundreds of scientific species and his research has spanned the globe. His research of the mole rat revealed the rat’s ability to cope in oxygen-free environments – which is also the basis for healing cancer, blood and heart diseases, and strokes. Prof. Nevo’s studies of emmer wheat and barley have provided significant possibilities of agricultural improvement of the basic nutrients of our everyday diet. In the course of this research, he has built up the largest wild wheat and barley gene bank in the world at the University.

Prof. Nevo continues full speed ahead with his work and research, with definite plans for the future.
Spanish Ambassador visits University

Spanish Ambassador to Israel Alvaro Iranzo held an official visit at the University of Haifa. This was the Ambassador’s first visit at an academic institution since taking up the post in 2008, and he stated how the University of Haifa is highly regarded by the Spanish Embassy and the Spanish Foreign Minister.

The Ambassador, who was head of the Middle East Division at the Foreign Ministry in Madrid prior to his posting in Israel, considers his new position a worthy challenge and looks forward to fostering relations between the two countries. Hosted by President of the University Prof. Aaron Ben-Ze’ev and coordinator of the University’s contacts with Spain Prof. Aviva Doron, he expressed his intention to support advancement of the University’s relations and joint activities with Spanish universities and research institutions.

In good company at the London Jewish Book Week

The British Friends of Haifa University held a reception during this year’s Jewish Book Week in London, with two prominent professors from the University talking about their new books.

Prof. Aaron Ben-Ze’ev, President of the University, presented his book In The Name of Love: Romantic Ideology and Its Victims in which he examines the dark side of romantic love. Anthony Julius, one of Britain’s most prominent lawyers, chaired the session. In his opening he urged the audience to visit the University of Haifa and get a first-hand impression of the most pluralistic campus in Israel.

Prof. A. B. Yehoshua, one of Israel’s most internationally known authors and a Professor of Literature at the University of Haifa for some thirty years, talked about his new novel Friendly Fire. At its core is the pointless death of a young soldier and it offers an insightful exploration of relationships and of Israeli society today.

At the reception, A. B. Yehoshua spoke of his long-time connection to the University and said, “The University of Haifa is a unique place, it is a one-of-its-kind model of co-existence between Jews and Arabs.”

Leon Charney, Chairman of the University’s Board of Governors, joined the guests, after arriving from New York, to talk of his new book Mystery of the Kaddish, discussing what this essential prayer tells us about life and death in Judaism. Also present were Mr. Amos Gaver, Vice President for External Affairs and Resource Development, and Mr. Ernst Fraenkel OBE, who will be receiving the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Honoris Causa at the annual meeting of the Board of Governors this year.

The reception was attended by some fifty prominent friends and supporters of the University in the UK.

Debating at the top

The University of Haifa’s Debating Society reached the semi-finals of the World Debating Championships that took place in Ireland. Leor Sapir and Hanneke Berman, the students who represented the University, were among the 8 finalist teams, out of the 550 that participated in the championships. This achievement continues the chain of successes secured by the University’s Debating Society last year.

More information can be found on the Society’s Web site: http://debate.haifa.ac.il/English/index_eng.htm

Wolf Foundation Scholarships

Thirteen proud students received Wolf Foundation scholarship grants toward undergraduate and graduate degree studies. Mr. Ilan Pilo, CEO of the Wolf Foundation, presented the scholarships, flanked by Prof. Yoav Lavee, Dean of Students, and Prof. David Faraggi, Vice-Rector of the University of Haifa. Mr. Pilo expressed his hopes to see recipients of this year’s scholarships as recipients of the Foundation’s advanced prizes in Agriculture, Chemistry, Mathematics, Medicine, Physics, and Arts in the future.

The University of Haifa on “Facebook”

The University of Haifa created an official online University group on the Facebook social network and is the first university in Israel to do so. “The first objective of creating the group is to expose the University’s extensive activities to the young audience that surfs the Web. Besides that, it is clear to us that the future stands in the new media channels and it is important for the University of Haifa to be there,” said Dr. Amir Gilat, Head of Communications and Media Relations at the University.

The group’s information includes University news, new faculty studies, invitations to events, and discussion groups. The group on Facebook can be located under the name “University Of Haifa-Official Group.”