The transition between the Persian and Hellenistic periods in Idumea and Phoenicia in light of the terracotta figurines

My paper aims to examine the transition between the Persian and Hellenistic periods in light of terracotta figurines in two regions inhabited by pagans in the southern Levant, coastal Phoenicia and inland Idumea. Terracotta figurines are cheap and common objects that are normally related to cult and religion. Unlike monumental architecture and precious materials that require state control or elite ownership, terracottas are cheap and reflect all classes of society. Furthermore, unlike cheap and mundane objects such as pottery, that change easily after new fashions and depend mostly on market forces, terracotta figurines are selected and adapted in a more conscious and intentional way, in order to serve indigenous religious needs. That what makes terracotta figurines a litmus test for society and its mindset, and a reliable indicator in times of change, such as the transition between the Persian and Hellenistic reigns. The Persian-period repertoire of terracottas demonstrate regionalism and include local, regional and universal types. The Phoenician and Idumean repertoires share certain types, but at the same time they show segregation and regional types. In contrast, the Hellenistic period repertoire adheres mostly to the Eastern-Hellenistic koine, with only little regional and local characteristics. There are profound changes between the two periods concerning production methods, variety of types, style, iconography and perhaps also use and meaning. Many of the figurines fit perfectly throughout the Mediterranean. In my paper I shall examine those changes by focusing on three sites: Maresha in Idumea, and Tel Dor and Kharayeb in Phoenicia. I shall try to pinpoint the time and causes for the changes, and relate them to other cultural changes such as language and pottery. Finally, I shall discuss the impact that change had on local societies, i.e., not only how people changed style, but also how style changed people.

Dr. Adi Erlich (Haifa University)