

ANNUAL REPORT: ISRAEL TEL BETH-SHEMESH 2017 FIELD SCHOOL

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Students excavating the Late Bronze Age palace floor at Tel Beth-Shemesh

GENERAL

The four-week IFR Field School at Tel Beth-Shemesh, Israel, took place between June 11th and July 8th, 2017. The Tel Beth-Shemesh research team included 11 students (7 were U of L and 4 were IFR students), 14 volunteers, and 11 staff members from the University of Lethbridge, Harding University, York College, and Tel Aviv University. We excavated within five 5 x 5 meter units in Area B, located in the northern area of the tel. The cultural levels in the lower excavation area, included two units, dating from 1150 to 1300 BCE. The team working in the three units in the upper excavation area excavated cultural levels dating from 1150 to 800 BCE.

The daily routine involved waking up at 4:15 am and getting ready for the day. We left for the site at 4:45 am. The bus ride took about 15 minutes. We excavated at the site from 5:00 am until 1:00 pm, with a break for our second (big!) breakfast at 9:00 am. At 1:00 pm, the bus took us back to the camp for lunch. In the afternoon, the students helped with pottery washing, sorting, classification, and registration, as well as bone cleaning and identification. They had a short break in the late afternoon to take a shower and catch up on their field books and other course assignments. The evening lecture began at 6:00 pm and dinner was served at 7:00 pm. Students participated in all of these activities, under the close guidance of experienced staff members.

Participating students were involved in all aspects of the excavation and laboratory work carried out during the summer. The field school program included the following main elements:

- A. ***Daily instructed field sessions on the techniques of site excavation.*** Students were taught how to correctly use a trowel, handpick, large pick, shovel, wheelbarrow, brushes, screens, dental tools, etc. and when to use these tools. They were also taught how to recognize changes in the matrix they were excavating and identify the different types of cultural

remains. The students were exposed to as many different situations as possible. They worked directly with senior staff members at all times.

- B. **Field workshops on data recording.** The students were taught what to write in the field journals, how to fill out the pre-designed layer and feature sheets, and what to record on pottery tags and bone bags. They helped their unit supervisor with each of these tasks. They also learned how to create horizontal site plans and draw stratigraphic profiles. The students were actively engaged in measuring the architectural features and artifacts with a Total Station and taking georeferenced images. The importance of meticulous field records was stressed throughout the field school.
- C. **Laboratory workshops on the processing, classification, and analysis of archaeological remains.** Every afternoon the students helped wash, sort, classify, and record the pottery sherds collected from the site. They also cleaned and identified the bones excavated. The completed a laboratory session on lithic artifacts, and those especially interested in these remains helped with the analysis throughout the summer. The students did these tasks together with the senior staff members who organized these activities as learning sessions.
- D. **Evening lectures.** These lectures covered information about Tel Beth-Shemesh as well as field approaches and methods. There were also a number other lectures on relevant historical, archaeological, and cultural topics. All staff and students attended every lecture. The lectures were linked with the assigned readings.
- E. **Intensive weekend tours and travelling seminars.** Though not required, students were encouraged to participate in the weekend trips in order to develop a broader understanding of the ancient Near East and to better contextualize the Tel Beth-Shemesh excavations. The first field trip was to the Jordan Valley, the Galilee, and the coastal plain, with visits to ancient Jericho, Beth-Shean, Sepphoris, Hazor, Akko, and Caesarea. The second trip was to the Negev and the Judean deserts. The students visited the ancient sites of Beer-Sheba, Makhtesh Ramon, Ein-Gedi, Qumran, and Masada. The third trip was to Jerusalem with a stop at the Stalactite cave along the way. We took the students to several museums, and toured them through the monuments in the Old City, including Hezekiah's Tunnel which they found very exciting. The last day of the field school was spent in Jerusalem so the students had a chance to explore the markets.

RESEARCH FOCUS AND RESULTS, SUMMER 2017

Tel Beth-Shemesh is a multi-level site (tel) with a long history of occupation. More than ten cultural levels have been identified thus far, spanning from ca. 1800 to 635 BCE. The overarching research goal of our project is to define and understand the cultural changes that took place through time: technology, architecture, urban design, economy, trade, and ideology. In order to begin to study these cultural changes, we must clarify the stratigraphy and chronology of the site. The systematic excavations carried out each summer contribute to this goal.

Over the past several seasons, we have been excavating in Areas B and D, adjacent areas on the northern edge of the tel. Our focused research goals for this year were twofold: 1. Excavate more of the Late Bronze Age palace (ca. 14th century BCE), which we first identified and uncovered in 2008, in order to establish its spatial extent and functional areas, and 2. Locate the southern wall of the temple, which dates to about 1100 BCE, in order to understand the construction of the building.

As we began excavating the deposits above the Late Bronze levels, we discovered a very well preserved water channel less than 1 m north of the temple. We also discovered a lower course of stones slightly askew from the northern temple wall. The tradition of superimposing one

temple on top of another is common in the ancient world; we seem to have confirmed this phenomenon at Tel Beth-Shemesh! We also discovered the western and southern walls of the temple this season.

In order to locate the western wall of the temple we had to excavate through several occupation levels in one of the 5 x 5 m units. This proved to be very fruitful as an assemblage of complete vessels dating to the 10th century was discovered. Prior to their discovery, very few artifacts from this period had been found. Among the particularly interesting small finds were two javelin points and a piece of scale armor. We now have a better understanding of this occupation period, and the chronology of the site overall. We are looking forward to disseminating our results in academic journals, excavation reports, at conferences, and through public lectures.