

ANNUAL REPORT: TEL BETH-SHEMESH EXCAVATIONS 2015 FIELD SCHOOL

Directors: Dr. Shawn Bubel, University of Lethbridge, Canada
Dr. Zvi Lederman, Tel Aviv University, Israel
Dr. Shlomo Bunimovitz, Tel Aviv University, Israel



Excavating matrix in Level 7 (12th Century BCE) at Tel Beth-Shemesh

GENERAL

The four-week IFR Field School at Tel Beth-Shemesh, Israel, took place between May 30th and July 1st, 2015. 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, modern field approaches and methods, geoarchaeology, and GIS. 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. Four of the five IFR students participated in the weekend trips this summer. One student chose to stay with family on the weekends. The first field trip was to the Stalactite cave and the Tel Aviv area. The second trip was to the arid Negev and the Judean desert. The students visited the ancient sites of Beer-Sheba, Arad, Ein-Gedi, and Masada, and several modern cities. The third trip was to the Jordan Valley, the Galilee, and the coastal plain, with visits to ancient Beth-Shean, Megiddo, Beit Alfa, Nimrods Fortress, and Caesarea. The final trip was to Jerusalem. We took the students to several museums, monuments in the Old City and the City of David, including Hezekiah's Tunnel which they found very exciting. They also had the chance to explore the markets in Jerusalem.

Our 2015 Tel Beth-Shemesh research team included 14 students (9 were U of L and 5 were IFR students), 6 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, just south of Area D, near the northern edge of the site.

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 7:30 pm. Students participated in all of these activities, under the close guidance of experienced staff members.

RESEARCH FOCUS AND RESULTS, SUMMER 2015

Tel Beth-Shemesh is a multi-level site (tell) with a long history of occupation. More than ten cultural levels have been identified thus far, spanning from ca. 1800 to 635 BCE. The main 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 tell. In Area B we discovered a unique temple dated to 11th century BCE (Level 5). In Area D we unearthed a section of a palace dated to the 14th century BCE (Level 9). This summer we focused our efforts on excavating occupation Levels 6 to 8 in Area B in order to eventually expose more of the palace. In previous seasons we found more than 150 restorable pottery vessels on the palace floor. Among these vessels were rare finds that were imported from major cultural centers around the Mediterranean: Egypt, Syria, Cyprus, and Crete. These finds reflect an established trade network that Beth-Shemesh played an important role in.

Levels 5 and 9 reflect two different occupation phases that were almost three hundred years apart. This season's findings will help us understand the changes that took place at the site during these centuries. Finds of note are a beautifully preserved olive oil pressing basin complete with three large crushing stones and an occupation surface dated to approximately 1200 B.C.E. Thousands of pottery sherds, lithic artifacts, and bones were collected, which will provide insight into the lives of the people of Beth-Shemesh.

We are now positioned to excavate the matrix covering the southern part of the palace in 2016.

We are continually disseminating our results in academic journals, in excavation reports, at conferences, and through public lectures (at the British Museum in October 2015, for example).