

ANNUAL REPORT: TEL BETH-SHEMESH EXCAVATIONS 2014 FIELD SCHOOL

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Unearthing a cultic object from Level 5 (11th Century BCE) at Tel Beth-Shemesh

GENERAL

The four-week IFR Field School at Tel Beth-Shemesh, Israel, took place between June 12th and July 10th, 2014. 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 each day. They assisted with the analysis of the lithic artifacts and those students with GIS experience helped digitize the georeferenced images in ArcGIS and create the architectural plans of the site. They 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, the 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. All IFR students participated in the weekend trips this summer. The first tour was to the arid Negev, the Judean desert, and the vicinity of Jerusalem. The students visited the ancient sites of Beer-Sheba, Arad, Ein-Gedi, and Masada, and stopped by several modern cities. The second field trip was to Beit Guvrin – Maresha and the Tel Aviv area. The third trip was to the Jordan Valley, the high-mountains of the Galilee, and the coastal plain, and included visits to Beth-Shean, Megiddo, Beit Alfa, Banyas, 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. They also had the chance to explore the markets in Jerusalem.

Our 2014 Tel Beth-Shemesh research team included 19 overseas students from different schools and countries, 5 volunteers, and 12 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 three joining fields along the northern slope of the site: Areas A, B, and D.

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 5:15 am until 12:45 pm, with a break for our second (big!) breakfast at 8:45 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 2014

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.

In previous summers we discovered two different architectural units from occupation levels that were almost three hundred years apart: A section of a large building (palace) was uncovered in Area D, dated to the 14th century BCE (Level 9), and in Area B, a unique temple was found in Level 5, dated to 11th century BCE. More than 150 restorable pottery vessels were found on the floors of the Level 9 'Palace'. 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. Through the study of these finds we will developed a clearer picture of global trade and cultural connections in Late Bronze Age, when major empires such as Egypt and ancient Hati still existed.

A group of exceptional cultic vessels was found on the Level 5 floor of Temple L1651, which we have dated to the Early Iron Age. Interestingly, these vessels were made and decorated following old Canaanite traditions. No artifacts from abroad or even from the neighboring sites of Tel Miqne, Tel Timnah, and Ashkelon, where new immigrant groups (the 'Sea Peoples' or 'Philistines') settled, were associated with this architectural feature. The study of the finds from Level 5 revealed an intent to emphasize the 'local' rather than 'global' and to maintain a level of ethnic intimacy in a period of rapid cultural change. The two cultural levels reflect juxtaposed periods in this ancient community. We are excited to continue the detailed study of cultural change at Tel Beth-Shemesh with the aid our students.