

ANNUAL REPORT: Abel Beth Maacah 2019 FIELD SCHOOL

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IFR Student Olivia Schaul excavating a Middle Bronze IIB toddler burial

Excavations at Tel Abel Beth Maacah in the summer of 2019 were conducted in four areas: Area A on the northeastern part of the lower tell, Area B on the southeastern part of the upper tell, Area O on the southwestern part of the lower tell and Area K, a new area, in the eastern part of the middle of the tell. The research goals this year were to 1) expand our knowledge, specifically the chronology and cultural affiliation, of the Iron Age I and IIA occupation and to search for an Iron IIB (8th century BCE) level, based on the biblical narrative; 2) reach the Late Bronze Age level in order to establish a sequence of occupation from this period to the Iron Age; 3) excavate Early Bronze Age levels, in order to explore the earliest occupation of the site. In all four of the excavation areas, we accomplished our research goals, with some surprises (for example, we reached a Middle Bronze II layer where we expected to encounter the Late Bronze; no Iron IIB architectural remains were identified; we know now that Iron IIA (9th century) occupation reached the middle of the tell; two additional of strata attributed to the Iron I and another one of the early MBIIB were exposed, showing the intensity of these sequences beyond what we previously thought).

Two IFR students participated in the four-week excavation and one in the two-week program. The three were assigned to work in Iron I layers in Area A, focusing on an early Iron IA layer excavated in a unique cultic building and on a destruction layer marking the end of the Iron Age I (19th century BCE), also in a unique cultic context. In addition, one of the students who is specializing in physical anthropology, participated in the excavation of burials exposed in Area O (Middle Bronze IIB) and in Area K (Mameluke). In each excavation project, the students were supervised by the area supervisor and closely monitored by one of the expedition directors, Dr. Naama Yahalom-Mack who was responsible for the curriculum.

The participation of the IFR students, particularly in the exposure of the early and late Iron I remains, as well as in the excavation of the burials, made a great contribution to the achievement of our research goals. The IFR students got to excavate "classic" archaeological

contexts and gained experience in unraveling complex stratigraphic problems which characterized the area in which they worked. Quandaries concerning the way we can date a layer of pits, methods of how to approach the excavation of a meter deep destruction layer, how to determine the stratigraphy of burials, and other exemplary archaeological field work cases were discussed and practiced with the students. IFR students took part in activities outside the field as well, including pottery washing and sorting, wet-sifting for microarchaeological samples, lectures and field trips.

Detailed field reports of each excavation area will be posted on the expedition website (www.abel-beth-maacah.org), where published articles and other data, such as information about our major finds, are posted as well. In November 2019, a special session on the Tel Abel Beth Maacah excavations will be presented at the annual ASOR meeting in San Diego. Pottery restoration of the burnt destruction contexts excavated by the IFR students will take place during the coming academic year, as will radiocarbon dating (C14) of charred organic remains from these contexts. An article is expected to be published this year with the physical anthropology data relating to the Middle Bronze IIB baby burials, some of which were excavated by an IFR student.

Another article is in preparation, discussing the Iron I to Iron IIA transition in light of the geo-political situation in the Upper Galilee at that time.