

News in Archaeology (July 2015)

Dr. Tsvika Tsuk, chief archaeologist, Israel Nature and Parks Authority

[News from the 39th Session of the World Heritage Conference, Bonn, Germany:
The Ancient Cemetery \(Necropolis\) of Bet She'arim, managed by the Israel Nature
and Parks Authority, is declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site](#)

The ancient cemetery of Bet She'arim was declared a World Heritage Site on Sunday July 5, 2015 at the 39th Session of the UNESCO World Heritage Conference in Bonn, Germany. It is the ninth World Heritage Sites to be inscribed in Israel, following last year's inscription of the caves of Maresha-Bet Guvrin. The 10-member Israeli delegation to the conference included representatives of the Foreign Ministry, the Israeli UNESCO Committee, the Jerusalem Municipality and the Israel Nature and Parks Authority.

A great deal of emphasis was placed at the conference on the terrible condition of antiquities due to intentional destruction in the Middle East – in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya.



The cemetery of Bet She'arim was proposed for inscription through the Israeli UNESCO Committee of the Education Ministry and through the Foreign Ministry. Its candidacy won the support of the Emek Yizra'el Regional Council and the Tiv'on Local Council, in whose jurisdiction Bet She'arim National Park falls. The file was written by Dr. Zvi Gal, with the assistance of Esti Ben-Haim. Dr. Tsvika Tsuk, chief archaeologist of the Israel Nature and Parks Authority, presided over the entire five-year process, assisted by the director of Bet She'arim National Park, Revital Weiss and her team, and members of the Israel Nature and Parks Authority's northern district.

The UNESCO inscription means that the Bet She'arim cemetery now belongs to the select list of the most important heritage sites in the world. It positions Israel as a bridge between ancient cultures and as an important focus of world heritage conservation, with a unique connection between past and present. The inscription means the site will receive worldwide media exposure and will be fostered and protected from damage by humans and nature.

Dr. Dalit Atrakshi, secretary general of the Israeli UNESCO Committee recently told the press: "Israel became a signatory to the World Heritage Convention in 1999. Since then, eight sites in Israel have been declared World Heritage Sites, including the White City of Tel Aviv, the Old City of Akko, the Baha'i Gardens of Haifa and Akko, and **sites under the aegis of the Israel Nature and Parks Authority**, including Masada, the Biblical Tels, the Carmel Caves, the Bet Guvrin-Maresha caves and now, Bet She'arim." Atrakshi said that the Education Ministry and the Israeli government ascribe the highest value to the existence and protection of World Heritage Sites and were very pleased at the great success in inscribing the new sites.

Dr. Tsvika Tsuk, chief archaeologist of the Israel Nature and Parks Authority: "This is a greeting from Bet She'arim's city of the dead from 1,800 years ago. It is exciting testimony from our ancestors that is almost unparalleled anywhere in the world. When you visit the necropolis at Bet She'arim you feel the heartbeat of the Jewish people. The tangible information coming from the archaeological finds confirms and completes the written sources. The archeological findings from Bet She'arim include

hundreds of inscriptions along with dozens of reliefs of seven-branched candelabra and other Jewish sacred implements. We are proud of the inscription and thank all those who have accompanied us on the road that led to it.”

The flourishing town of Bet She’arim gained renown during the Roman period as an important Jewish center – as the seat of the Sanhedrin and of the leading sage Rabbi Judah Hanasi. This great leader was able to renew Judaism in the Galilee after the Bar Kokhba Revolt (132–135 CE) and set down the first written codex of Jewish law – the Mishnah.

After Rabbi Judah Hanasi was interred at Bet She’arim, many Jews from the Land of Israel and the Diaspora followed suit, believing that burial near this righteous figure would ensure their entry to Paradise. The necropolis is of outstanding universal value due to its 30 manmade, many-branched burial systems. It is the densest ancient cemetery in Israel and, like the Catacombs in Rome, was one of the densest burial complexes in the Roman world. This, the most important of ancient Jewish cemeteries, features a wide variety of architectural burial styles and a rich array of Classical Eastern Roman art intertwined with popular art and including hundreds of inscriptions in four languages (Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic and Palmyrene).



ICOMOS, the international professional body that examined the site, found indisputable evidence of the extraordinary global value of the Bet She’arim cemetery in the artistic variety of the tombs, which expresses the character of a religious culture in the ancient world in an important period in the history of the Jewish people.

Click here to see the video of this fascinating meeting:

whc.unesco.org/en/sessions/39com/records/?day=2015-07-05

This is a 3-hour, 27-minute video; the part on Bet She'arim begins at 1 hour and 58 minutes and ends at 2 hours, 25 minutes. It is divided into three parts: the ICOMOS presentation (6 minutes), up to 2 hours, 4 minutes; responses of 17 countries, all of which supported the inscription, up to 2 hours, 18 minutes (14 minutes); declaration of inscription, and remarks by the delegation heads, from 2 hours, 19 minutes to 2 hours, 25 minutes (7 minutes); total, 27 minutes.

[Jewish Workshop for Oil Lamps Discovered at Shikhin, Tsippori National Park, Lower Galilee](#)

Dr. Mordechai Aviam, Kinneret Institute for Galilean Archaeology, Kinneret Academic College and Prof. James Riley Strange, Samford University, Birmingham, Ala., U.S.A.

A workshop for the production of oil lamps was found at the site of the Jewish settlement of Shikhin, north of Tsippori, now within Tsippori National Park during the fourth year of archaeological excavations at the site.

The excavations are under the direction of Dr. Mordechai Aviam and Prof. James Riley Strange, the latter of Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama, U.S.A.

The village of Shikhin is mentioned in the Mishnah and the Talmud as a settlement of potters who produced mainly storage jars during the Roman period. In the very first seasons of the excavation, clear evidence was unearthed of massive production of vessels for storage, cooking and serving, with thousands of sherds found discarded as kiln waste. This evidence underscores the observations of various scholars who visited and identified the site in years past, as well as conclusions from the excavations at Tsippori, the glorious Jewish city located just 2 km south of Shikhin.

Hundreds of fragments of oil lamps were found during the excavations as well as a few fragments of stone molds in which soft clay was pressed to produce the two parts of the lamp, the upper and the lower, which were then put together and fired in a kiln. The number of molds discovered reached into the dozens – the largest

number of molds ever found in Israel at a single site. In fact, only one other lamp-production site was found in Israel, back in the days of the British Mandate, in the Arab village of Beit Nattif in the Judean Lowlands, now on the edge of the city of Beit Shemesh. Additional sections of the Beit Nattif workshop have recently been found in Israel Antiquities Authority excavations; it has been determined to have belonged to a non-Jewish potter who produced, among other things, clay figurines.

Part of a lamp-maker's dwelling was also found in the current season at Shikhin and about 10 almost complete oil lamps were discovered among fallen stones in one of the rooms of that dwelling, along with fragments of two molds, one of which was



Oil lamps



Molds for oil lamps

decorated with pomegranates. Surprisingly, the lamps themselves were made of coarse material and are of low quality, the two parts not quite fitting together at their joining point. It seems that they were made by apprentices, perhaps relatives who were trying their hand at the family business.

In a previous season, a lamp decorated with a seven-branched candelabrum was found. That, along with the discovery of fragments of stone vessels typical of a Jewish settlement, as well as a ritual bath (*miqveh*), show that Shikhin was a Jewish settlement.

The lamp workshop at Shikhin was apparently in operation during the end of the first and the second centuries CE. In the coming seasons, the excavators will continue to uncover both the lamp-maker's house and the remains of a synagogue discovered during previous seasons.

Conservation and Maintenance Work by Teams from the Northern District

Yonatan Orlin – head of conservation, Northern District, Israel Nature and Parks Authority

The conservation and maintenance teams were established by the heritage branch of the Prime Minister's Office to meet the need for rescue and conservation maintenance work at Israel Nature and Parks Authority sites. The teams were established in cooperation with the Israel Antiquities Authority and the work has been undertaken in coordination with and accompanied by its experts.

Conservation at Gamla in the Yahudiya Forest Reserve

The Upper Galilee-Golan conservation team is now at work at Gamla in the area of the breach in the city wall and the section of the wall south of the breach.

In the 1980s, extensive reconstruction was done in the area of the wall with the goal of better illustrating the city's magnitude to visitors at their very first glimpse from the upper observation point.

The area of the breach and the southern wall were also reconstructed at that time, rebuilt to a height of 5 m using basalt stones and cement. Construction was implemented in such a way that despite the cement, the wall appears to be built of dry masonry, that is, without bonding materials.

However, stones in the area of the breach began to come loose and became a danger to visitors. Thus, the current project, still underway, includes replacing the stones and bonding them with material based on hydraulic lime, basalt aggregates and local soil. Loose stones are also being stabilized using basalt wedges and bonding material.

At the moment the team is working on the wall south of the breach, which had critically swelled at the base, destabilizing it and putting it in danger of imminent collapse. Because the wall was already reconstructed it was decided to dismantle and rebuild it. Reconstruction involved a special method of connecting the stones to each other within the wall to achieve greater stability, and using bonding materials based on hydraulic lime, basalt aggregates and local soil.



Fig. 1. The wall during excavation; the red line shows this portion today.



Fig. 2. The wall before the beginning of work, the area that swelled is marked in red.



Fig. 3. Dismantling the wall.



Fig. 4. General view of the work area.



Fig. 5-7 Rebuilding the wall.



Conservation at Korazim National Park

The Lower Galilee-Carmel conservation team is now at work at Korazim National Park.

Conservation work is focusing on one of the “wealthy homes” in the center of the park.

The walls of the buildings are built of large basalt stones interspersed with smaller basalt stones, which were originally bonded with soil. Over the years, rainwater washed away the soil and pushed the smaller stones out of the wall. Without bonding material and the support of the smaller stones, the larger stones began to fall as well.

The conservation work includes reinserting the small basalt stones in the wall to support the larger ones and restore the wall’s volume. It also involved stabilizing the tops of the walls and replacing larger stones that had fallen out. The bonding



Figs. 8–9: Before (right) and after (left) conservation

material used is based on hydraulic lime, basalt aggregates and soil. It was applied in a way that gives the outward appearance of dry masonry, that is, as if no bonding material were used.

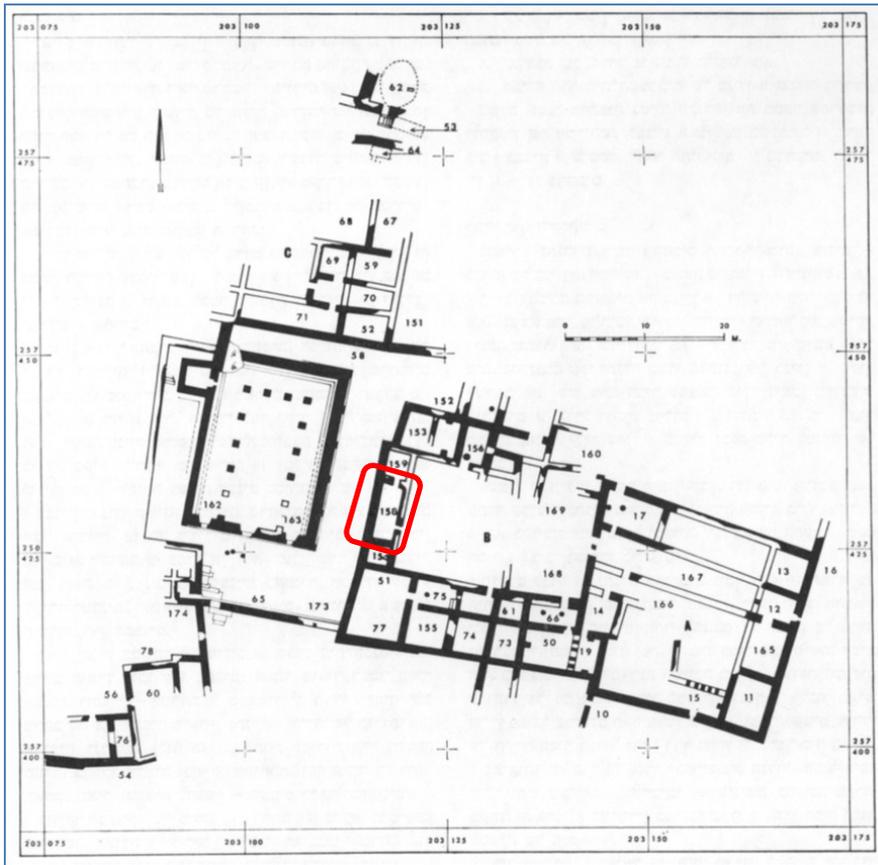


Fig. 10. Map of Korazim with the work areas marked in red.

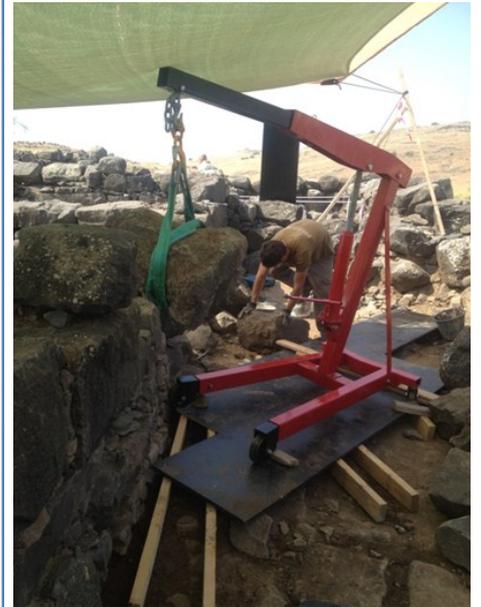


Fig. 11. Use of a crane to lift the stones.