

## ANNUAL REPORT: JORDAN-TELL DHIBAN 2017 FIELD SCHOOL

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*IFR Students and Project Staff excavating the Field S Building*

In the 2017 Tell Dhiban excavation season we made significant progress in our understanding of the two peak periods of occupation at the site, namely the late Byzantine Period (C. 550-636 ce) and the Iron Age IIB period (c. 830-700 BCE). In Field S, IFR students excavated the interior of a building that collapsed between c. 580-630 CE based on radiocarbon dating, probably as the result of an earthquake. The work was challenging in two distinct ways, on the north end of the building there was massive rubble collapse reflecting the direction in which the roof and upper walls fell. This area was also subject to partial reuse in the form of a makeshift drain channel inserted into the rubble. IFR students did a brilliant job of sorting this out, eventually identifying the foundation trench of the drain channel, clearly separating it from the surrounding rubble (which it closely resembled) and thereby clarifying the last uncertain aspect of the post-collapse reuse of this building that was first identified in 2012. In doing so, IFR students gained confidence and important practical skills in excavating complex (and chaotic!) stratigraphic contexts.

On the south end of the building the roof collapse was less massive and IFR students were soon into a layer of smashed whole pots mixed with compacted sediment probably representing sub-flooring from an upper story. Here IFR students faced the challenge of systematically uncovering vessels that were largely complete by also nearly flattened by the large stone slabs that had fallen on top of them. Again, the students did an excellent job and gained in both confidence and skill, such that the cleaning, uncovering and documentation tasks that they faced rather nervously and performed extremely slowly in week 2, were being handled skillfully and relatively quickly by week 5.

In and amongst these reconstructable vessels we recovered significant numbers of burned seeds, especially peas and other legumes. The range of functional types in the ceramic assemblage, the presence of both stored seeds and seeds inside cooking-pots, and the presence of personal toiletry items such as a bone cosmetic applicator, point to this being a domestic context. As always, we carried out extensive, systematic sampling of sediment for water flotation, this year processing 130 samples. It should be noted that, after initial training by our

project archaeo-botanist, the processing of the flotation samples was run entirely by IFR students during our late afternoon laboratory sessions. Work from previous seasons has yielded evidence consistent with wine production as well as an unexpected absence of olives. We are hopeful that when fully analyzed the 2017 results will allow us to test the idea of local site specialization in the production of 'cash crops' during the Late Byzantine period. This research promises new, fine-grained, insights into debates regarding the autonomy and resilience of local communities during the demise of the eastern Byzantine Empire and the transition to Islamic rule. Dr. Kutner will be presenting a paper at the ASOR Annual Meeting in Boston this November discussing these issues in relation to the results derived from IFR student excavations from Field S in 2017.

We finished the season perhaps 1.0-1.5 meters above the foundations of this building, and we look forward with some excitement to the 2018 season, when hopefully IFR students will help us finally reach the primary floor.

In 2017 IFR students also worked on an Iron Age midden and water reservoir located at the base of the western slope of the tell. While somewhat less exciting than the smashed pots of Field S, IFR students working in Field W did, for the first time, provide us with a substantial sample of plant and animal remains dating from the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE when Dhiban was ostensibly the capital of the kingdom of Moab. When analyzed, this midden material will be invaluable as a new starting point for discussing the Iron Age economy of Dhiban, something that has been an object of speculation in several articles but never addressed with substantive data. IFR students also worked very (!) hard uncovering a series of erosion surfaces as well as a deposit of buried agricultural soil retained by a terrace. All of this has allowed us to reconstruct the sequence by which the Iron Age reservoir was reduced in size and partially covered over by agricultural terraces in the Byzantine period. The long-term dynamics of reuse, recycling and replacement made evident by the work of IFR students at Dhiban will be the subject of a paper to be delivered by Dr. Routledge at the ASOR Annual Meetings, and is also a central component of a book entitled *Tells: persistence and emergence* that Dr. Routledge is currently completing.