

Tel Aviv

Journal of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University



ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/ytav20

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To cite this article: Yitzhak Paz (2022) In Memoriam: Professor Ram Gophna (1928–2021), Tel Aviv, 49:1, 6-7, DOI: [10.1080/03344355.2022.2056684](https://doi.org/10.1080/03344355.2022.2056684)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03344355.2022.2056684>



Published online: 26 Apr 2022.



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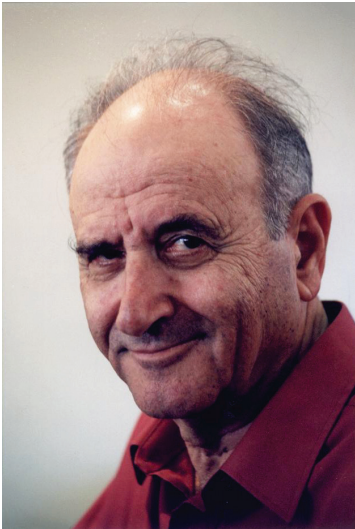


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In Memoriam: Professor Ram Gophna (1928–2021)



On July 5, 2021, Professor Emeritus Ram Gophna, who was among the first and major contributors to the study of the proto-historic periods in the Department of Archaeology and Ancient Near Eastern Cultures at Tel Aviv University, passed away.

At an early age Ram, who was born in 1928 in Tel Aviv, joined the fieldwork of his uncle Jacob (Yaakov) Kaplan, an archaeologist who studied the antiquities of Tel Aviv–Jaffa and was the first to define the Wadi Rabah Culture. The time he spent with his uncle as a teenager shaped his decision to become an archaeologist.

After the 1948 war, in which he fought in the ranks of the Palmah, Ram began his academic studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. His teachers

were, among others, Professors Moshe Stekelis, Nahman Avigad and Benjamin Mazar. In the course of his studies, he met his future wife Ruth, a history teacher.

Ram joined the newly established Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums (later the Israel Antiquities Authority) in the early 1960s and was the district archaeologist in charge of the western Negev. In 1971, he joined the academic staff of Tel Aviv University's Department of Archaeology and Ancient Near Eastern Cultures, while studying toward his Ph.D. (awarded in 1974). His dissertation, under the supervision of Professor Yohanan Aharoni, was on the coastal plain of the southern Levant during the Early Bronze Age, and his main research interests lay in the proto-historic periods in general and the Early Bronze Age in particular. Ram was promoted to Professor in 1981 and continued to teach in the department throughout his academic career, until his retirement in 1997.

Ram was one of the leading researchers to detect the extensive Egyptian presence in southwestern Israel during the late fourth millennium BCE, and his excavations at 'En Besor, an Egyptian outpost in the Besor stream basin, were one of the zenith points in this field. The discovery of administrative paraphernalia at 'En Besor, as well as other traces of Egyptian presence elsewhere in southern Israel, were milestones in the recognition of Ram Gophna as one of the leading researchers in Israel and abroad.

One of his most notable excavations was conducted at the fortified EB II town of Tel Dalit, a component in the urbanisation of the Lod Valley, one of the regions upon

which he focused in his research and to which he dedicated his very first lecture at Tel Aviv University.

After his retirement, Ram Gophna remained active in research, imparting his expertise in archaeological excavations, lecturing in conferences in Israel and abroad. Throughout his career he published over a hundred articles, books, book chapters and encyclopaedia entries, making several contributions to Israeli archaeology. He co-authored (with A. Gopher, R. Eyal and myself) a two-volume publication of the Kaplan excavations of protohistoric sites in Israel (Tel Aviv, 2017). The results of excavations in numerous Chalcolithic and Early Bronze settlements in the Tel Aviv region are included in these volumes.

Ram considered his research, fieldwork and teaching career to be a mission in which he shared his knowledge with the younger generations of researchers. He has bequeathed his enthusiasm, his boundless scientific curiosity and his professionalism to his students, who currently occupy the forefront of protohistoric research in the southern Levant.

On a personal note, the first class I took with Ram, in 1992, was called 'Pottery Typology A, from the Neolithic to the Early Bronze Age'. It takes much talent to endear the subject of pottery upon students, and Ram had this talent. He had the ability to tell a story about each and every sherd and to reconstruct the human activities related to each one. Under his supervision, I wrote my M.A. thesis and later my Ph.D. dissertation (co-supervised by the late Professor Shlomo Bunimovitz and the late Professor Moshe Kochavi). I had the pleasure of accompanying Ram on many field surveys and trips in quest of Early Bronze sites and landscapes. He was also the scientific advisor of the large-scale excavation at Tel Bareqet, a fortified EB town located north of Tel Dalit. We cooperated in many research projects and shared 20 years of publications together, the first (with N. Getzov) published in 2001 and the most recent (on his 1971 excavation of Palmaḥim) published in 2021.

Ram was interested in many humanistic fields, including literature, theatre, poetry and history. He conducted a thorough research on his childhood neighbourhood in Tel Aviv, which was published in a book.

Ram was a mentor, a teacher, a colleague, and above all, a true friend. The following quotation reflects his character and his warm and honest attitude towards people: 'When you meet someone, you talk with him, and if, after you say goodbye, you still haven't found your family relation to him, it means you didn't talk together enough time'. Ram will be remembered as a leading Israeli archaeologist, who will be followed by generations of scholars.

Yitzhak Paz