

# In Memoriam

## Shlomo Bunimovitz

1952–2020

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On December 5, 2020, our friend and colleague, Prof. Shlomo Bunimovitz, former head of the Department of Archaeology and Ancient Near Eastern Civilizations at Tel Aviv University, passed away.

Shlomo was one of the pillars of the Department for over three decades. He began his B.A. studies in 1975, graduating *summa cum laude* in 1978. He went on to complete his M.A. in 1983 and his Ph.D. in 1989, both under the supervision of Prof. Ora Hanegbi. In hindsight, in Shlomo's M.A. thesis ("From Khirokitia to Enkomi: A Composite Model for Culture Change in Cyprus from the Neolithic to the Late Cypriot Period") contains the seeds of what would later epitomize him as a scholar, a teacher and an intellectual: the ability to probe the Near Eastern cultures in depth, his profound familiarity with updated theoretical approaches in world archaeology, and finally, a long-term perspective on the formative periods of humanity. These fundamental principles served as Shlomo's toolkit when he wrote his groundbreaking Ph.D. dissertation, which would make archaeology a leading player in the study of a period previously known mainly from Scripture. In his dissertation, titled "The Land of Israel in the Late Bronze Age: A Case Study of Socio-

Cultural Change in a Complex Society,” he wholeheartedly adopted theories from the fields of geography, sociology, and economy, which would illuminate the archaeological data and enable him to piece together a complete innovative picture, intermeshing with research worldwide.

Shlomo’s teaching career at the Department of Archaeology and Ancient Near Eastern Civilizations began in 1978 and continued until his final year. He taught introductory-level courses on the archaeology of the Land of Israel and the archaeology of Cyprus, Crete and Greece. He also gave classes on archaeological theory, in which he exposed generations of students to the archaeological research taking place worldwide. In his quiet, unassuming and learned manner, Shlomo taught us all to think archaeology, to read archaeological theory, and to link theory and practice. He encouraged the many M.A. and Ph.D. students he supervised to strive to decipher the complex, to uncover the manifold cultural connections, and not to settle for a merely descriptive and cataloguing approach.

In his early years at the Department as a B.A. student, Shlomo participated in excavations and surveys conducted by the academic expeditions of Tel Aviv University. He started out as an area supervisor in the excavations at Tel Aphek-Antipatris and in the surveys of the Sharon and the central Coastal Plain. He also joined the survey expedition to the Sinai. In 1981, together with Israel Finkelstein and Zvi Lederman, he co-directed the excavation of Shiloh and the extensive survey of Mount Ephraim, which completed the excavation. These two enterprises were published in the Monograph Series of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University co-authored by Bunimovitz, Finkelstein and Lederman: *Shiloh: The Archaeology of a Biblical Site* (Monograph Series 10, 1993) and *Highlands of Many Cultures: The Southern Samaria Survey* (Monograph Series 14, 1997).

In 1990, Shlomo began what would become his life project—the excavations at Tel Beth Shemesh, an endeavour that he continued, along with his friend and colleague, Zvi Lederman, until the summer of 2019. Over the course of thirty years, Shlomo shaped this project and instilled his spirit in it. The excavations at this site, of great biblical historical significance, serve as a laboratory for investigation of cross-cultural questions concerned with social order, identity and intercultural encounters, technology, and the establishment of complex political entities. They also illuminate the unique nature of ancient Beth Shemesh, the Shephelah and Judah in the Bronze and Iron Ages. The excavations have exposed the Middle Bronze Age city gate; a palace from the 14th century BCE (the El-Amarna period); an Iron I temple; the earliest known iron-production workshop dating from the late Iron IIA; and public structures and a water system of the Iron IIB.

The findings from Tel Beth Shemesh were published, in the course of the excavations in a variety of leading journals and in publications geared toward the general public. In these articles, Shlomo and his co-authors continued to piece together the mosaic of theory, finds, and interpretation. This is especially evident in articles presenting the series of unique finds from the palace of the “Mistress of the Lionesses,” the queen of Beth Shemesh in the El-Amarna period, in an article dealing with the cultural response of the Canaanite population of Beth Shemesh to the Philistine settlement in Ekron, and in a series of articles concerned with the innovation of the technology of production of iron artifacts and the importance of this technological innovation to the society and political structure of the

southern Levant. This series culminated in the publication of the last article that Shlomo got to see: “Iron Oxide Concretions as Raw Material for Iron IIA Iron Metallurgy in the Southern Levant: New Evidence from Tel Beth-Shemesh, Israel” (published in *Journal of Archaeological Science* 2020). The crowning glory of the excavations at Tel Beth Shemesh is the final report of the excavations up to 2000: *Tel Beth-Shemesh: A Border Community in Judah. Renewed Excavations 1990–2000: The Iron Age* (co-authored by Zvi Lederman, published in the Monograph Series in 2016).

In addition to Beth Shemesh, Shlomo dealt with a myriad of topics in his publications. In the early days of his career, he published several articles proposing a new approach to ceramic vessels and their cultural contexts. His Ph.D. dissertation led to several key publications on the Late Bronze Age and the character of the city states that divided the land. His understanding of the interrelations between the cities of Canaan and the Egyptian regime, as well as the relations among the cities, gave rise to his original explanation of the causes that led to their collapse and to the rise of Israel. Shlomo also published articles dealing with Cyprus and its culture in proto-historical and historical periods.

The appointment of Shlomo Bunimovitz as Professor of Archaeology constitutes the recognition of the scientific community in his achievements and the unique voice he expressed. His students often mentioned his pedagogical abilities, and he earned several certificates of merit and excellence. He participated in many conferences in Israel and abroad, and his lectures always drew large audiences.

Notwithstanding his achievements, Shlomo was a modest man, with a highly developed sense of humor and infinite curiosity. He travelled the world, experiencing many different cultures, and always strived to gain insight from them for the interpretation of archaeological finds. Archaeology was the love of his life, second only to his love of his wife and children. For many, Shlomo was a mentor, a friend, and a beloved beacon of erudition. His untimely death leaves a void in the Department of Archaeology and Ancient Near Eastern Civilizations at Tel Aviv University, and in the Israeli archaeological community at large.

*Yuval Gadot*