



Fig. 1

Loom weights and the humanity within objects not on display

Museum Studies

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Fieldwork
Seminar

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Background

The site of Beth She'an, which I primarily focused on, was excavated in 1921 and over the course of multiple dig seasons, the museum added over 8,000 artifacts to their permanent collections, even after half of the finds were left for the host country and now seen in the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem (Ousterhout, Robert. "Beth Shean Revisited." Expedition Magazine 55, no. 1 (March, 2013). Each shelf and drawer allowed me to explore a different trove of material culture, stratified through excavation level and general object time, exemplifying the layering of civilizations over time.



What I learned from loom weights

Often exhibits display the most beautiful and visually interesting pieces. In the basement I was able to interact with the objects that were not being displayed, not because they are not important, but because there is just so much material. In my time at the museum I photographed and rehoused over 100 different loom weights. While this may seem boring for some as they are not the most visually exciting, for me it was an amazing experience, studying objects that were not made by professional artisans, but were often made and used in house, utilizing different forms and materials. This is why I want to pursue museum studies, because not every day is going to be a big find or a groundbreaking discovery, but because I get to interact with people from the past through what they leave behind, which is more often than not an imperfect loom weight.

My role

In my time working in the Near Eastern collection of the Penn Museum under Katherine Blanchard, I worked primarily on rehousing a variety of objects from the site of Beth She'an (modern day Israel) and photographing these objects so that they can be available in the digital collection for researchers. In taking the objects out of their original packings, we made sure that all objects were accounted for, took their photos for the database, and rebagged the pieces in new, clean bags.



Figures 1-7 courtesy of the Penn Museum

