

BETH SHEMESH: SHERDS AND DATA

BACKGROUND

From 1928-1931 and once more in 1933, a Haverford College professor of biblical literature named Elihu Grant undertook large-scale archaeological excavations at the ancient site of Beth Shemesh, about 18 miles west of Jerusalem. The Penn Museum acquired Haverford College's collection of archaeological material from Beth Shemesh in 1961, and due to the size of the collection most of the sherds (pottery fragments) have gone unprocessed until now. Of the roughly 5000 sherds, very few have registry numbers in any of Grant's publications. This renders a huge number of sherds practically unfindable for researchers. Historically, sherds have been afforded a marginal importance in scholarship, but their value has been re-evaluated in recent years.

A DAY AT THE MUSEUM...

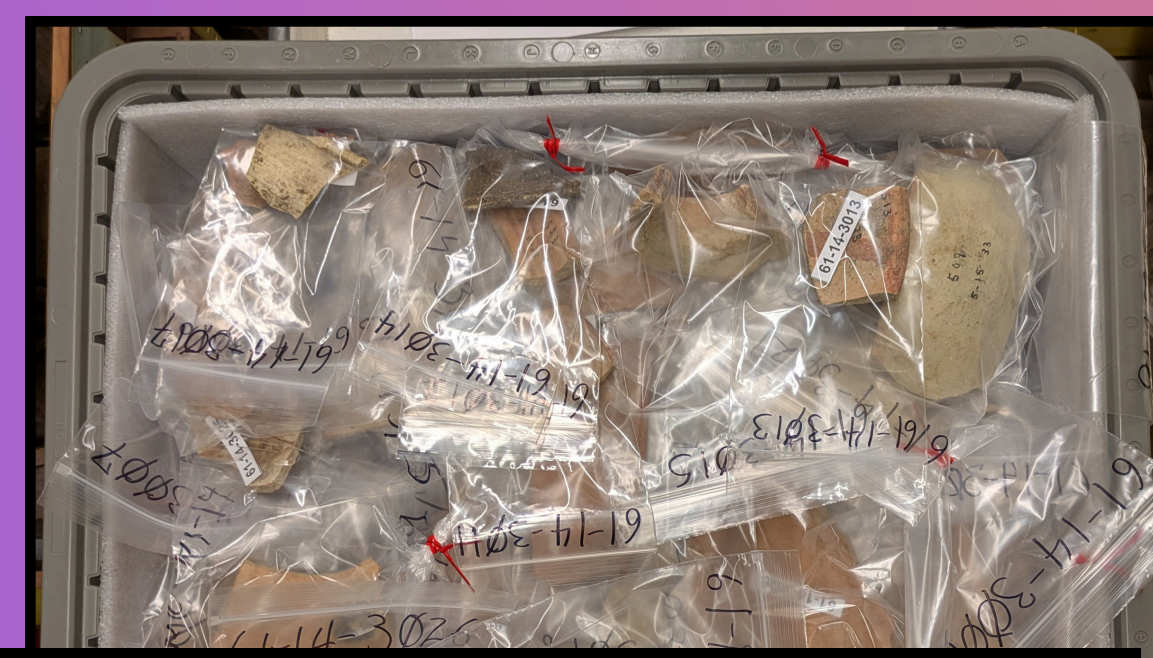
- Create descriptions of each sherd, noting the type, color, ware, and any decoration or interesting features.
- Photograph sherds.
- Later, enter the data into a spreadsheet to be uploaded to the museum database.

WHAT I LEARNED:

- Object handling skills
- Vocabulary related to ceramics
- Photography procedures
- Archival research techniques

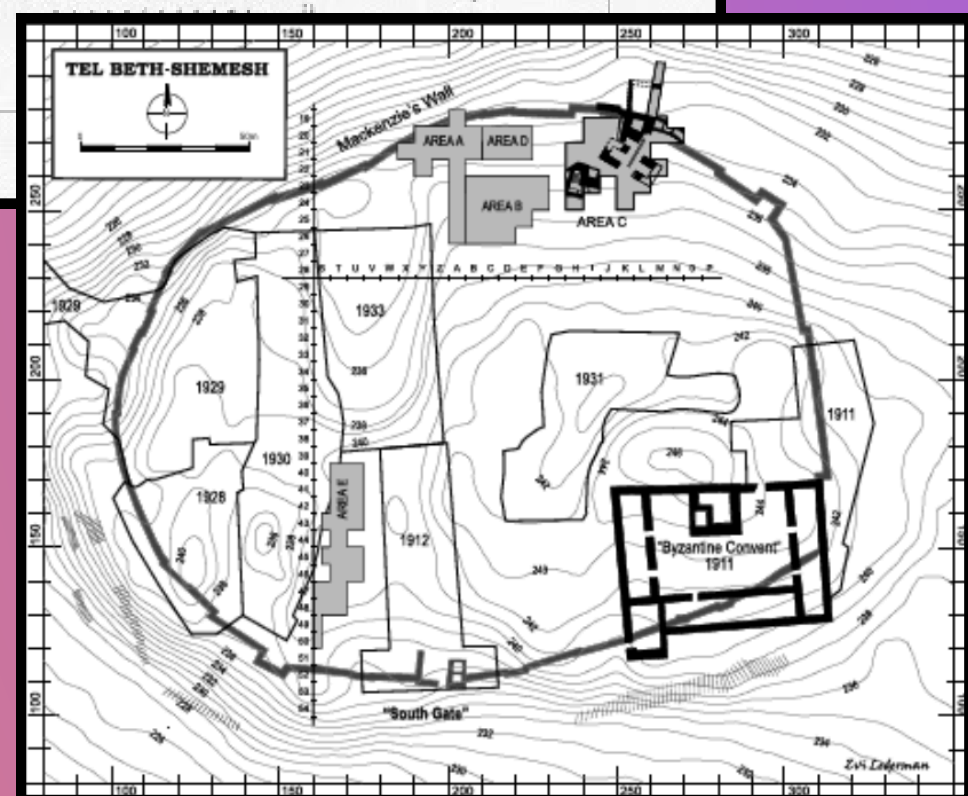
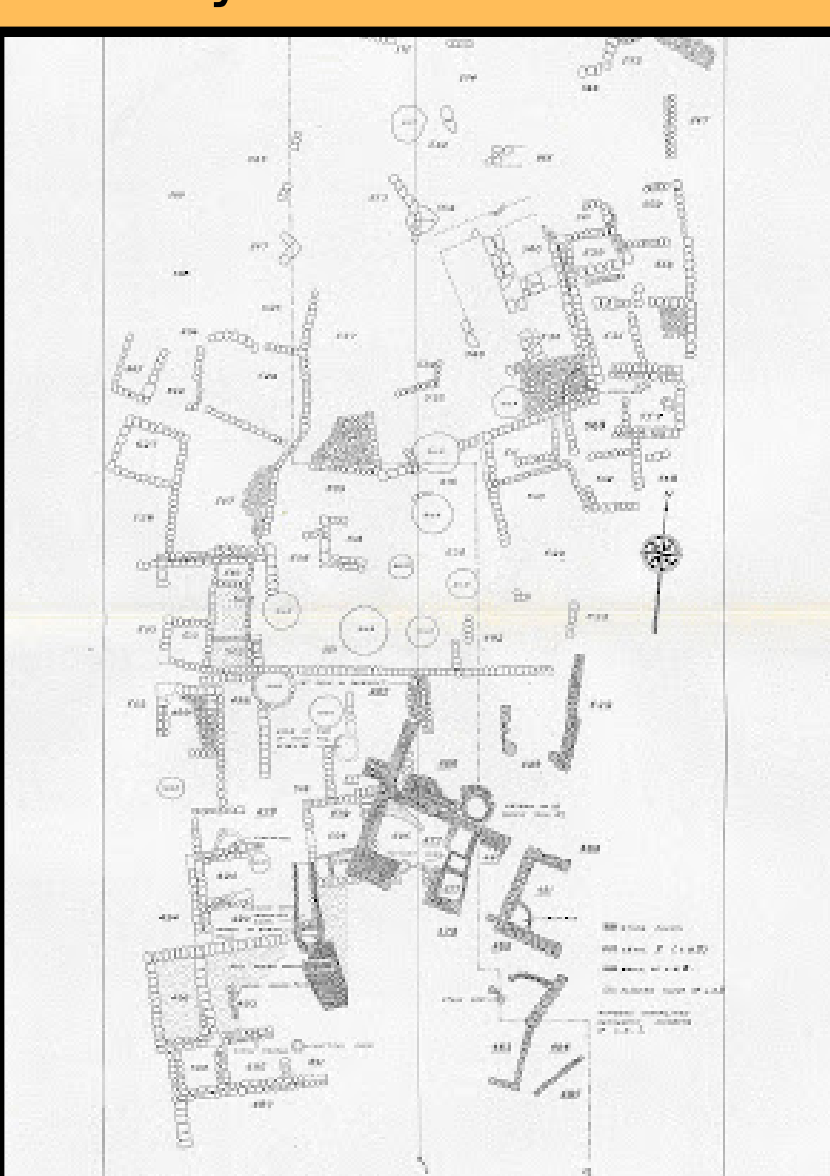
CHALLENGES

- Each excavation year uses a different system for recording the date and findspot on the objects.
- The sherds were not placed in boxes according to either excavation year or archaeological stratum, meaning each box is a heterogeneous mixture of vessel types, time periods, and findspots.
- The new plastic boxes are smaller than the old wooden ones.



PROJECT OBJECTIVE

This project aims to develop a sustainable framework for processing sherds from Beth Shemesh. By describing, numbering, and photographing the sherds, this material is made more accessible to researchers. I focused my efforts on boxes containing material from the 1933 excavation. The 1933 excavation took place in the town itself, and is fairly comprehensively published in Grant's *Ain Shems* volume III, also titled *Rumeillah*.



Cypriot milk-bowl rim sherd



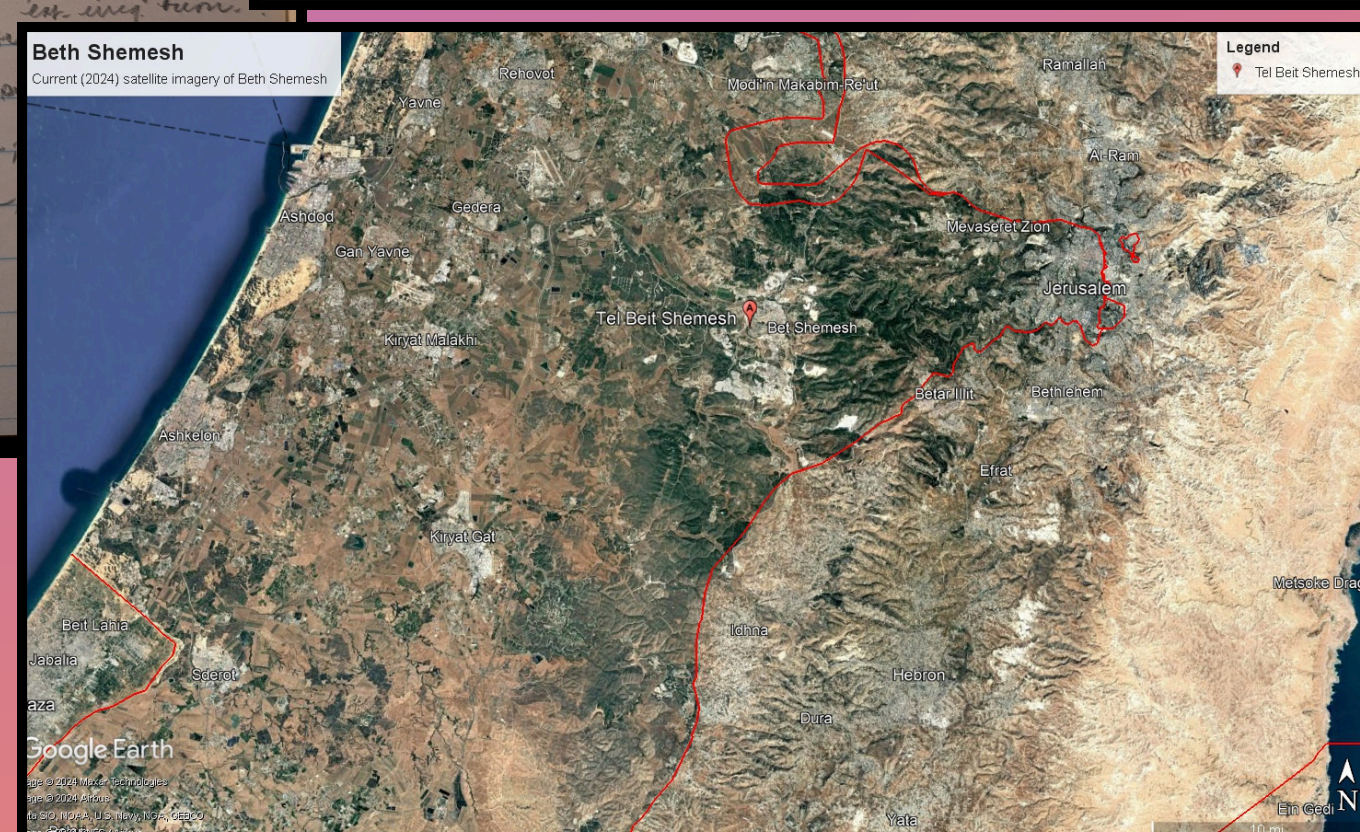
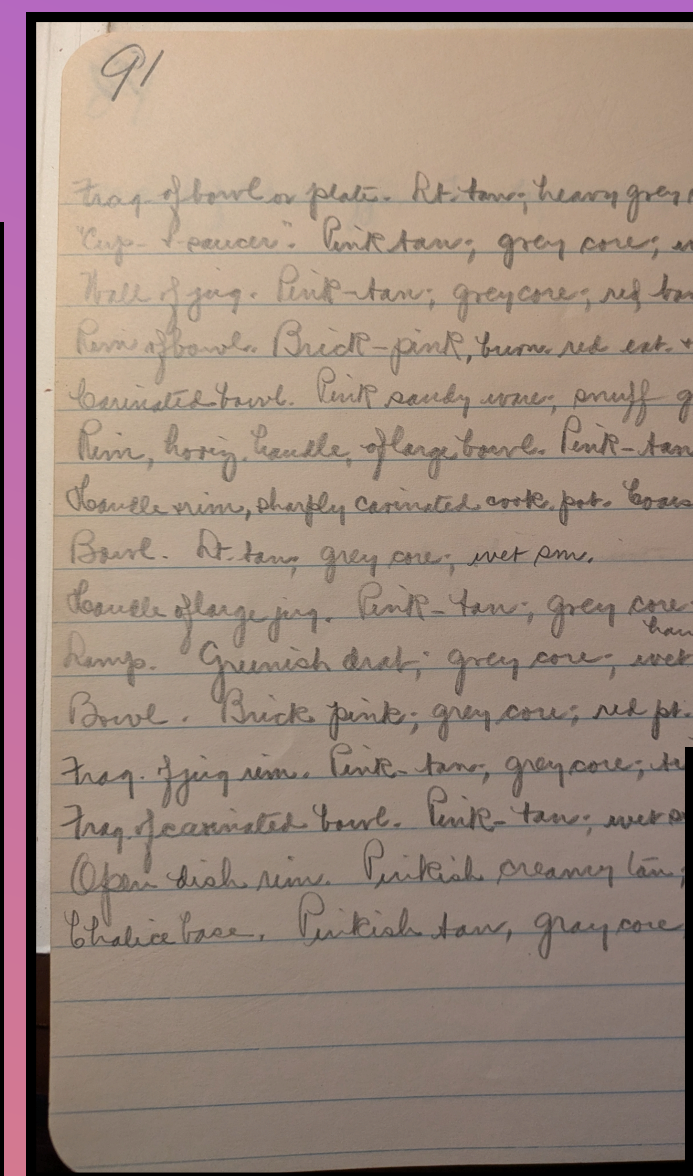
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WHAT WAS UNEXPECTED?

- Through my research in the Penn Museum archives, I discovered a set of notebooks that described the sherds from the 1933 excavation at Beth Shemesh. These descriptions did not number the sherds, but someone did take the time to document them according to room number (most likely while they were held by Haverford College).
- I have been able to work somewhat faster than expected, and have processed ~350 sherds at this point.



Rim sherd



BIBLIOGRAPHY



SITE BACKGROUND

The town of Beth Shemesh was occupied from the Middle Bronze Age IIA period through to the Iron Age IIC (2000-650 BCE). Early archaeologists like Grant were attracted to the site because of its connections to biblical narratives surrounding Samson as well as the Ark of the Covenant. At Beth Shemesh, local material culture endured through the end of the Bronze Age and into the Iron Age, though the early Iron Age strata also prominently feature Aegean-influenced ceramic styles. Grant's excavation encompassed both domestic contexts within the town itself and funerary contexts from three tomb complexes.

NEXT STEP

Write a paper synthesizing my observations about the sherds, my archival findings from the Penn Museum and Haverford College, and outside research. The main goal of my paper is to explore the relationships between educational institutions and biblical archaeology in Palestine in the 1930s-1960s.