

A Festschrift in  
Honor of Rami Arav



# A Festschrift in Honor of Rami Arav:

*“And They Came to Bethsaida...”*

Edited by

Fred Strickert and Richard Freund

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We wish to acknowledge the hard work and dedicated service of the many volunteers under the hot sun and under difficult conditions at *Et-Tell* over the past three decades.

We also express our appreciation for Bethsaida Excavation Consortium Members and Staff who have offered their scholarship, insights, and criticism in a collegial spirit.

## FOREWORD

### A FESTSCHRIFT IN HONOR OF RAMI ARAV

#### FRED STRICKERT

##### **My first encounter with Rami**

The date: Monday, May 9, 1988.

The time: 7:00 a.m. sharp--late in the day by Rami's standards.

The place: The road entering HaYarden Park, just north of the mound called *et-Tell*.

My companions: my wife and eighteen undergraduate students who were spending a month in the Middle East, ready to dig into the history-filled soil near the Sea of Galilee that they had heard about so often growing up in Sunday School and church.

Our opening conversation: "Rami?" A nod.

"Fred?" A nod.

Both of us surprised that we had made this connection.

"How did you know how to find the site?" Rami asked. Remember, this was long before the government of Israel began listing Bethsaida on maps.

"I read Josephus."

"Wow," said Rami with both hands raised in his typical enthusiastic way, just as he often responds when a new volunteer holds up a small pottery shard with that I-think-I-found-something-important look.

And then I added maybe to show off a little, "And Father Pixner's article in *Biblical Archaeologist*," as I pointed emphatically with my hand, "The Jordan River there to the west, the Sea of Galilee down there, and right there 100 meters to the south, that must be the mound."

Rami shook his head, "Wow! You found it."

Then I offered my own exclamation point, "And right here by the bus, Pixner's stone commemorating the healing of the blind man of Bethsaida," yet thinking to myself that the inscription really didn't look 2,000 years old.

Rami agreed, but he had other things on his mind. "Let's get to work."

So often in later years, Rami has reminded me of that first meeting by the side of the road. How he had recently returned from the States with Ph.D. in hand, now in search of an archaeological dig with lots of volunteers where he could make a name for himself. How he had received a letter in the mail at Haifa University one day from some unknown professor from a place called Iowa. How he had gone out on a limb renting a four-wheel-drive jeep and borrowing trowels, buckets, sieves and all the necessary equipment for a dig. How he kept asking his Israeli colleagues, "Is this for real? Will this professor guy really show up?" Rami had asked himself again and again, "Should I bring all that equipment on the appointed day in case the professor does show?"

But he did.

And I did.

I have to confess that the glamor of working on an authentic archaeological dig quickly faded away. The top of the mound was covered with thistles and weeds that had sprung up from the late winter rains. By the second day with blisters on their hands and scratches on their legs the students were ready for mutiny, "If we wanted to spend our time pulling weeds, we could be working on my father's farm back in Iowa." So, Rami relented, and passed out the trowels and handpicks and his oft-repeated instruction, "Don't dig a hole. Stay level."

The result: buckets of dirt removed and buckets of pottery found.

"Is this something important?"

"Wow!"

And there was some pretty cool stuff: a toga pin, ancient nails, glass beads, and a coin.

The best finds always come on the last day of a given session. And so, it was. Rami cleaned the coin and pointed out the faint image. "The emperor Tiberius," he said. Then turning it over, he showed us the image of a tetrastyle temple.

I wrote down on a scrap of paper that I still possess: Locus 301, Basket 1235. 13 May 1988.

"This is not just any coin," he told us. "It's a coin of Philip the Tetrarch."

"The same Philip who turned Bethsaida into city named Julias?" I asked.

Rami nodded.

And we both said, "Wow!"

## **Rami's Team of Scholars**

That was how it all started. It was not long before Rami's team of scholars began to emerge. A month later for the summer session, John Greene and the late John Rousseau made their appearance. The next year, Mark Appold. Then Heinz Wolfgang Kuhn, Elizabeth McNamer, Richard Freund, and so many others that we just can't name them all. Richard Freund, besides bringing a critical eye for discovery and scores of student volunteers, brought important administrative skills. He found a hospitable and comfortable home for dig staff and volunteers first at Kibbutz Gadot and then at Kibbutz Ginnosar. He also freed up Rami from some of those tedious administrative tasks by organizing an impressive consortium of sponsoring Universities and Colleges and recruiting a dedicated and diverse group of scholars with a wide range of research interests.

Cumulatively Rami's team comprises dozens and dozens of scholars and volunteers numbering in the thousands. The research fills volumes of publications, conferences of scholarly presentations and the wide sharing of information.

## **A Festschrift in Honor of Rami Arav**

Now after thirty years since Rami first broke ground at Bethsaida, it is time for reflection and celebration. This is the reason for this current volume: A Festschrift, a compilation of written articles to celebrate Rami's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday and thirty plus years of the Bethsaida dig. Twenty-three scholars have contributed directly to this project, though so many others are linked by earlier publications. Just read through the footnotes and bibliographies printed here to see their names.

In order to understand fully the impact of Rami's work, we thought it best to go back to the time before Rami put spade to Bethsaida soil. Elizabeth McNamer surveys the preliminary work of Bargil Pixner who found himself drawn to Bethsaida while he was directing the construction of a monastery at Tabgha on the west side of the lake. How has the dig fulfilled Pixner's earlier predictions? What would surprise him most from how the dig has unfolded?

Most archaeological publications focus on results rather than the process. What might we learn about Rami's methodology? What about his interaction with volunteers and staff? What do participants take home with them from their experience at the dig? Rami has had the good fortune of working with one photographer over the past dozen years. Hanan Shafir

draws on a deep archive of photos to present a photo-essay of daily dig experience.

Because of *et-Tell's* location several kilometers from the current shore of the Sea of Galilee, archaeologists have relied heavily on geological expertise to understand the city's physical context. John Shroder jr., who has served as the lead geologist, summarizes the process that his team of scientists have carried out to better understand how Bethsaida was indeed a city on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee.

When Rami began at Bethsaida, he never dreamt that he would eventually come down upon a significant Iron Age City. Four articles shed light upon this ancient city of Tzer, the capital of the Geshurite Kingdom with an impressive *Bit Hilani* palace and four-chamber gate complex. David Ilan compares the Bethsaida gate complex with the gate at Tel Dan, while John Greene surveys the regional political scene that brought about the end of that Iron-age city, evident by the destruction level at the gate. Ken Bensimon goes back to the building process of the city wall and towers, with building techniques paralleling other city's walls. Walter Bouzard takes a micro approach with a careful analysis of a three-letter name inscribed on a jar handle: MKY, drawing attention to one of Tzer's ancient residents.

Following the destruction and abandonment of Iron-age Tzer, a new city rose up at *et-Tell* during the Hellenistic era. One impressive feature of this period found at Bethsaida as well as other regional locations was the presence of numerous Rhodian Amphorae, known for their durability and their stamped handles. Richard Freund asks a fundamental question: why were these Rhodian amphorae found at Bethsaida? What might we learn from them about ancient trade routes? How might the ancient Jewish presence in Rhodes have been related to distribution patterns?

The largest number of articles in this volume are related to Roman era Bethsaida. A reason for this is because we have significant written documents about this period, namely Josephus and the Gospels. However, it is important also to let the physical evidence speak for itself. Carl Savage has previously written about limestone vessels as indicators of a Jewish presence. In this volume Savage reports on a study of the physical make up of Herodian oil lamps to see how the chemical elements compare with Herodian oil lamps found in other locations, and also to explore a possible origin for them at a Jerusalem kiln.

Another important area of study is that of coin distribution patterns. Early studies have shown that the northern Galilee and Golan fell under the influence of the mint in Tyre. Donald Ariel's study of a mini-hoard discovered in Bethsaida showed a growing influence from the mint in

Tiberias in the first century CE. My article, “Why Bethsaida?” argues that economic development under Antipas in the Galilee, and especially at Tiberias, became a threat to Philip and his tetrarchy. Philip responded with a new city at Bethsaida.

Other articles by Patrick Russell, Aaron Gale, and Chris Kinsinon look to archaeological evidence from Bethsaida to shed light on the Gospels. Mark Appold provides a comprehensive study of the Apostle Andrew, who, though he was often overshadowed by Bethsaida’s favorite son, Simon Peter, he too played a significant role in the early church. Mark Smith presents a comparative study of three Roman Trials as described in the Gospels, Josephus, and Philo. Paul Williams discusses Bart Ehrman’s *Lost Scriptures* and *Lost Christianities* to show a greater diversity within Christianity.

Greg Jenks has provided a comprehensive catalogue of coins from the Medieval Period as evidence that people did continue to visit the site following the Roman era.

Phil Reeder, along with Harry Jol, Paul Bauman, Vanessa Workman, Maha Darawsha, Shalom Yanklevitz, Carl Savage, and Richard Freund have not only worked together at Bethsaida, but they have also reached out on various archaeological projects at the Cave of Letters, Nazareth, Yavne, Rhodes, and most recently Lithuania. In the final article in this collection we learn more about Ground Penetrating Radar and Electrical Resistance Tomography as a minimally invasive form of archaeology at Yavne (as also in Freund’s article on Rhodes).

Our wish for you, Rami, is that this collection of articles will bring joy to you as you reflect on the great expanse of work begun at Bethsaida.

Thirty years digging at one archaeological site. That’s quite the accomplishment. I’m guessing we could count on one hand those archaeologists who equaled that feat.

What can we say, but “Wow!”

Fred Strickert  
Professor Emeritus of Religion  
Wartburg College  
Waverly, Iowa, USA  
31 October 2018

## INTRODUCTION

DR. RAMI ARAV,  
BETHSAIDA'S CHIEF ARCHAEOLOGIST

RICHARD A. FREUND

Dr. Rami Arav, Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, is among a small group of Israeli excavators who have continuously excavated one site in Israel for over 30 years and produced in timely fashion archaeological reports of amazing detail during this time. His work at Bethsaida, beginning in 1987, has resulted in the creation of a national park at the site east of the upper Jordan River. He is continually cited by scholars from around the world for his work on Bethsaida, Israel and his insights on this critical location for the study of Iron Age Golan and Galilee, the origins of early Christianity and Galilean Jewry, and the place of Galilee (where he was born) in the history of Ancient and Modern Israel.

Dr. Rami Arav holds BA and MA degrees from Tel Aviv University, and a Ph.D. from New York University in Near Eastern Languages and Literature. He returned to Israel in 1987 to work on Bethsaida with stints at the Golan Research Institute in Qatzrin, Haifa University, and the *Eretz Israel* Museum in Tel Aviv before starting first as a visiting professor and then as full-time faculty and professor at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Dr. Arav also co-directed the John and Carol Merrill project in the famed Cave of Letters on the Dead Sea and did work on other excavations throughout Israel—most notably in Nazareth, Jerusalem, the Negev and the Golan.

The hallmark of his work has been the collaborative model of the institutions which participated in the excavations and the alumni of the Bethsaida excavation numbers in the thousands. The consortium of scholars has at times topped 30 scholars from 18 universities and colleges worldwide. Many of those faculty published articles together with Dr. Arav and so his work spans many sub-fields of archaeology including (but not limited to): historical geography, anthropology, numismatics,

ceramics, geo-science, flora and fauna studies, history, religious studies, palynology, architecture, biblical interpretation, Hebrew Bible and New Testament studies, Dead Sea Scrolls studies, and Byzantine period studies. Not only does Dr. Arav himself present academic papers at conferences and symposia, he also frequently helps to coordinate full Bethsaida sections for numerous academic venues, as well as annual fall Batchelder Archaeology Conferences at the University of Nebraska at Omaha where Bethsaida scholars share their research with their colleagues as also the general public.

Rami has served on Ph.D. committees around the world and has held prestigious lectureships in Europe and the United States. He has been an ardent supporter and leader in the professional societies of the American Schools of Oriental Research and the Society of Biblical Literature both nationally and internationally and is well known amongst the general public from his articles in *Biblical Archaeology Review* and from TV documentary appearances in National Geographic, NOVA, Discovery, and the History Channel among many other shows and films.

Professor Richard Freund,  
Maurice Greenberg Professor of Jewish History  
and Director, Maurice Greenberg Center for Judaic Studies  
at the University of Hartford

# RAMI ARAV PUBLICATIONS

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CHAPTER ONE

PHOTOGRAPHING BETHSAIDA WITH  
RAMI ARAV, 2006 TO PRESENT

HANAN SHAFIR

**Prologue**



Fig. 1-1 Prof. Rami Arav holding an Egyptian Bes sculpture found at Bethsaida in May 2008.

My first encounter with Rami Arav was in the summer of 2005. The year before, I had completed six seasons photographing at Tel Hazor when funding ran out. I came to Bethsaida at the beginning of the 2005 season and introduced myself to Rami. I told him of my previous experience and expressed my wish to work with him. His previous photographer had left and there was an opportunity for me to join the team. Rami was very friendly and open. He was doing his own photography that year and

showed me the equipment he was using. He also gave me a tour of the site and I felt a very good chemistry between us. I was not promised a job at that time, but Rami said he would think about it. Yet I was not very optimistic.

A few months later I was hired to photograph at Bethsaida, not by Rami, but by the conservator of the site, Ms. Orna Cohen, whom I already knew since our working together in the City of David years earlier, and later at Tel Hazor, who needed photos for the “before and after” report of the restoration of the City Gate’s chambers and of the adjacent City Walls. I was hoping to continue.

Sometime before the dig season, I got a phone call from Rami. He told me that the dig’s previous photographer could not come that year (2006) and invited me to come for one session of two weeks in which we would check each other for compatibility and chemistry. The rest is history; I’ve stayed on the dig ever since.

Our cooperation in the following years created a large archive of photos from the dig, arranged by years, topics, sizes, and themes. When I started photographing I realized that, unlike other digs where I had worked, Rami established a system of shooting the content of the pottery baskets in addition to documenting in the computerized database and drawing important finds and artifacts. In this way Rami can easily pull out a precise photo of a particular basket in a specific year and, with it, see all types of pottery utensils, flint tools, oil lamps and other finds that found their way into that particular basket. Special finds, like coins, complete vessels, and other important shards and artifacts, are photographed separately from the basket’s content, but the basket’s number and its entire database would also appear in the photo.

During the twelve years I’ve been working with Rami at Bethsaida I photographed a myriad of photos. The photos are of anything that one can think about while visiting an archaeological site, starting with the place itself; its vegetation, its natural inhabitants, large and small, the landscapes around it. Then I photographed staff and volunteers in their activities; their encounters with the place, people at work, their reactions when they found something with archaeological significance, during breakfast and popsicle break, while working and while resting and I paid special attention to photographing the students and volunteers with whatever it was that they unearthed; coins, oil lamps, jewelry, instruments of war and peace, and so on. Last, but not least, I photographed the archaeological process from the beginning to the end, the uncovering of walls, floors, artifacts and pottery “in situ” and, of course, the baskets of the daily finds at “pottery reading.” Above all those activities reined the presence and spirit of Rami. He was

all over the site, doing everything and bringing to realization all his vision about the place.

I decided to contribute to this *Festschrift* some typical photos I have taken of Rami and show some aspects of his character as they appear in the photos. The photos are not necessarily in a chronological order and are not intended as a comprehensive summary of the dig over the last 12 years. Rather they simply reflect the character of my boss and friend Rami as dig director.

### Rami through the Photos



Fig. 1-2 Orientation of volunteers to Bethsaida excavations

According to Rami, no one will work at the Bethsaida dig, be it student or volunteer, without knowing at least the basic history of the place. The first day of the dig is always dedicated to an orientation tour through the different areas of the site and to providing answers to all the big questions about Bethsaida and the capital of Geshur.



Fig. 1-3 Bethsaida pottery lab

Pottery is the means of dating archaeological ages. Learning to notice the different types of vessels: pots, jars, jugs, oil lamps and amphorae help the archaeologists find their location in the timeline of the archeological site. Rami makes sure to introduce the students and volunteers to the abundance of vessels and shards found at the dig and point out the differences between similar types like oil lamps or cooking pots and thereby show their development through the ages.



Fig. 1-4 Dramatization of gate rituals

Rami is a master of dramatization. He knows that if you listen to something interesting you may remember it, but if at the same time you watch a performance related to the words you are not likely to forget it. In this case, he robed one of the students as a Canaanite priestess for a reenactment of a water ritual at the bema, by the city gate, in front of the Moon God Stele. Another favorite reenactment by Rami has the elders of Geshur sitting at the City Gate and judging the subjects of the city for their crimes. This gets to be very funny.

Recently the Moon God figure was chiseled off the replica stele, which was placed at the gate and the 3,000 years old basalt basin was stolen and the bema was shattered, probably by religious zealots. Fortunately, the original stele is on display in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.



Fig. 1-5 Pottery reading

Pottery reading is probably the best show in town (or in Kibbutz Ginossar). Rami, Dr. Carl Savage, and the staff of archaeologists go over the catch of the day, also known as baskets of pottery shards, and Rami presents significant pieces with rims or bases, blades of flint, coins, jewelry and other interesting artifacts. Didactically, piece by piece, the audience learns to identify cooking pots, fishbone plates, Terra Sigillata pottery, originals and local forgery, or as Rami puts it “a product of Tiffany compared to a copy from Target.” This activity, which has the potential to become a dry, tedious chore, often provides much fun—and occasionally pure ecstasy--when a rare black shard with an exciting relief pops up from within the piles of common shards.



Fig. 1-6 Recording site elevations

Rami is very keen on new archeological technologies like GPR (Ground Penetrating Radar), laser rays for height measurements, RTI photography and so on. Nevertheless he also likes to preserve traditional techniques of

drawing, measuring and documenting all the physical finds of the dig. He takes his time to position, level and secure the old draughting table with its plumb-line in place, to cover the table with draughting paper, to place the viewer on top of it so that he can get started taking measurements and distances drawing a picture of the finds.

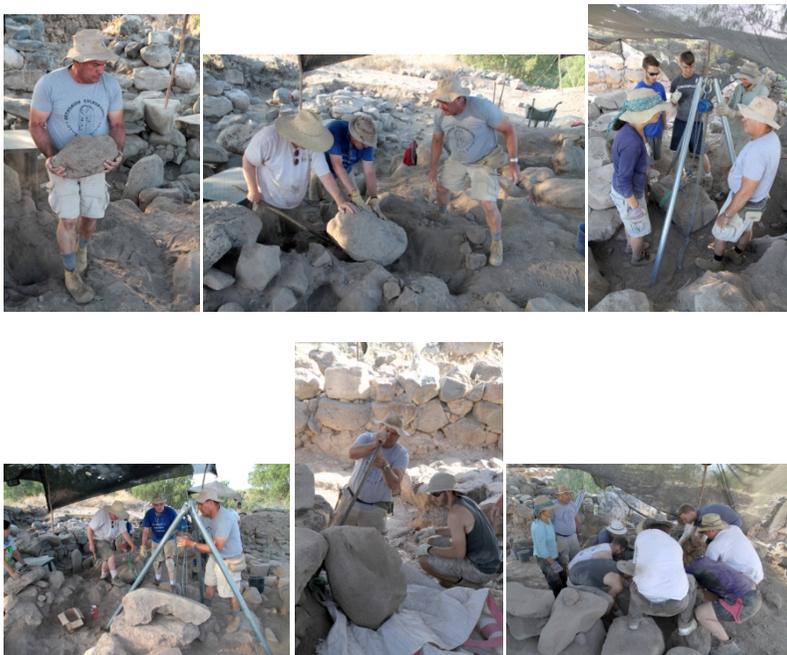


Fig. 1-7 Moving large stones

Moving rocks is a daily activity at the dig, but it is not always an easy thing to do. Rami is always involved in the procedure, especially when the rocks are large, either by personally carrying away medium size rocks or by using “sophisticated” equipment such as a crowbar or a tripod with a pulley and sometimes even an “advanced” sheet of tarp, upon which a stubborn rock is placed, and carried away by 4-6 musclemen and women to a safe place where it won’t be a nuisance. Rami will not rest until the mission is complete.