

## THE SOCIETY FOR HUMANITARIAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH AND EXPLORATION

### **The 2015 “Common Ground” Initiative:**

Exploring the past, present and future of a land and its people through  
archaeological training and fieldwork

The Society for Humanitarian Archaeological Research and Exploration (SHARE) and its programs continue to promote dialogue and exchange in the context of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, giving participants the opportunity to engage with the past, the present, and with one another through archaeological fieldwork. SHARE's programs have grown considerably over the past several years, and the 2015 season of the Common Ground Initiative proved to be our most successful by far.

Our work this summer consisted of a focused field season at the UNESCO World Heritage site of Akko, where the Common Ground Initiative has made a difference in the lives of young Israelis and Palestinians since 2013. The season was made possible through partnerships with the Penn State Tel Akko Total Archaeology Project and The International Conservation Center (ICC) in Old Akko as well as through the crucial support of our staff, members and donors. Special thanks go to Moses and Susan Libitzky for their key roles in making this season a reality, and to Dr. Dana DePietro, Dr. Jeffrey Pearson, Delphine Rodrik, and Ornit Schnecke who were on site in Akko this summer to work with our participants and coordinate the field program.

### *Building Community through Archaeology and Dialogue*

Since archaeology deals with the reconstruction of the past, it is an inherently political process and therefore can be a contentious one as well. This is especially true in Israel/Palestine, where holy sites, traditions and the material culture of the past have strong ties to modern identity, heritage and cultural patrimony. In the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, archaeology is often politically employed in efforts to establish or refute ties to that past, consequently reinforcing the “legitimacy” of each side's position in the present. For these reasons, archaeology in the region can be highly controversial, and practitioners can be understandably reluctant to engage with the political ramifications of their work.

SHARE and its partners maintain that archaeology can provide a unique opportunity for meaningful dialogue, precisely because of the often-contentious position archaeology occupies in the socio-political arena. The highly physical, complicated and goal-oriented nature of archaeological fieldwork requires cooperation and teamwork on a daily basis. These attributes foster camaraderie and the creation of meaningful, lasting relationships between individuals in the field. Participants also gain an enriching, educational experience that serves as an introduction to the discipline of archaeology and to a range of future career possibilities.

With this in mind, SHARE's Common Ground Initiative seeks to promote dialogue, participation and understanding between Israelis and Palestinians through a collective exploration of their shared cultural heritage in archaeological settings.

## *The 2015 Field Season at Akko*

This year, the Common Ground Initiative took place at two locations within Akko, each with its own curriculum and objectives. Building on the successes of last season, we were able to continue our work promoting dialogue, participation and understanding between the Arab and Jewish residents of Akko, Israel. Akko, a UNESCO World Heritage site, lends itself naturally to such a project. The predominantly Arab Old City is separated from the predominantly Jewish New City by a series of fortifications dating to the Ottoman era. Young people from each community attend separate schools and are taught in separate languages. Interaction between the communities is rare, if not discouraged outright.

The Akko program is designed to engage local youth (aged 14-16) in an exploration of Akko's past and present. In partnership with the Penn State Tel Akko Total Archaeology Project and The ICC, sixteen Jewish and Arab young adults were selected to participate in this season's two-week archaeological field program. The program consists of a week of excavation at Tel Akko and a week of conservation training in the ICC located in Akko's Old City. Tel Akko sits on the outskirts of the old and new cities, and provides a neutral location where participants are able to engage with the city's rich heritage as well as with one another.

The first half of this year's program was held at the ICC, located in a historic Ottoman house within the old city of Akko. The ICC serves both as a classroom and as a laboratory for teaching the latest techniques in archaeological conservation. Building on curriculum developed and refined over the past two years, this season's conservation training included all stages of planning, documenting and preserving historic structures within Akko's old city. Participants were grouped into several conservation teams and had to work together at each stage of the process to carry out their projects from start to finish. Under the guidance of professional conservator Salim Amar, participants learned how to perform free-hand and scale drawing of historic walls in the old city; how to mix and use mortar for restoration, and how to precisely measure, cut, and install masonry. They were able to immediately apply all these new skills by helping to restore a section of the courtyard of the historic ICC building. This curriculum, originally designed for college-age students, initially proved challenging for some of our participants, however, they embraced the assigned projects and exceeded our expectations yet again.

During the second week, participants joined the archaeological excavations taking place at Tel Akko, where they worked alongside volunteers and field staff from a number of American universities. This season's projects on the Tel, led by Penn State's Tel Akko Total Archaeology Project, consisted of ground and aerial survey, excavation of historical material ranging from the Iron Age up through the Roman period, and the collection, cataloguing, and analysis of artifacts. SHARE participants received training in and actively contributed to all facets of the excavations.

This year's cohort of SHARE participants included several students from last season who returned as junior staff members. Building on their experience from last year, these junior staff took on additional responsibilities including attending lectures, taking the lead in discussions and participating in community outreach. Building on the certificate of completion they had earned the year before, they received a special junior staff certificate at the end of season graduation ceremony. This year, we also had several

participants who returned for a third season. For these participants, we created a third program and accompanying certificate level: associate staff. The associate staff took on a natural leadership role within the group and actively shared their knowledge of archaeology, as well as their experiences of building bonds and understanding with the more junior participants. A key component of the associate staff position was to design and lead a tour of the Old City at the end of the season. This tour, called "My Akko," was attended by nearly all members of the American excavation staff, numerous members of the community, and all of the SHARE project participants and staff. The tour chronicled Akko's history and landmarks, as well as the experiences - both different and shared - of young people growing up in separate areas of a mostly divided city. It was a highlight of the 2015 program and points to the importance and promise of SHARE's work in Akko and beyond.

The integration of junior and associate staff positions went hand-in hand with a robust curriculum of activities and workshops. We were very fortunate to once again have the expertise of Dr. Jamie Quartermaine, Dr. Justin Lev Tov and several other experts, who lead workshops on faunal analysis, ceramic reconstruction and 3D mapping using radio-controlled drone aircraft. These workshops proved to be tremendously successful. Some of our returning junior and associated staff even had more field experience than their American counterparts and, on occasion, were even observed instructing them in the field.

As in previous seasons, the interaction between American volunteers and our program participants was vital in three key ways: firstly, the Americans were able to gain a local perspective from members of the community and vice-versa; secondly, the Americans gave our participants a sense that the work they were doing was not only interesting, but also had intrinsic value; and thirdly, by introducing a third party into the discussion, we were able to shift the dichotomy from Arab and Jewish to local and visitor, which helped establish bonds within and between the "local" groups. This participant-driven, bottom-up and mutually beneficial approach in which all parties contribute and benefit from the rewards of interaction lies at the heart of SHARE's curriculum and philosophy of change.

### *Quantifying Change and Assessing Impact*

Building upon the experience of previous seasons, one of the key issues we wanted to address in 2015 was how we go about quantifying change and understanding what kind of impact the Common Ground Initiative has had. Since the inception of SHARE's field projects, we have conducted entry and exit interviews with each participant and have used this feedback to improve our programs and approach. This was our second year using a daily journal as part of our curriculum. We asked participants to share their daily thoughts and reflections in the journals, as well as to write about their experiences at the end of the season. While some activities were more popular than others, and the inherent nature of the program can be trying at times, the vast majority of responses were overwhelmingly positive. A selection of reflections from this season and seasons past follows:

*"It was a perfect challenge: I got to learn about beautiful and new things, and got to know beautiful and new people."*

*"At first I was afraid to walk in the old city by myself- I was brought up to believe that Muslims and Arabs were bad people who wished me nothing but harm. But now, as a result of*

*this program, I know that is not the case. I have made many new friends in the old city, and I'm not afraid to go there anymore."*

*"Today was all about restoration, and I learned how to restore a wall. Working was nice because we all worked, talked and laughed together. I really enjoy the interaction with people :)"*

*"The thing I like most is digging with D. and R. It was really hard, but we did a great job. (no pain, no gain!) Today was also our last day, but the best day ever- I just wish it could go on a little longer!*

*"I worked well with J., a lovely girl that I really had a connection with. She is Palestinian, and I think that makes us closer because we found out we are very similar. Arabic and Hebrew are the same family, which I knew in theory, but with J. I finally realized it."*

*" Today I explored parts of my own city that I've never seen before, and did it with new people I liked very much"*

*" It was a really fun and exciting program- we learned so many new things! I am very happy that I was part of the group."*

*"In conversations with other volunteers, sometimes I encountered perspectives that were contrary to or that challenged my own, but I felt free to express my point of view and have a conversation about our disagreements ... I was able to break down some previous prejudices I had of Israelis, especially after becoming friends with E., one of the Israeli participants."*

*" I loved everything! I love to excavate and to see all my friends from last year, and to make new friends this year! I can't wait to do it again next year!*

*"Because of SHARE and its programs, I've been exposed to ideas and individuals from the region that I never would have been otherwise. The experience has been life changing and has fundamentally changed my point of view."*

*"Without SHARE, I never would have learned as much about the history of the Old City of Akko as I have over the last three years of participating in this program."*

While testimonials provide valuable insights into personal experiences, they can be hard to quantify when trying to assess degrees of overall change. For this reason, we have continued to use analytics along with interviews and reflections in order to assess the impact of our programs. A method that we again employed this year is interaction network mapping, in which we ask participants to map the strength of their interactions with other participants over the course of the program. Participants draw connections between their name and the names of others using solid lines, dotted lines, or no lines at all depending on the frequency and strength of their interactions. This method allows us to actually see change over time when the exercise is carried out at different points during the season. Comparing before and after results reveals a net increase in total interactions ranging from 20-80% and an increase in interactions with members from the opposite group ranging from 20-60%. These numbers are most encouraging, and when paired with the testimonials above, make a powerful case for the efficacy of the initiative and its programing.

## *Conclusions and Directions for the Future*

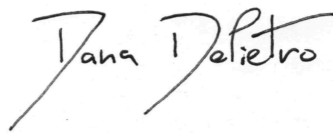
Overall, SHARE's Common Ground Initiative has made an immediate and tangible difference in the lives and communities of young Israelis, Palestinians and their American counterparts. Now entering its fifth year, the program is poised to make a number of significant inroads in the months to come. Following our third successful season at Akko, we will continue to establish ties with other projects, universities and institutions to expand and improve our programs. Considerable thanks go to directors Dr. Ann Killebrew, and Shelly Ann Peleg for their support and participation in making the 2015 season possible.

Building on our momentum from the summer, we are currently pursuing exciting new opportunities within the United Nations to expand our programing to other UNESCO heritage sites in Israel/Palestine and other parts of the world. As a small all-volunteer non-profit, we continue to seek out grants and opportunities that will allow us to keep focusing our energies and enthusiasm on our organization and its programs.

While the 2015 season presented certain challenges, the dedication of our staff, students and supporters ensured that any adversity we encountered was quickly transformed into an opportunity. As in prior years, the level of enthusiasm for the program, as well as the degree of camaraderie and friendship that developed as a result of it, far exceeded our expectations. The Common Ground Initiative continues to thrive at a time when dialogue and understanding in the region could not be more important.

As we plan for the 2016 season, the support of our members, partners and participants will play a vital role in ensuring that our programs continue to connect and inspire young people for years to come. We are dedicated to the principles that have served us so well over the past four years, and we look forward to continuing to provide Israeli and Palestinian youth with the tools, training and opportunity to collectively seek out common ground, both figuratively and literally. On behalf of SHARE, thank you for all you have done for our organization, and for those we serve.

With Appreciation,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Dana DePietro". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Dana" and last name "DePietro" clearly distinguishable.

Dana Douglas DePietro, Ph.D.  
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## ARCHAEOLOGY > Re-evaluating conflict through archaeology, amid uncertain peace

Delphine Rodrik - TEL AKKO

**As the most recent “long-term” truce between Israel and Gaza follows two months of violence and few signs of real progress, it might seem like the opportunity for a long-term solution in Israel-Palestine is too far frozen in the past. But on an archaeological excavation in Akko this July, Arab and Jewish high school students saw change not far below the surface.**



At around 5:30 a.m. on Tel Akko, the temperature is already climbing steadily. But in early July of 2014, the region’s most recent conflict has not yet reached its boiling point. Further south, children have already become casualties of the latest violence between Israel’s military and Gaza’s militants. Schools have been ordered shut and summer camps put on hold, rockets have launched, Israel’s active reserve forces are growing.

It could be any point in Akko’s turbulent history, but this Monday it is quiet and still, one of the calmer places on the coast of the Levant. As the rising sun dissolves clouds over the Galilee’s east, the Mediterranean grows in blue below the crusader walls of Akko’s Old City, its minarets and towers sharpened in resolution. To the south of the Tel, known by locals as Napoleon Hill, a metal silhouette of the prospective invader on a reared horse watches over the city, alerting the unaware to its significance even today.



Up here with this view, it's easy to understand why Akko was the object of conquest for centuries, millennia—and perhaps even now, located on Israeli land that many claim as Palestine. Today those living in Akko's Old City are predominantly Arab, while those in the surrounding New City make up the majority of its Jewish community, about 75 percent of Akko's total population. In a couple hours, a group of 12 Arab and Jewish high school students from Akko will join Penn State's archaeological excavation on the Tel.

In archaeological terms, all this might be considered part of a modern stratigraphy, the layers of an archaeological site that reveal different periods of occupation and use. An excavation is in its own way a conflict, one you must tackle by layer, as you might approach any mess or disorder. Archaeologists are in search of an increasingly comprehensive, and complex, picture—yet one that is rarely ever perfectly complete—of the relationships between different features, periods, and those who lived among them.

I'm in Akko this day for the start of programming with the Society for Humanitarian Archaeological Research and Exploration (SHARE), an [American](#) non-profit that utilizes archaeology and conservation to bring together youth in regions of ethnic and territorial conflict. Interaction and understanding is the prerequisite for any sustainable solution between young Israelis and Palestinians, SHARE maintains, and the team-oriented nature of archaeology provides a uniquely neutral setting to facilitate communication.

In Israel-Palestine in particular, archaeology is highly politicized, often a means of claiming ownership to the past and present, both unclear. But although the summer's escalating violence has the potential to set Arab and Jews in harsh contrast, SHARE's students form friendships that display the opposite. In the field, during workshops on pottery analysis and aerial photography, and throughout restoration projects at Akko's International Conservation Center, students' conversation and enthusiasm are more common than the collision of rocket fire only a few miles south. Their interaction often displays the unconditional joy—echoing cheering and laughter over dares during lunch, for instance—that knows no boundaries, barriers, separation walls.

Perhaps the ease with which SHARE's students open up to each other is natural for a generation that shares more across a regularly promoted false dichotomy—Israelis vs. Palestinians—seeking to divide them. Together, they know fear: of sharing the wrong

opinion with the wrong person; of speaking the wrong language in the wrong place; of being in the wrong place at the wrong time; of periodic, inevitable, seemingly eternal war.

Together, they also share ambition, a critical idealism. SHARE's students aspire to be politicians, musicians, artists; they want to "change the unfair world," in the words of one. They are big dreamers, uncertain of whether circumstances will keep these goals forever dreams.

In Akko, I'm constantly reminded of the immediacy and insistence with which both the recent and ancient past clings to daily life. While one of our Muslim students is fasting for Ramadan, two other Jewish students are fasting for the Seventeenth of Tammuz, in remembrance of the Roman attack on the walls of Jerusalem. Even celebration and commemoration here overlap, history repeated and retold.

That leaves archaeology inescapable, as well. While helping a family dig holes to support a fence in their front yard, for instance, we find long-broken pottery a few inches down, alongside dirt and stones. It's from the Ottoman period, you can tell: modern remains. Don't forget the history that unfolds at your feet, this onetime-jug seems to say, or isolate what it holds. I am not all ancient.

Archaeology, we explain to our students on that early July day, is a necessarily destructive practice: To understand a site, walls and floors must be uncovered, recorded, and then removed. The students' creativity allows them to grasp the concept intrinsically; they imagine, connect, reconstruct. We understand, they insist. They are anxious to get digging.

Seeing with a simple wisdom inherent in youth, they might find a sense of order from chaos, peace from conflict, the foundations of a new era directly above ruins of the last. Happiness, these young adults know, is a culture, friendship a faith, and compromise a politics understood by all. And always, they remind us, these things must be shared.

*September/06/2014*