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# 2024 Stevan B. Dana Fieldwork and Annual Meeting Scholarships

DONOR IMPACT REPORT





# 2024 Donor Impact Summary

**\$4,000**

awarded for fieldwork in 2024

**2**

Scholarships Awarded

## Recipients:

- Gabbi Graber
- Bruno Soltic

## Colleges and Universities:

- Jerusalem Univeristy College
- Lipscomb Univeristy

## Excavation/Fieldwork Sites:

- Tel Burna, Israel

**\$6,912**

Awarded for the Annual Meeting in 2024

**7**

Scholarships Awarded

## Recipients:

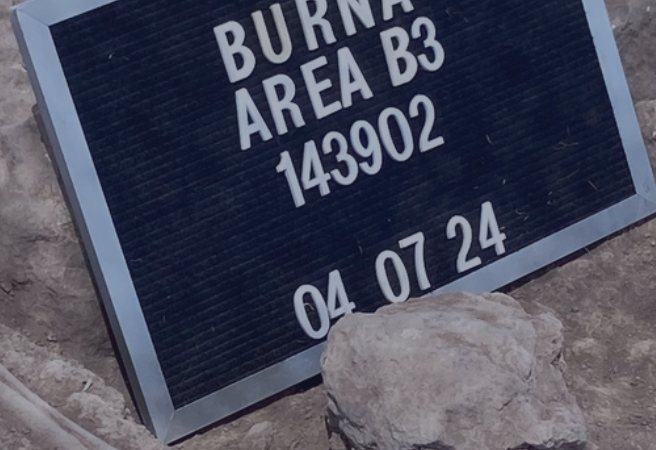
- Doron Ben Ami (Israel Antiquities Authority)
- Taylor Grueser
- Murray Hiebert (Millar College)
- Daniel Hippert (University of Haifa)
- Robin Jenkins
- John Rinks
- Helena Roth (Tel Aviv University)



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ANNUAL MEETING 2024



# Gabbi Graber



Jerusalem University College  
Tel Burna, Israel

Gabbi Graber is from Birmingham Alabama. She recently graduated with my M.A. in Biblical History and Geography from Jerusalem University College (JUC) and began a Ph.D. program in Ancient Near Eastern Archaeology at Lipscomb University this fall.



My alarm goes off at 4:50 a.m. and in a blur of confusion it takes a moment to remember that I am not in my bed in Alabama but instead am in a kibbutz in Israel. It's day four and I have learned and practiced the exact time I need to make sure my bag is packed, coffee is made, and my water bottles are filled. In this flurry of well-practiced movement, everyone silently packs into the same car we've ridden in all week to arrive at Tel Burna before 6:00. The Shephelah hills roll around us as we listen to a dramatic Disney soundtrack calling forth nostalgia and lyrics long since memorized. We make the final ascent up to the site as the sun rises behind Tell Burna.

It feels almost instinctual that the first order of business, before the sun even begins to beat down, is to lift and place shade cloths over the open squares. People begin to scatter to their respective spaces as the area supervisor, makes the necessary adjustments for the day and communicates with the square supervisors. Seamless rotations of who is picking and who is cleaning allow for needed water breaks as the level of ground slowly lowers. As we dig, our eyes become better at spotting the indicative sherds from the body sherds. A sharp jar goes up my elbow as I hit the stone that will be the first evidence of a wall cutting straight through our square.



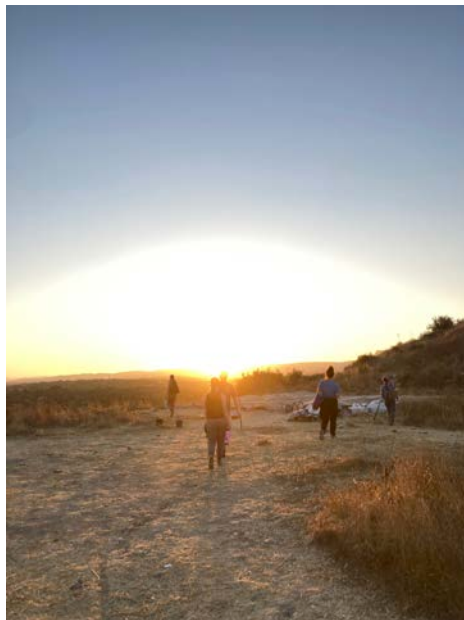
# Gabbi Graber

Jerusalem University College  
Tel Burna, Israel

A loud voice breaks us from the focus, and everyone grabs their preferred breakfast items knowing what will sit well with still four more hours of digging. As I work with a patishe, I listen to the conversation of the Dig Director, area supervisor, and my square supervisor about the pattern of the walls and where we will need to open a new square. I check my watch and with not much time left to dig in the day I swiftly switch to sweeping the square starting in a corner to move cohesively with the others in my unit. What I thought was bedrock on day one I now know to be the packed dirt we will remove tomorrow. Many hands make the end of the day move faster as we organize tools, lower shade cloths, and pack up the cars. The drive back to the kibbutz involves more singing of childhood songs, laughing at inside jokes, and wistful longings of a post-dig ice cream.

We each grab a brush and bucket of pottery, and I am always drawn to a bucket that was from the square I dug. Pottery washing clumps us back together as we recall different sherds and the squares they came from. Every ear is bent towards the main table where the experts sit examining and reading pottery as the square supervisors talk through their square. They casually lift a sherd and quickly place it in its period. This leaves volunteers and students alike astounded at the practiced eye of a well-seasoned archaeologist able to date a sherd by touch and sight alone.

Dirt washed down the drain and feeling slightly more human, we again hop in the cars and hike up a new tell with new site lines that help explain the importance of the geographical placement of Tel Burna within its valley system. The day has been long and full, and dinner can switch quickly between laughter and silent, tired camaraderie. Dirt mustaches, sweat stains, repeat outfits, and tired conversations bond a group that is half repeat diggers and brand-new strangers. To think that I knew none of this a mere four days ago is astounding. There is still much to learn and as I heard well-experienced archaeologists in the field say “we’ve never seen this before” or I think about potentially being a square supervisor in the future. A mere four days ago I did not know what a tag was, and now I have the license number memorized. And while the pick does not feel comfortable in my hand it feels more natural that it did on Monday. I knew as soon as my first day in the field was over that I wanted to spend more days, months, summers, and years becoming seasoned and trained in this profession, for each day on site becomes a day of new discoveries in the art of what becomes practiced and perfected memorized movement.





# Bruno Soltic

Lipscomb University  
Tel Burna, Israel

Bruno Soltic is a PhD student at Lipscomb University, focusing on Iron Age Cultic structures in the Ancient Levant. With several years of excavation experience in the Middle East, he is passionate about archaeology and history. Bruno teaches history in a school in Florida and is a father of twin boys and one daughter. He is also a video maker with a YouTube channel, making videos about archaeology and history.



This year, our efforts were concentrated on a single layer of architecture from the Late Bronze Age. This focus provided a deep dive into the period, with the discovery of a large building revealing much about the era's construction techniques and daily life. The excavation rapidly expanded daily as we uncovered more of the building's structure.

This season was unique because we were excavating a single-period site, a rare archaeological opportunity in Israel's Bronze and Iron Ages sites. Typically, we deal with multiple layers representing different historical periods, but Tel Burna allowed us to excavate only the late bronze age right on the surface.

The process of uncovering this building was both challenging and exhilarating. Each morning began before dawn, with the team driving around 20 minutes up to the site from our kibbutz. At the Tell, we discussed our goals for the day, reviewed our progress from the previous day, and addressed any challenges we encountered. With our tools in hand, we set off to our designated areas, ready to dig, brush, and sift through the layers of history.

Our focus was primarily on architecture rather than pottery, which is often the case in multi-layered sites. This singular focus allowed us to understand the period's spatial dynamics and construction techniques more clearly. However, the discovery of a well-preserved pottery piece by a local volunteer and his grandchildren added an exciting twist to our excavation. One day, as the grandfather and his grandchildren were articulating a collapsed wall, they found a beautifully broken pot beneath the rubble. This significant finding prompted us to focus on that area to expose the collapse and the pottery for restoration. We had to slow down and use our resources to preserve the vessel.



# Bruno Soltic

Lipscomb University  
Tel Burna, Israel

Fieldwork at Tel Burna wasn't just about the discoveries but also about the people and the experiences we shared. The daily interactions, problem-solving, and shared excitement over new finds made the experience memorable. These moments reminded us that archaeology is not just about uncovering the past but also about building connections in the present.

Our methodical approach involved not only excavation but also meticulous documentation. Every find was carefully recorded, photographed, and cataloged, from the smallest pottery shard to the most significant architectural feature. This process is crucial for preserving each artifact's context and future research.

Opening around three new squares per day was no small feat, but it gave us a comprehensive understanding of the building layout. This approach also ensured that we could cover a larger area within the limited time frame of the excavation season.

As the final season at Tel Burna, there was a sense of urgency to uncover and understand the building as much as possible. The site's strategic location and historical significance have provided insights into the broader geopolitical landscape of the ancient Near East. The artifacts and architectural features uncovered this summer will undoubtedly contribute to our understanding of the region's history.

Reflecting on my time at Tel Burna, I am grateful for the opportunity to be part of such a significant excavation. The knowledge and experience gained this summer have been invaluable for my academic research and my personal growth as an archaeologist. The friendships forged, and the memories made will stay with me long after the last trowel has been packed away.







**Thank you for your  
continued support of  
the next generation of  
archaeologists!**



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