



THE SOCIETY FOR HUMANITARIAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
RESEARCH AND EXPLORATION

**The 2016 “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 2016 season of the Common Ground Initiative proved to be our most successful by far.

Our fieldwork this summer consisted of two main components: 1) a focused conservation and archaeological training project 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; and 2) intensive development and outreach efforts aimed at expanding our programming in the summer of 2017 and beyond to include work with the youth of the communities of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam, Meveserat, and Abu Ghosh.

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 Dr. Dana DePietro, Dr. Jeffrey Pearson, Angel Ryono, and Ayelet Cohen, who were on site in Akko this summer to coordinate the conservation field program and to engage in outreach and development. Warm thanks also go to Ken Miller, who played a vital role in laying the groundwork for our development work in Abu Ghosh, and Jimin Lee, who continues to head up our online outreach and fundraising efforts.

*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 2016 Field Season at Akko*

The Common Ground Initiative seeks to promote 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. Our Akko program is designed to engage local youth (aged 14-18) in an exploration of Akko's past and present. In partnership with the Penn State Tel Akko Total Archaeology Project and the International Conservation Center (ICC), fourteen Jewish and Arab young adults were selected to participate in this season's conservation and archaeological field school. The program consisted of three intensive days of conservation training and practice followed by a week of archaeological training and excavation at Tel Akko.

The ICC is situated in a historic Ottoman house within the old city of Akko and 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 three 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 historic fortification walls of the Old City. Our students embraced this challenging curriculum, which was originally designed for college students, and once again exceeded our expectations.

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 previous seasons who returned as associate staff members. These students took on a leadership role within the group and actively shared their knowledge of conservation and archaeology, as well as their experiences of building bonds and understanding with the more junior participants. 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. With four years under their belts, some of our returning junior and associated staff 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 2016 was how to 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. Here is a selection of participant reflections from this season and seasons past:

*"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 from this season and seasons past 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 programming.

#### *Development, Outreach, and Plans for the 2017 Season and Beyond*

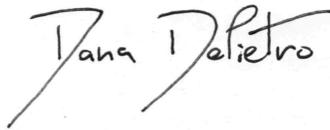
During the summer of 2016, our team also engaged in extensive outreach and development efforts, with the goal of expanding the scope of SHARE's programming as well as the range and vitality of its partnerships moving forward into the future. We held meetings with officials at the United States Department of State and UNESCO, and with professional archaeologists, cultural heritage experts, and leading academics, all of whom offered support for the unique and important work that SHARE is doing in the region.

SHARE also achieved the goal of expanding its programming by successfully establishing a working partnership with the community of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam and the Tel Gezer Excavation Project to introduce a new SHARE project at the nearby archaeological site of Tel Gezer. This project will launch in 2017 and consist of archaeological training and dialogue workshops for high school-aged youth drawn from the communities of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam, Meveserat, and Abu Ghosh. The archaeological training will be led by professional archaeologists from SHARE and the Tel Gezer project. The dialogue workshops will be collaboratively run by SHARE staff and facilitators from the School of Peace at Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam. Both components of the program will challenge participants to engage meaningfully with both the past and present of Israel/Palestine and to participate actively in the dialogue and peace-building process.

These exciting new projects and partnerships will complement SHARE's ongoing work in Akko, as we continue to establish and solidify ties with other private and public institutions, universities, and communities to promote our vision. Critically, as a small all-volunteer non-profit, we continue to rely on both institutional grants and individual contributions to support our organization and programming. As we plan for the 2017 season and beyond, the support of our members, partners, and participants will play a vital role in ensuring that our programs continue to train, connect, and inspire young people to break down barriers and seek out common ground, both figuratively and literally. Now, more than ever, we need your support. By using archaeology as a tool for dialogue and engagement, the Common Ground Initiative brings communities together at a time when dialogue and understanding in the region could not be more important.

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 that reads "Dana DePietro". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Dana" and last name "DePietro" clearly legible.

Dana Douglas DePietro, Ph.D.  
Executive Director, SHARE  
[www.archshare.org](http://www.archshare.org)