



IN MEMORIAM

Itzhaq Beit-Arieh

1930–2012

Prof Itzhaq (Itzik) Beit-Arieh passed away on July 12, 2012, following a prolonged illness. He had just completed his final excavation report, on Tel Malhata in the northeastern Negev. This was a fitting coda to a prolific career spanning five decades, most of which was devoted to the study of the Negev and Sinai deserts in the Bronze and Iron Ages.

Itzhaq, or Itzik as he was known to most of us, was born in Kovno, Lithuania on July 9, 1930, to parents who had immigrated to Palestine with the Third *Aliyah* in 1923, but had returned to Europe for the birth of their first child. They were soon back in Palestine, however, and Itzik grew up near Tel Aviv, attending the Gymnasia Herzliya and participating, at age 18, in Israel's War of Independence. In the early 1960s Beit-Arieh became the first—and for a time, the only—student in the newly formed Department of Archaeology at Tel Aviv University. When Yohanan Aharoni established the Institute of Archaeology in 1968, Beit-Arieh became one of its mainstays, accompanying Aharoni on his excavations at Tel Sheva (ancient Beer-sheba), and completing a Masters thesis (1971) on Middle and Late Bronze Age temples. Indeed, he might be described as a quintessential product of Aharoni's approach to biblical archaeology: always striving to place sites in their geographical and historical context through survey and excavation, absorbing history by walking the landscape, and never losing sight of the big picture. Like Aharoni, Beit-Arieh loved the desert, attracted perhaps by the paradox of a seeming wasteland masking a rich undercurrent of life and human activity. It awaited discovery, and provided rich rewards for those who would submit to its rules and persist in its study. Once one mastered the signs of human presence, the desert seemed to provide clarity of vision that was often lacking in the areas of the sown.

In 1971 Beit-Arieh embarked on what was to become a 12-year study of the Early Bronze Age settlements of the southern Sinai highlands, forming the substance of his Ph.D. dissertation (1977) and culminating in the Irene Levi-Sala prize-winning publication of 2003, *Archaeology of Sinai—The Ophir Expedition*. Based on a series of expeditions into virtually uncharted territory, this study revealed the existence of 50 previously unknown sites of the Early Bronze Age located in the heart of the Sinai. Excavations at six sites uncovered a material culture with remarkable affinities to Early Bronze Arad and with evidence for contact with Egypt. Dramatically expanding the reach of the Levantine Early Bronze Age, these discoveries entailed a revision of our understanding of the scope and quality of the first experiment in urbanism in the Levant in general, and at Arad in particular.

It was during this study that the Yom Kippur War of 1973 overtook Itzik, and with it came the tragedy that overshadowed the rest of his life—the death of his soldier-son Ophir, after whom the Sinai expedition was subsequently named.

The peace treaty of 1979 with Egypt marked a change in the orientation of Beit-Arieh's work from the Sinai back to the northern Negev. In a series of excavations and surveys beginning in 1979 and ending in 2000, the complex web of cultural and political relations between Judah and Edom took on tangible form. These excavations included the fortified towns and fortresses of Tel 'Ira, Ḥorvat 'Uza, Ḥorvat Radum and Tel Malḥata, as well as the Edomite shrine of Ḥorvat Qitmit—a fortuitous and remarkable discovery that cast Edomite culture and religion in an entirely new light. As in the case of the Sinai expedition, Beit-Arieh completed a full report on each of these excavations, all of which were to be published as Institute of Archaeology monographs (*Ḥorvat Qitmit: An Edomite Shrine in the Biblical Negev* 1995; *Tel 'Ira: A Stronghold in the Biblical Negev* 1999; *Ḥorvat 'Uza and Ḥorvat Radum: Two Fortresses in the Biblical Negev* 2007; *Tel Malḥata* forthcoming). In addition, each major excavation was accompanied by pedestrian surveys, culminating in the full publication of three survey maps (*Tel Malḥata* 2003; *Ḥorvat 'Uza and Naḥal Ḥemar* 2011) under the aegis of the Archaeological Survey of Israel. While highlighting the intense interest of the Judahite kingdom in the Negev as an economic resource and a political buffer zone, it is the unexpected wealth of Edomite religious and cultural expression, elucidated in extensive collaboration with Pirhiya Beck, that comprises the outstanding contribution of Beit-Arieh's Negev projects to our understanding of the cultural entanglements and political economy of the late Iron Age.

Apart from these major regional undertakings, Beit-Arieh had a hand in excavations and surveys near Serabit el-Khadem in Sinai, at the Egyptian New Kingdom cemetery at Deir el-Balah (with Trude Dothan), in the Early Bronze sites at 'Ain el-Qudeirat and Tel Ma'ahaz (with Ram Gophna), and in the Early/Intermediate Bronze Age 'Uvda Valley Site 917.

Ever unpretentious as a scholar and easily accessible to students and colleagues as a teacher, Itzik Beit-Arieh led primarily by example. His desert expeditions—journeys of exploration in the true sense of the word—were among the last in a chain of transmission going back to the formative days of Israeli archaeology. They are remembered by many as superlative learning experiences.

For his wide-ranging archaeological activities, for his unrivalled publication record (he left no outstanding archaeological debts!), and primarily for his warm, generous personality, Itzik Beit-Arieh will be remembered and missed.

He is survived by a daughter, archaeologist and educator Avivit Gera, and three grandchildren.

Raphael Greenberg