

AIA Waldbaum Field School Scholarship Report: Huqoq, Israel – Elena Gittleman

I became involved in the Huqoq excavation in the beginning stages of research for my Masters thesis. My adviser's specialty is the art of Medieval Iberia, particularly Jewish art and images of Jews, and my specialty is in the art of Late Antique Byzantium; and so in order to combine both of our interests and areas of expertise, we began thinking about Jews and Jewish art in Late Antiquity/Early Byzantium. After a bit of research, I came across the excavation at Huqoq, and immediately became very excited about the mosaics they were uncovering. The opportunity to be at the cutting edge of art historical knowledge was too much to resist, and before I knew it, I was on the plane to Israel.

Never having been on a dig before, I was unsure of what to expect, but Dr. Jodi Magness, the dig director, and the rest of the team immediately put me at ease. I was assigned to work in a square at the southern end of the synagogue, just inside the nave at the eastern aisle: Area 300 Synagogue South, Square 4/6. This was a new square this season and our goal was to reach the Byzantine floor level, to hopefully find the *bema* and perhaps more mosaics! Unfortunately, we did not reach the Byzantine level due to the many walls and complicated usage of the area during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Our director, Jodi Magness, as well as our co-director, Shua Kisilevitz are very concerned with carefully excavating and documenting all occupational levels, including the modern Palestinian village of Yakuk which was abandoned in the 1940s. Just we were getting ready to close the site, we made it down to the Medieval occupational level, where we were expecting to find the stylobate delineating the aisle from the nave, but unfortunately, it was robbed out. We began to find some loose mosaic tesserae, so are very optimistic that the mosaic on the Byzantine level is still intact in this area.

The most exciting find of the summer was in the northern part of the synagogue. They uncovered a continuation of what has been called the "Maccabee" mosaic uncovered in 2013. Witnessing the uncovering of these mosaics that haven't been seen in possibly 1000 years was the highlight of the summer. Our experts are still debating and researching the possible identifications and meanings of the mosaic, but it is clear even now that we came across something very special and important.

Overall, this experience made me grow as an art historian as I now have an even greater amount of respect for the work archaeologists do, as well as a better understanding of their methodologies. Additionally, I was able to work in the field and in the lab with the mosaic expert, Dr. Karen Britt, who so graciously taught me how art historians can work in the field. I want to thank the AIA Waldbaum Field School Scholarship for supporting my work this summer, and I hope be able to return to Huqoq next season to continue the amazing work being done there.