



## »Dig for a Day« with the Archaeological Seminars Institute

The ancient Hellenistic city of Maresha was the capital of Idumea and contains thousands of subterranean rooms. These chambers were filled approximately 2200 years ago with tons of debris that appears to have been dumped into them from the dwellings that once existed above them on the surface. During the course of the excavation we discovered that some of these rooms contained up to nine meters of unstratified debris. The fill includes pottery sherds, complete local and imported vessels, Greek and Aramaic ostraca, coins, jewelry, animal bones, amphora stamps, figurines as well as many bricks from the dwellings on the surface. These many finds detail the everyday life of the inhabitants of Maresha; a cosmopolitan city that included Idumeans, Nabateans, Arabs, Phoenicians, Judeans, along with many other ethnic groups.

While this lack of stratigraphy has limited our understanding of certain aspects of the city's past, it has allowed for the »Dig for a Day« program of the Archaeological Seminars Institute to function here. The actual excavation work is carried out by people from around the world with no training who want to experience archaeology, first hand, and for a short period of time. This program allows people of all ages to dig and sift through unstratified fill, guided by professionals. Over 1,000,000 people have enjoyed the excitement of participating in this program whose fees have underwritten the entire excavation, including the processing of all of the finds, for the past 30 years. Due to the fact that all the excavation is underground, the site is cool and comfortable in the hot summer months and dry and warm (relative to the surface) in the winter months. In order to participate one must make a reservation at:



**office@archesem.com – or – <http://www.archesem.com/dig.asp>**

The excavations are undertaken on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority, funded by the Archaeological Seminars Institute, Jerusalem and directed by Ian Stern and Bernie Alpert.



**The following excavation reports can be consulted:**

- E. Ambar-Armon, Oil Lamps on Kernos Vessels from Maresha, *Strata* 28, 2010, 102–140
- I. Stern, Ethnic Identities and Circumcised Phalli at Hellenistic Maresha, *Strata* 30, 2012, 57–87
- I. Stern, The Excavations of Maresha Subterranean Complex 57: The ‘Heliodoros’ Cave, *BARIntSer* 2652 (Oxford 2014)
- I. Stern – B. Alpert, Maresha: Subterranean Complex 169, *Hadashot Arkheologiyot – ExcIsr* 125, 2014 (online)
- I. Stern – B. Alpert, Tel Maresha: Subterranean Complex 1, *Hadashot Arkheologiyot – ExcIsr* 126, 2014 (online)
- I. Stern – V. Noam, Holey Vessels of Maresha, *ARAM* 27, 2015, 343–364
- I. Stern, Subterranean Complex 147 at Maresha: the Construction Phases of the Columbarium, *Atiqot* 87, 2016, 37–48 (online)



Moldmade bowls; Photos by Gabi Laron.