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*Journal of Roman Archaeology* 36 (2023), 558–565  
doi:10.1017/S1047759423000338

## Caesarea Maritima. The port, the city, and a long narrative of settlement

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HOLUM, K. G., ed. 2020. *Caesarea Maritima: Excavations in the Old City 1989–2003 Conducted by the University of Maryland and the University of Haifa: Final Reports, Volume 1*. ASOR Archaeological Reports 27. Alexandria, VA: American Schools of Oriental Research. Pp. xviii, 454. ISBN 978-0-89757-115-9

The site of Caesarea Maritima, on the northern coast of Israel, was founded as an anchorage in the Hellenistic epoch and greatly expanded thanks to an innovative artificial harbor project commissioned under Herod the Great in 22–10 BCE. From then through the

Byzantine period, it was the capital of the province of Palestine and one of the most politically and culturally prominent cities in the Eastern Mediterranean. As for fieldwork, for many decades Caesarea has been investigated by the Israeli Archaeological Authority (IAA) and a host of international initiatives, and, not least, by the University of Maryland's Combined Caesarea Expeditions (CCE), under the direction of the late Avner Raban and Kenneth Holum;<sup>1</sup> the latter's work is here reviewed. To be sure, Caesarea is the kind of site that still generates considerable scholarly excitement. Each year, an international conference held in New York celebrates the site's legacy, bringing into focus its history, material culture, and long season of excavations.<sup>2</sup> What is more, a host of publications illustrates Caesarea's material culture and the society that produced it, highlighting its main monuments: the central city, harbor, Augustan Roman temple, Byzantine octagonal church, Crusader church, and, ultimately, the city walls. Overall, the cultural benchmarks of Caesarea's nucleation and growth are well known: the Phoenician early settlement, Herod's wholesale transformation of the city and port, the construction of Late Antique walls, Anastasius's harbor repairs, and the dwindling of the settlement in the 7th c. CE.<sup>3</sup> All the same, how the foundation of Caesarea exactly unfolded from the early days of Straton's Tower cannot be determined. The city's mythography is the most typical concoction of etiology, legends, and divine intervention. Yet, no medium tells that story better than the early 4th-c. CE Coupe de Césarée on display at the Louvre. It is a bronze, silver, and copper bowl that offers a stunning tableau vivant of the city's foundation myths. Above and beyond the religious practicalities attended as the city was founded, this artifact shows that legends and myths of old were deeply rooted in the fabric of Late Antique Caesarea. As for the materiality of the city, however, after Herod's establishment of the harbor, Caesarea organically grew to encompass its eastern districts, all the while graduating from small enclave to one of the main hubs of the Mediterranean. Amenities and public buildings aligned Caesarea with the great cities of the Greek east and reflected its provincial dignity. Ambitious building programs, and not least the establishment of the government compound south of the circus, cemented the notion of the capital of Judea, while an array of waterworks punctuated key landmarks, plazas, and thoroughfares. The occasional makeover of buildings and addition of imperial veneer, however, signaled the new law and order. Tiberius, Titus, Hadrian, and virtually every emperor that had an interest in stamping their pride onto this city left a permanent mark on Caesarea's fabric. Environmental factors also got in the way of the city's evolution. In particular, seismic events not only demolished buildings, but also time and again reoriented the city's governance, paving the way for new social forces as well as new agencies tasked with reconstruction, while relentlessly reinventing the city's skyline. Not to mention the effects that at least two major tsunamis had on this community. The episode of 115 CE, a consequence of the earthquake that struck Antioch on the Orontes and described by Cassius Dio,<sup>4</sup> is attested archaeologically and vividly illustrates the impact of a tsunami on the harbor infrastructure, with damage caused to the moles and its shoreward edge.<sup>5</sup> Overall, how Caesarea negotiated its

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<sup>1</sup> Raban and Holum 1996.

<sup>2</sup> <https://as.nyu.edu/departments/ancientstudies/events/fall-2022/caesarea-maritima-international-conference-mmxxii.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Augenti 2018, 39.

<sup>4</sup> Dio Cass. 68.24.

<sup>5</sup> Reinhardt et al. 2006; see also Goodman-Tchernov et al. 2021.

layout and habitus against the background of political variability and environmental challenges is what makes the study of this site compelling.

Despite much scholarship, however, vast sectors of the city remain unknown, and paramount questions still loom large. For instance, the transition from Late Antique to Islamic Caesarea is still broadly sketched.<sup>6</sup> The two views of the nature of the Levantine coast from the 7th–10th c. characterize the city as either a depopulated no-man’s land frontier with the Byzantine-controlled Mediterranean or home to a reduced population but containing wider agricultural areas interspersed with key settlements that remained engaged in trade and exchange. According to Islamic sources, Caesarea (Qaysariya) was a *ribāt*, a type of site that functioned as either a military-religious lookout station or a commercial waystation.<sup>7</sup> The Vanderbilt investigations of the north side of the Temple Platform and CCAP (Caesarea Coastal Archaeological Project) excavations currently engage with these questions, addressing the Early Islamic occupation and the transformation of Classical cities in the Early Islamic period. The former project, in particular, addresses domestic architecture of the 10th and 12th c. in the context of two large compounds, gleaning a picture of thriving activities and ingenious water-impounding techniques. The latter project, conversely, explores previously unknown districts away from the city center. It investigates the interface between the local ecology and the post-Late Antique phase, highlighting the impact of environmental events, not least the tsunami of 749 CE. How the local community responded and adapted to such fast environmental changes is a central issue within this research. In particular, work in areas previously unexcavated (Areas NC or North City, newly named, and FZ or Fortezza, previously named) addresses these concerns. Specifically, Area NC sheds new light on the topography of the city’s northern expanses within the Crusader (and Early Islamic possibly) city walls and along the axis of the Roman/Byzantine north–south *cardo*. It is anticipated this area will capture “between” the roads, where the activities were happening, and not only the road itself. The use, reuse, and transformation of this long throughfare has driven the excavation in this sector, and, amid fallen column shafts and reused architecture, now affords the initial glimpses into the topographical adjustments that occurred during the postclassical age at Caesarea. It should be stressed, however, that much of this new research deliberately begins by addressing the reconfiguration of the area by the 19th- and 20th-c. Bosnian settlement, a conspicuous presence in the topsoil of area NC. While these periods are not traditionally included in excavation efforts, they have been treated methodologically the same as any other historical epoch. To that end, old maps and 1930s aerial photographs have been harnessed to document how the late Ottoman settlement veers (or does not) from its medieval predecessor. Ultimately, this new research aims at producing a “biography” of the *cardo*, bringing to the fore its architectural adjustments and spatial limits, as well as its role in moving traffic and commodities. Overall, this sector of the city shows high potential for understanding Caesarea’s urban transformation from the Roman through Byzantine to modern periods with a focus on non-public residential and commercial districts. In a similar vein, Area FZ radically addresses the southern boundary of Caesarea, investigating an area of high potential that was explored in the 1960s by the team of the Università di Milano.<sup>8</sup> The current exploration aspires to 1) define the city wall and

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<sup>6</sup> Holum 1992.

<sup>7</sup> Porath 1996; Sharon 1996; Boas 1992.

<sup>8</sup> Borroni et al. 1966.

understanding of the shape, extent, and date of the “*fortezza*” or *ribāt*, and 2) introduce another area of settlement from the Late Byzantine to Early Islamic periods that was previously unknown. Excavation and surveying of walls that have been revealed by winter storms usher in a topography of two projecting towers, and, overall, an exciting material horizon of the 6th–8th c. Moreover, compelling evidence of Early Islamic agroecosystems and settlements south of the city amid sand dunes, grounded in the refuse waste stream from Caesarea justifies our pursuits in this area of the town.<sup>9</sup>

A lot to unpack, indeed, but the study of Caesarea can benefit from a trove of previous research. Kenneth Holum’s work, in particular, has been pivotal in forging fundamental interpretative frameworks, and, not least, in spearheading a host of research initiatives, from environmental studies to the analysis of the material record. Further, his approach to the site has touched upon fundamental issues of connectivity, be it exchange and communication, resilience, or identity over time. These questions now offer new paradigms for the understanding of harbor communities and both their inland and their maritime networks, at a time when this aspect of research is producing great dividends.<sup>10</sup> In this vein, the CCE 2020 edited volume here reviewed brings together 14 years of fieldwork right in the heart of the ancient city, offering detailed analyses of the archaeological record as well as of Caesarea’s built environment through the ages. Truth be told, the book’s genesis and realization were not simple: Holum’s untimely passing hampered the production of the volume he had envisioned. We owe it to his wife, Marsha L. Rozenblit, and a dedicated group of Holum’s former collaborators, that the enterprise was, however, brought to completion. As Rozenblit reports, only the chapter on the visualization of the church and the volume’s conclusions were never finished. Field notes and previous scholarship were painstakingly taken up by the authors as they sought to recreate Holum’s vision. What is more, the book was ostensibly intended as the first installment of a series that was to cover medieval Caesarea, the Islamic settlement, and the material culture, in sequence. We will probably have to wait for that. In the interim, the specialist of the ancient Near East and the enthusiasts at large will find much interest, as well as vital information, in this volume’s contents.

The first chapter (“Introduction: Combined Caesarea Excavations Inside the Old City”) describes the timeline of the excavations and positions Holum’s explorations in the context of the site’s topography and geomorphology. Much attention is also dedicated to the textual and epigraphic record of the city, with a view toward firmly grounding the excavation of the Temple Platform in the cultural setting of Herod’s operations at the site. The chapter also foregrounds the drivers that propelled this research and the combined offshore operations by the CCE initiative, an approach that positioned Caesarea at the center of the discourse of the Mediterranean during the Roman Imperial and Late Antique periods. Much interest is also devoted to the history of Caesarea’s exploration and how operations began in the 1960s under the direction of Avraham Negev, with the clearing of the debris stemming from the 1948 demolition of the Bosnian settlement and a Greek convent on the temple platform. More subtly, these early operations remind us that Ottoman and modern Caesarea still need to be brought into sharper focus. Chapter 2 zeroes in on the excavation of Area TP, that is, the Temple Platform, occupied by the conspicuous silhouette of a 5th-c.

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<sup>9</sup> Taxel and Roskin 2022.

<sup>10</sup> Arnaud and Keay 2020.

church. The church's inner and outer foundations were identified only in the 80s, and thus the archaeological exploration was viewed as a unique opportunity to shed light on the building and its Herodian predecessor. The chapter is in essence a field report, with detailed summaries of the field and study seasons that unfolded between 1989 and 2003. The dialectic of construction and destruction of the site, as well as the archaeological record, appear in all of their complexity. Chapter 3, "The Stratification of the Temple Platform," segues into a presentation of the field approach with the analytical discussion of the cultural layering of the site, from the Hellenistic epoch to the dismantling of the site by Negev in the 1960s. While the graphic apparatus aids well the discussion, the shoe-horning of the numismatic record into the end of the chapter strikes an odd note. A more systematic presentation of the coins, ideally in a dedicated appendix, would have better complemented the discourse of the chronology, other than illustrating local monetary trends. All the same, the next chapter (Chapter 4: "Herod's Temple: Excavated Evidence") by Audrey Shaffer and Kenneth G. Holum takes up the previous sections and offers a discussion of the material record of the excavations, from the tenuous traces of a pre-Herodian settlement to the heavy foundations of the 5th-c. church. The essay is essentially concerned with the encroachment and overlap of structures, thus building the plateau for the more finely grained analysis of the building programs that during the early Principate and Late Antiquity shaped the platform in fundamental ways. In that vein, Anna Iamim tackles the construction of the temple, grounding her analysis in the scanty remains of the foundations, while conjuring up the decision-making and engineering choices that underpinned this project. The granularity of the data lends itself well to illustrating the perspective of the builders, as they leveled the ground and bounded the stone in the most efficient fashion, at times at the expense of aesthetic consistency. Next, Chapter 6 by Edna Dalali-Amos discusses the architectural décor of the temple ("Reconstructing Herod's Temple: Kurkar Architectural Fragments of the Temple and Related Structures"). Kurkar, the local calcareous sandstone, takes center stage as its use in the built environment of Caesarea is typically assigned to the heyday of Herod's monuments. The catalog of finds is conspicuous (82 fragments), many of them unprovenanced and strewn across the site after Negev's demolition and heavy-handed clearing activities. Many architectural fragments were also repositioned as spolia in other buildings away from the platform, as attested, for instance, by the promontory's palace. All the same, the collection consists of elements of the Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian orders of various proportions; its presentation is far from inert, as it serves convincing reconstructions of the superstructure and its decorative apparatus. An appendix, equipped with drawings, offers a detailed description of each fragment.

Chapter 7, by Jennifer A. Stabler and Kenneth G. Holum analyses what appears to be a watershed in the "life" of the temple platform: the destruction of the pagan sanctuary and the construction of the church. The rub, of course, is when the former fell out of use, thereby paving the way for a new project and its religious realities. Here lies perhaps the most enticing section of the book, with the discussion of the platform's architectural transitions and phases of disuse. The analysis is meticulously presented, and the authors' case for the dynamics of the temple's demolition sometime around 400 CE are cogent. The whole suite of available evidence, not least fragments of entablature, column shafts, and stucco sheathing, is harnessed in the effort of calculating the modality of the building's spoliation. What also comes across vividly is the so-called intermediate occupation of the platform, that is, a century, more or less, of leveling, dumping and construction that



sought to obliterate the Temple phase. Whatever the intentions of the builders of this “inter-phase” were, they suddenly came to naught and, by 500 CE, a new, ambitious plan for an octagonal church was underway. Chapter 8, by Holum and Iamim follows closely the implementation of the church plan. The rigor of the excavations and the clarity of the narrative go to great lengths in piecing together a building that offered modest archaeological remains. The one hindrance, if any, is the architectural plan that is meant to illustrate the building phases (198); its gray scales confound the reader, but this is rather an issue that pertains to the whole visual apparatus of the book, and I shall reprise this aspect below. At any event, the recording of the excavation data and the analysis of the church’s monumental features are exemplary; foundations, fills, ambulatory, nave, side rooms, and the naos are pieced together again and coalesce into the vision of the builders. The analysis produces a convincing visualization of the narthex, bema, and ambo; the one question is perhaps the martyr tomb at the center of the nave and inner octagon. The archaeological record sheds only tenuous light onto the holiest part of the church complex, and questions about the insertion of this feature early on remain. At stake, of course, is the discussion of the agency behind the construction of the church, the liturgical apparatus, and the way the building was experienced, aspects that the volume only alludes to. Destruction during the 8th c. and the later Crusader occupation have greatly compromised our understanding of this sector of the building; nevertheless, the authors make a compelling case for the church being originally intended as martyrium. The religious climate that brought to bear the design of the building and its liturgy, of course, would be central in a discussion that Holum and Iamim deliberately shun. That Caesarea had no shortage of martyrs is a matter of record; Eusebius, among others, extolled the extraordinary determination of the local Christian community at the time of the great persecutions.<sup>11</sup> So much for the historical and religious discourses of the Temple Platform; the narrative remains strictly confined to the archaeological record, yet opening occasional vistas onto the stimuli and drivers that resonate in the site’s monuments. The destruction of the octagonal church is also briefly alluded to, with the discussion of damage in the Islamic era, as attested, for instance, by the demolition of the ambo. What parts of the church were particularly targeted in the process remains to be determined. As an appendix to this section, Chapter 9 offers the catalog of fragments of superstructure that were recovered by the excavation and previously sidelined by Negev. The list is very useful and sensibly presented. Rather than a simple catalog of architectural fragments, it discusses trends and styles of capitals, creating groups and sequences and thus capturing the transformation of the building from its original phase into the 6th c., when a raised bema was added.

Chapter 10 by Iamim bookends the presentation of the Platform’s archaeology. The author angles the analysis toward the processes behind the site’s relentless transformation. She emphasizes the decision-making and strategies adopted by the builders of the Temple Platform, highlighting the adjustments that led from the construction of the Roman sanctuary to the intermediate complex and, finally, the octagonal church. What comes across is the degree of versatility and the great dexterity that guided these processes. Not least, the profound knowledge of kurkar, its construction properties and limitations, make it plain that the conceptual and material developments of the site were local. The same chapter, “A Final Point,” braids together all the evidence and addresses, albeit in succinct terms, the formal language of the church, as well as the influence it may have exerted on the

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<sup>11</sup> Eusebius, *Martyrs of Palestine* (Bardy 1967).

builders of the Dome of the Rock of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. The section is the only outlier in the book, alluding, as it does, to the Church of Caesarea becoming an architectural blueprint, all the while eschewing the discourse of the formal tradition that spawned the octagonal plan and significance. At this juncture, the book veers toward the analysis of the archeological record surrounding the Temple Platform, highlighting Area I, that is, the Inner Harbor. Arnon and Holum (Chapter 11) offer a lucid presentation of the built environment that framed and connected the Temple platform to the harbor. As with the previous section, the analysis is predicated on the textual record and the integration of previous fieldwork at the site. The corollary of harbor, quays, and staircases offers a coherent framework for the building projects that unfolded on the Temple Platform. As Holum argues, “they formed an architectural and conceptual unity from the time of Herod’s original design to the end of antiquity” (323). That this project culminated with the construction of the Church, “promoted no doubt by Caesarea’s bishop” under the auspices of the Emperor Anastasius, is the main argument, not entertaining, however, the possibility that this is the Church of Procopius mentioned in the chronicle of John Malalas.<sup>12</sup> Further, the chapter addresses the presence of shops and their accessibility during the 6th and 7th c. CE, thus tackling a key phase in the life of the city and harbor. The addendum of the catalog of pottery by Jodi Magness provides further material evidence for the discussion of accessibility to the Church on the Temple Platform. Lastly, Chapter 12, by Holum, is where the datasets of the South Flank of the Temple Platform are highlighted. Other than providing further information about ancient access to the Temple Platform, the chapter discusses a complex of shops and commercial outlets, in use from the 2nd c. CE and presumably thriving between the 5th and the 7th c. Further, Areas Z2 and TPS add information about movement and experiencing the site, foregrounding a staircase and a small bath, respectively. What is more, the ceramics from Area TP are discussed by Peter Gendelman in an appendix, here filed under “Chapter 13.” Illustrations and physical descriptions of the ceramic repertoire are rigorous, and what comes across is the remarkable *longue durée* of the settlement, as well as the diversity of the finds and imports. More fundamentally, the finds dovetail with the main cultural phases that shaped the development of the Temple Platform, and Caesarea’s settlement.

In conclusion, the volume is an impressive testament to Holum’s intellectual stature and scholarly legacy, as Jodi Magness poignantly remarks in Chapter 14. While some readers may lament the limited engagement with the historical framework, especially as regards the establishment of the Church and Caesarea’s religious climate, it is apparent that the authors aimed at presenting rigorous datasets in “raw” form, leaving the interpretation and discussion to future pursuits. Overall, the volume is laden with information, offers exemplary attention to details, and achieves its main goal: visualizing the Temple Platform and its building programs. As mentioned previously, the only limit of the book is the rather dull visual apparatus. Granted, there is no shortage of plans and sections, with most accurately executed by AutoCAD. However, a touch of color would have greatly aided the reader in unraveling complicated overlaps of building phases, fills, and trenches. In short, most images’ gray scales are far from ideal. But this minor hindrance should not bar the scholar of the ancient eastern Mediterranean from immersing themselves in the realities of this remarkable site and its material transformations.

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<sup>12</sup> Mal. *Chron.* 382.14.

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*Journal of Roman Archaeology* 36 (2023), 565–570  
doi:10.1017/S1047759423000454

## Structures and sequences: physical remains from the Beirut souks

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THORPE, R. 2019. *The Insula of the House of the Fountains, Beirut*. Berytus Archaeological Studies 57–58 (2017–2018); *Archaeology of the Beirut Souks* 3, AUB and ACRE Excavations in Beirut 1994–1996. Beirut: American University of Beirut. Pp. 367, figs 264. ISSN 0067-6105.

The Beirut Souks project undoubtedly represents an immense achievement, not only in archaeological terms, but perhaps more importantly as a coming together in common cause of disparate interests: governmental, curatorial, commercial, and academic,<sup>1</sup> in the

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Culture of the Lebanese Republic, Lebanese Department of Antiquities, Solidere - The Lebanese Company for the Development and Reconstruction of Beirut Central District,