

Aelia Capitolina: The Roman Colony and Its Periphery

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After the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 CE, the Tenth Legion Fretensis stayed in Jerusalem. Most researchers, relying on Josephus (*War* 6, 353; 7, 1–3. 5) and on archaeological finds agree, that the camp was located on the southwestern hill – the site of the Upper City of Herodian Jerusalem. This site was probably chosen because of the topographical advantages and the water supply, qualities, which assured good sanitation and health to the soldiers and made it a well-fitting site to the needs of the army.²

The camp was surrounded by an enclosure wall, in whose western part the remains of the First Wall from the Second Temple period and the three Herodian towers, Phasael, Hippicus and Marriame, as Josephus implied, were probably incorporated.

Inside the camp there were, likely, different structures, including the headquarters and barracks. Epigraphic finds indicate the existence of stables,³ and a bakery.⁴ The archaeological remains of structures within the camp are exceptionally few, including segments of walls, a water reservoir, water pipes, potsherds, and a comparatively large amount of broken tiles, stamped with the stamp of the Tenth Legion. Outside the camp, on the eastern slopes of the camp's hill, artifacts originating from the camp's dump were recently discovered. They include potsherds of vessels produced in the kilns of the legion in Binyanei ha'Ummah (see below), and three bread stamps with inscribed names of the centurion and the soldier-baker.⁵ Remains of a long

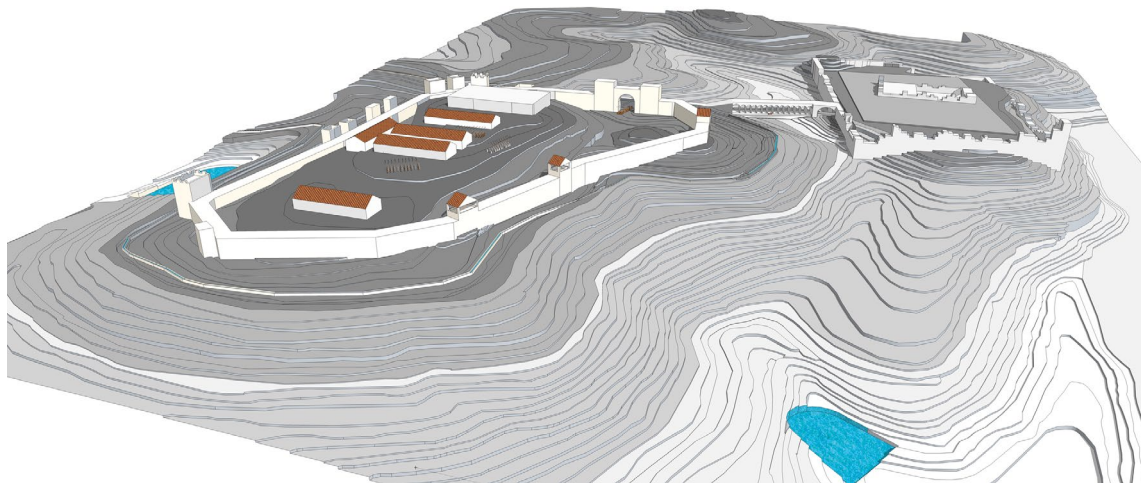


Fig. 1: The author's proposed reconstruction of the military camp of the Tenth Roman Legion, the ruined Temple Mount and the narrow bridge connecting them in the early 2nd century CE. The reconstruction of the bridge is based on the findings of excavations. The reconstruction of the army camp and the Temple Mount are suggested for illustrative purposes.

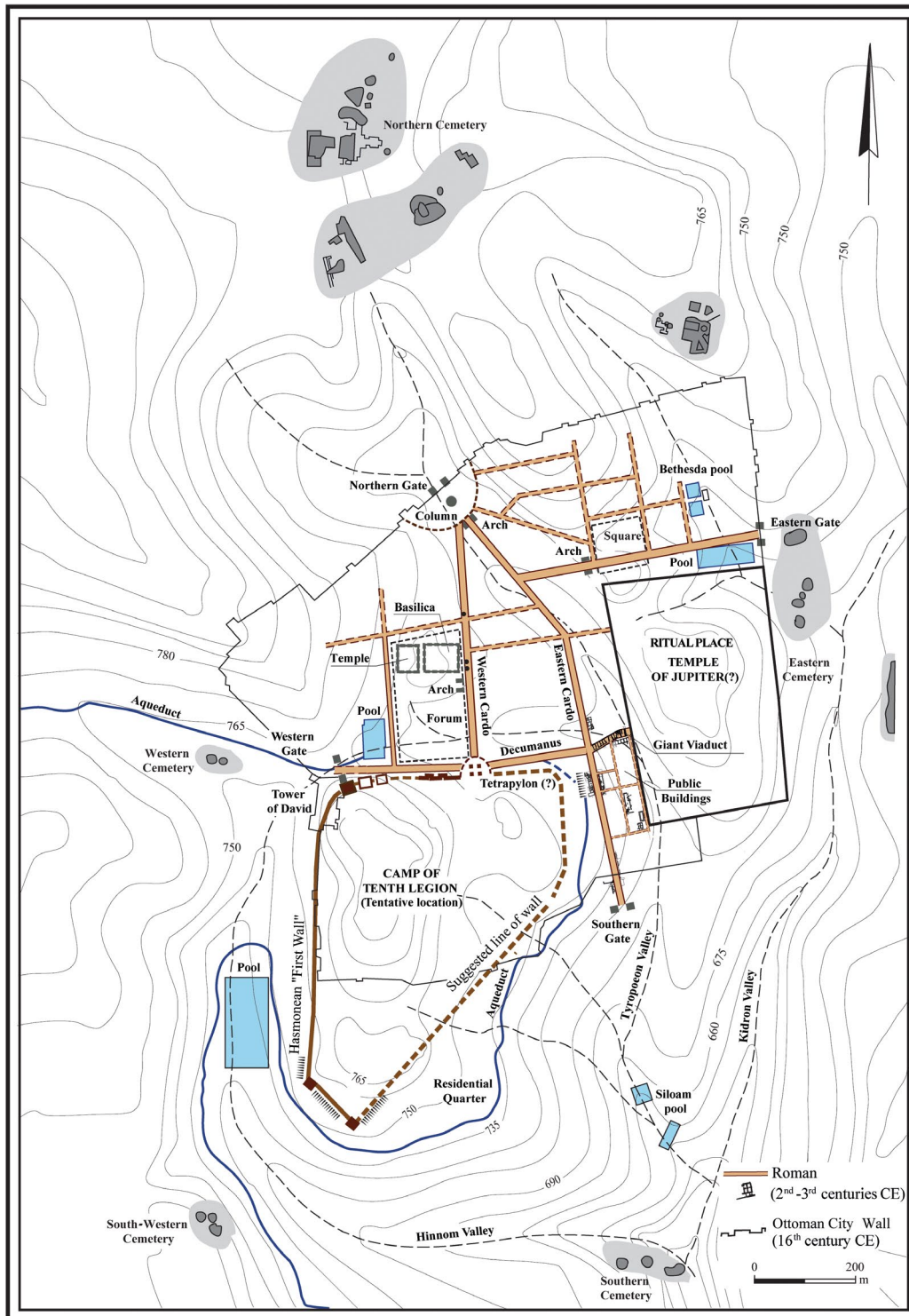


Fig. 2: The legion's camp and the city of Aelia Capitolina in the 2nd and 3rd century CE. Author's proposal.

bridge that possibly connected the camp with the Temple Mount were revealed as well (fig. 1).⁶

Around 130 CE, Hadrian built a new city on the ruins of Jerusalem, and granted it the status of a colony. Aelia Capitolina was built north and east of the camp's hill, and a prominent barrier (supposedly, a wall) was maintained between the camp and the city (fig. 2). The city's main streets were leading to the northern gate of the camp. This meeting place of the camp and the city, in front of the camp's northern gate, became, possibly, the starting point of the roads that led to and from the city in all directions.

Aelia Capitolina was a medium-sized, unwallled Roman colony, with free-standing city gates marking its limits. The Roman city was characterized by colonnaded streets, public squares and triumphal arches. Pagan temples and sanctuaries, as well as civilian public buildings and bathhouses adorned the cityscape. The water supply of Aelia Capitolina was based on pools and aqueducts of the Second Temple period that continued to be used in one form or another during the Roman period.⁷

Cemeteries were located outside the city. The common burial type was a cist tomb that was dug in the ground and lined with stone courses, or hewn in the bedrock below the surface. In addition, cremation burials, and family burial caves, with several burial troughs are known too. The cremations are usually attributed to the military, but the finds show that they were practiced also among civilians.⁸

The historical sources are clear about the decline of the periphery of Jerusalem in the wake of the Jewish revolts: "About the same time [following the fall of Jerusalem at 70 CE] Caesar sent instructions to the procurator, to dispose of all Jewish land. For he founded there no city of his own while keeping their territory, but only to eight hundred veterans did he assign a place" (Josephus, *War* 7, 216 f.). Following the Bar Kochba War Cassius Dio wrote: "Fifty of their most important outposts and nine hundred and eighty-five of their most famous villages were razed to the ground [...] Thus nearly the whole of Judaea was made desolate [...]" (Cass. Dio 69, 14, 1 f.).

The Archaeological Remains⁹

Six imperial roads led to and from Aelia Capitolina in the Roman period: north, to Neapolis (Schechem), east to Jericho, south to Hebron, southwest to Eleutheropolis (Beit Guvrin), west to Diospolis (Lod) via Emmaus and northwest to Diospolis (Lod) via Beth Horon (fig. 3) – for the Romans considered the well-organized road network as a basic element of proper administration and rule.¹⁰ The few sites that are known to date in the periphery of the city are naturally located along these routes.

The Sites

Structures and building inscriptions of military units attest to the presence of soldiers along the main roads, apparently in forts and fortresses. One such fortress of the early 4th century, in Giv'at Sha'ul,¹¹ (see fig. 3) was overlooking the road ca. three Roman miles west of Aelia Capitolina. It consisted of a square courtyard surrounded with rooms, and a yet older tower that was integrated in the corner. A building inscription of the Tenth Legion was found in Abu Ghosh. It bears a Latin inscription that reads "A vexillation of the Tenth Legion Fretensis (has built this)".¹² It is reasonable to assume that the military outposts were intended to protect the security of travelers along the roads (military units, convoys of merchants), and to maintain the infrastructure of the roads in a fluent manner.

A unique military site along the western road is the workshop of the Tenth Roman Legion, whose remains were discovered in the area of Binyanei Ha'uma, two Roman miles west of Aelia Capitolina (see fig. 3).¹³ The excavations exposed the kilns, the settling pools and the installations associated with the manufacture of the pottery vessels and building materials: bricks, rooftiles and ceramic pipes. Next to it, the remains of a village of the potters were unearthed. It is assumed that a unit of the Tenth Legion was stationed regularly at the site. The location of the site at a high point along the road, and the skill of pottery production that characterized the local population for centuries, probably affected the Roman decision to preserve the workshop and its workers after the destruction of Jerusalem. Based upon the finds, Levi and Beeri proposed that Jewish potters continued to manufacture pottery for the Roman army in the first years after the conquest of the city.¹⁴

In the village of Colonia near Tel Motza, about four miles west of the city, segments of partially preserved buildings, water pipes and cist tombs from the Roman period (late 1st/early 2nd to the 3rd/4th centuries CE) were recently unearthed.¹⁵

On the slopes of the tell, remains of structures decorated with wall paintings and mosaic floors were discovered,¹⁶ and remains of a bath from the Roman period have been documented.¹⁷ Rooms belonging to a late Roman – early Byzantine period building were also exposed.¹⁸ The Arab name of the village, Colonia, is presumed by many to preserve its Roman origins. Some identify it with the lands granted by the emperor to 800 veterans, as implied by Josephus.

Remains of two Roman villas were partly exposed one opposite the other on the northern and southern banks of the Refa'im Valley, approximately four Roman miles from the city along the Jerusalem – Bet Guvrin (Eleutheropolis) road (see fig. 3). The southern villa is located on the slope of the valley, near the spring of Ein Ya'el.¹⁹ The building consists of a residential core building, and two bathhouses on lower terraces. The remains include a triclinium preceded by a vestibule. The walls of the hall, which survived to a height of ca. 1 m, were decorated with a colorful fresco with human figures, flowers and geometric decorations. The floor was made of colored mosaic. In

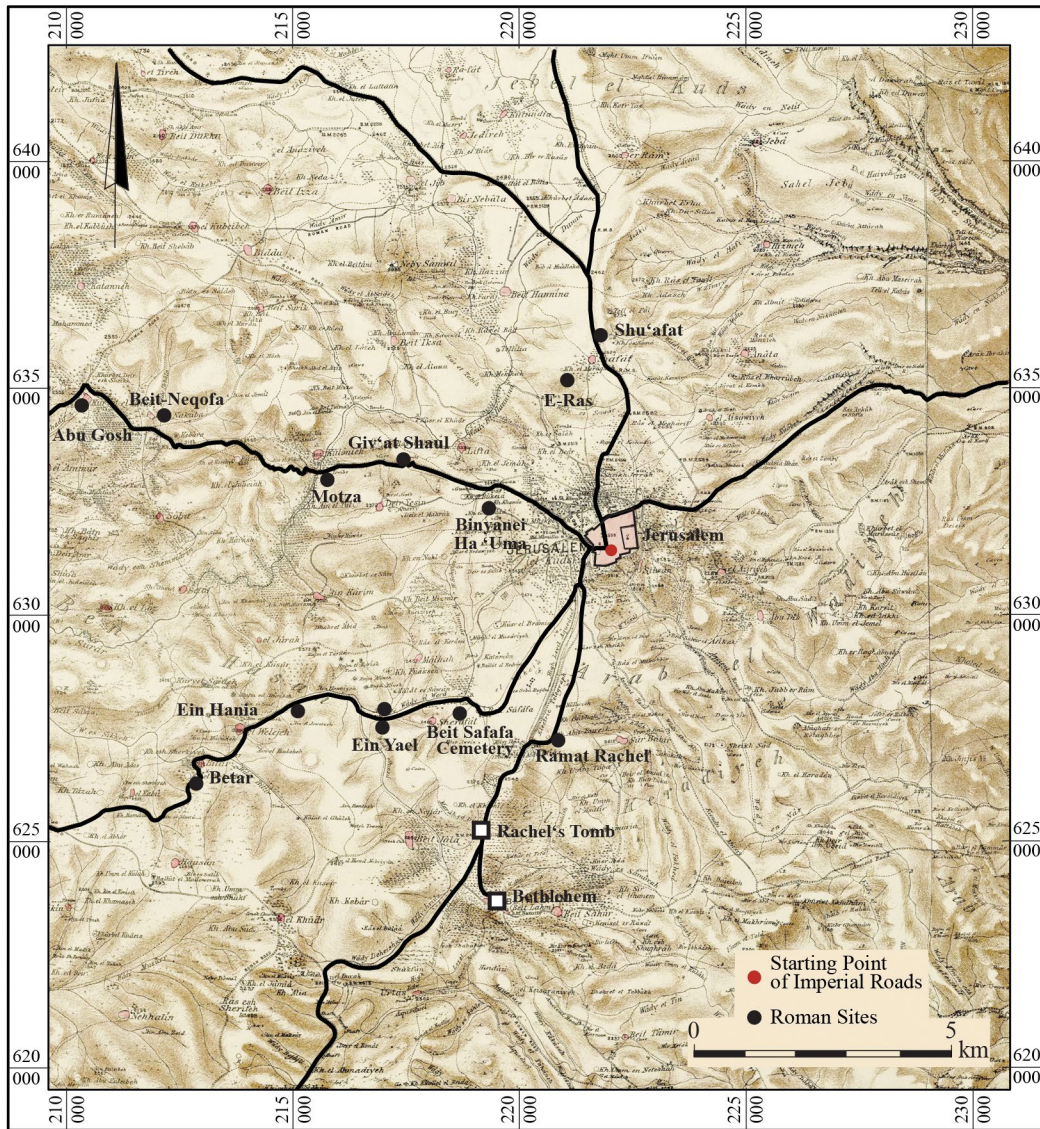


Fig. 3: Map of the Roman imperial roads leading to Jerusalem, along which are sites from the Roman period: north to Neapolis (Schechem), east to Jericho, south to Hebron, southwest to Eleutheropolis (Beit Guvrin), west to Diospolis (Lod) via Emmaus and northwest to Diospolis (Lod) via Beth Horon. The map is based on the Ordnance Survey of Western Palestine (1880), Sheet 17.

the center of the triclinium is a marble slab, which formed the base of a water basin or a fountain, surrounded by a mosaic carpet decorated with mythological figures, fish and birds. Lead pipes below the floor indicate that the fountain received water from the nearby spring. The vestibule floor was decorated with four medallions with figures

representing the four seasons. An illegible Greek inscription was incorporated into the floor. Tiles and bricks in the building and in the bathhouses were impressed with the stamp of the Tenth Legion Fretensis.

Another villa was uncovered on the northern bank of the river, ca. 400 m north of Ein Ya'el.²⁰ A mosaic floor was preserved in a room that probably served as the entrance room to the villa. The floor was decorated with two colorful mosaic panels. The main panel depicted a variety of foods – a couple of artichokes (or pine-cones), a giant mussel and a fish – representing *xenia*, gastronomical gifts to guests, serving as appetizers, the first part of the Roman dinner.

Both villas, based on the style of the mosaic floors and the remains of their wall paintings, were dated to the 3rd century. It is possible that the patron of the villas was a Roman soldier or veteran who received a plot of land after his release from the army. The mosaics, and the integration of a Greek inscription, exhibit a synthesis of eastern and western characteristics, typical of the Roman east during that period.

Remains of another Roman villa, dated to the 2nd or 3rd century CE, were unearthed at Ramat Rachel, about five Roman miles south of the city along the Aelia Capitolina – Hebron road (see fig. 3). The residential unit consisted of a peristyle courtyard with rooms around it. Some 30 m east of the building, remains of a bathhouse with mosaic floors, a hypocaust, and water pools were discovered. Ceramic tiles and pipes with the stamp of the Tenth Legion Fretensis were discovered in the bathhouse. Aharoni suggested that the remains indicated a military presence at the site and dated them to the second half of the 3rd century CE. Lipschits et al. dated the remains to the 2nd century and suggested they belonged to a rural Roman villa.²¹ However, 3rd to 4th century glass bottles found inside some of the shaft tombs in the settlement's cemetery (see below) indicate that the site was still inhabited at that time.

A rare find from this site is a small lead *bullā* (11 mm diam.) inscribed with the name *Imperator Hadrianus Augustus*.²² The bulla probably signed a letter sent by Hadrian to a person of high rank in the army or in the Roman administration, who was either the owner of the private estate or someone staying in the military unit stationed at Ramat Rachel.

In Beit Safafa, in the vicinity of the rural villas in Naḥal Refa'im (see fig. 3), and near the villa in Ramat Rachel, cemeteries with dozens of shaft tombs were exposed.²³ These cemeteries may have been local cemeteries for the population in the periphery of Aelia Capitolina.

The spring of 'Ein el-Hanniya is located on the southern bank of Naḥal Refa'im, along the Roman Jerusalem – Eleutheropolis road, ca. one Roman mile west of 'Ein Ya'el (see fig. 3). Near the spring, the remains of a structure resembling a nymphaeum exist. The structure consisted of a semicircular niche with pilasters on both sides, which had previously been topped with Corinthian capitals. In the center of the apse there is a small decorated niche. It may have been intended for placing a statue. The structure is usually identified as a public fountain, probably of the Roman period.

If a statue of one of the gods was placed in the niche, the site may also have served as a place of worship.²⁴

The remains of two Jewish settlements that existed until the Bar Kochba Revolt are partly known in the surroundings of Jerusalem: in Sh‘uafat, to the north of Jerusalem, and in Khirbet el-Yahud (Betar), to the southwest (see fig. 3).

The first is a unique, apparently planned urban Jewish settlement, which was established north of Jerusalem immediately after 70 CE, and abandoned on the eve of the Bar Kochba Revolt (before 132 CE).²⁵ The site is located along the Jerusalem – Neapolis road, between the third and the fourth mile. A long narrow strip (length: 506 m; width: 8 m) was excavated. The remains included ritual baths, stone vessels and pottery vessels characteristic of the Jewish population during the Second Temple period. The settlement was built according to a strict Roman design, and 15 structures (insulae) of different sizes (over 10 m wide) were discovered, separated by narrow streets that extended from west to east. The site was abandoned in an organized manner, manifested by the deliberate sealing of the doors of the buildings and the burial of coin caches, which indicate a hurried departure and the hope of returning. The latest well dated coin found at the site is a small Hadrianic coin minted in Alexandria in 129/30 CE. The conclusion of the excavators is that the site was abandoned before the Bar Kochba Revolt, and did not participate in it. They offer to identify it as an urban Jewish settlement established by the Roman authorities, perhaps for a Jewish aristocracy from Jerusalem who did not participate in the Great Revolt. It is possible, however, that a military unit of the Tenth Roman Legion stayed in the site, as coins with secondary impressions of the Tenth Legion and pottery vessels produced in the kilns of the legion attest to the presence of soldiers at the site. The economy of the site was presumably based on supplying food to Roman soldiers and providing road services.

The site of Khirbet el-Yahud is located on a mountain spur surrounded by Naḥal Refa’im on three sides, about eight Roman miles southwest of Aelia Capitolina along the road to Eleutheropolis (see fig. 3). It is identified as Betar, the last stronghold of Bar Kochba.²⁶ Most of the remains belong to the 2nd century CE – Bar Kochba period including a wall along the site’s outer circumference that was probably built hastily while the Romans were besieging the site. Pottery recovered near the wall shows that the site was inhabited from the end of the Second Temple period until the Bar Kochba Revolt.²⁷ It was subsequently abandoned and there is no evidence that it was ever reoccupied. Remains of the Roman offensive discovered around the site included a circumvallation siege wall preserved to the north and west and partly to the east, possibly cutting off the site from the spring that provided it with water. Beside the spring, a Latin inscription in the rock mentions two legions, “legionis V Mac[edonicae] et XI Cl[audiae]”. To the south of the site, two military camps were built: A west camp, A (450 × 200 m) and an east one, B (200 × 100 m). At a distance varying from c. 1.5 to 4 km south and east of camps A and B, four other hill-top camps (C, D, E, F) were identified during the archaeological survey.²⁸

Summary

Following the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 CE, a new era began in the city's history. The Herodian, Jewish city was destroyed, and a military camp of the Tenth Roman Legion established on part of the ruins. In around 130 CE, the Roman emperor Hadrian founded a new city next to the military camp. He honored the city with the status of a colony and named it Aelia Capitolina. The new Roman city was smaller in size and had a different plan from the ruined Herodian city. It followed the traditional Roman orthogonal design. The inhabitants of Aelia Capitolina were soldiers and veterans of the Tenth Legion, and their families, citizens and merchants, followers of the army who accompanied the soldiers. Jews were not allowed to enter the city. Latin presided as the city's official language, but Greek continued to be commonly spoken. The city's religious life revolved around Greco-Roman cults and practices. The daily life and burial practices of the inhabitants of Aelia Capitolina were completely different from those of their Jewish predecessors during the Second Temple period, as is well reflected in the archaeological record.

After 70 CE, Jewish owned lands were expropriated, and the land around Jerusalem was handed probably to the disposition of the Tenth Legion, and redistributed by the Roman authorities. Archaeological data from the countryside surrounding Jerusalem for this period is limited, though evident, and was presented in short above. Despite the limited scope of remains, the romanization of the city and its periphery after 70 CE shows clearly.

The findings indicate that the city's economy could not, apparently, rely on the supply of goods from its periphery, as the number of villas and farms was too small to support the population of the city. It can be assumed that the city continued to maintain ancient trade relations, relied on the economic strength of the soldiers (i.e. on the soldiers' salaries), and enjoyed imperial support by way of allocating labor and tax funds for the development of the city.

Notes

¹ This short summary is based on a lecture given in a session devoted to cities and their periphery in Roman Palestine and Arabia. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Achim Lichtenberger, Oren Tal and Zeev Weiss for inviting me to participate in this important session. The range of topics discussed, in the context of the various cities, highlighted the diversity of the cities under discussion, and emphasized the various aspects of Roman culture in the province of Judaea-Palestine, as expressed in the archaeological record.

² Several studies of the city were published in the past. For the location of the military camp on the southwestern hill see, inter alia, Geva 1984; Tsafirir 1999, 124–135. For other suggestions see Mazar 2011, 1–8; Stiebel 1995; Bear 1993.

³ CIIP I, 2, 721.

⁴ CIIP I, 2, 755. 757. 761.

⁵ Weksler-Bdolah 2014; Di Segni – Weksler-Bdolah 2012.

⁶ Onn – Weksler-Bdolah 2017.

⁷ For a summary of the historical sources referring the city see Isaac 2010, and references there. For a summary of the archaeological remains of Aelia Capitolina see Geva 1993; Tsafirir 1999; Weksler-Bdolah 2017, inter alia.

⁸ See Avni 2017; Kloner 2002, inter alia.

⁹ For summaries of the economic and agricultural periphery/hinterland of Jerusalem during the Roman and Byzantine period (70–636 CE), see Kloner – Klein – Zissu 2017, inter alia.

¹⁰ For descriptions of the imperial roads around Aelia Capitolina, see Ben David 2013; Isaac 1988; Roll 1983; Roll 1994, inter alia.

¹¹ Kh. al Atrash (Giv'at Sha'ul), see Tzaferis 1974; Fischer – Isaac – Roll 1996, 124 f.

¹² CIIP I, 2, 722.

¹³ Arubas – Goldfus 1995; Arubas – Goldfus 2008; Levi – Be'eri 2011, inter alia.

¹⁴ Levi – Be'eri 2011.

¹⁵ For recent excavations see Mizrahi 2015. Salvage excavations are conducted at the site from 2017 to present (2019). I thank Annette Landes-Nagar, Irina Zilberbod, Rachel Bar-Nathan, Jacob Vardi and Hamudi Khalaily, the directors of the excavations on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority for the information. See also Fischer – Isaac – Roll 1996, 225–227.

¹⁶ Eisenberg 1975.

¹⁷ Barag 1967, 267 note 105.

¹⁸ Greenhut – De Groot 2009, 5 f.; Kisilevitz et al. 2014.

¹⁹ Edelstein 1990; Roussin 1995; Talgam 2014, 46–48.

²⁰ Weksler-Bdolah 2007; Weksler-Bdolah 2016; Talgam 2014, 48 f., inter alia.

²¹ Aharoni 1964, 121; Lipschits et al. 2017, 130–138, and references there.

²² CIIP I, 2, 753; Lipschits et al. 2017, 131 f.

²³ For the cemeteries in Beit Safafa, see Zissu – Moyal 1998; Landes-Nagar 2015; for the cemetery in Ramat Rachel, see Ras 2017.

²⁴ Baruch – Zilberbod 2015, and references there.

²⁵ Bar-Nathan – Bijovsky 2018, inter alia.

²⁶ The site has been surveyed and investigated since the 19th century, see Tsafirir – Di Segni – Green 1994, 86 f. A trial excavation was conducted at the site, see Ussishkin 1993; Ussishkin 2008, and references there.

²⁷ Singer 1993.

²⁸ For the camps see Kochavi 1972, 24; Kennedy – Riley 1990, 100–104. For the inscription see: CIIP 4, 3198. The inscription was originally seen and published by Clermont-Ganneau in 1894.

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