

## Excavations at Tel Beth-Shemesh -- 2015 and Other Musings -- 3

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The northern Galilee area was the object of our third weekend trip. We headed to Caesarea Maritima, Banias, and Abel-beth-maacah. The weather was fantastic—temperatures were probably never above 85 and the breezes blew further to cool us. Overall the weather this year has been quite incredible. Almost every morning it is necessary to put on a wrap of some kind and we often needed to do so in the evenings as well.

We stopped first at Caesarea Maritima. Herod the Great developed the site almost from scratch. It became a major port city on the eastern Mediterranean coast and was the location of one of Herod's palaces. As the name implies, it honored Caesar (in this case Augustus, whose alternative name was Sebastos, which was also one of the names by which the harbor complex was known). The construction of the harbor was an engineering feat commensurate with Herod's proclivities for grandiose plans. The harbor remained a major port through Crusader times and Crusader remains continue to dominate parts of the town. Among the engineering aspects was the use of poured concrete that would harden in situ beneath the water (see Hohlfeder, *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 1: 800).

After Herod's death, the Romans made Caesarea the provincial capital of Judea. It became the official residence of the procurators among whom was Pontius Pilate who left an inscription at the site dedicated to Tiberias Caesar. The inscription was found in secondary use—that is, it was not in its original location where Pilate would have had it placed. Archaeologists found the inscription in the later theatre where it was used to repair the steps of the theatre.

Herod had a number of palaces scattered around the country—among them were palaces in



Jerusalem, Herodion, Masada, Machaerus, Samaria/Sebaste, and Caesarea Maritima. Excavations have uncovered the remains of the palace at Caesarea, which consisted of a wonderful structure that projected into the sea. The building had a swimming pool, which was filled with the Mediterranean water and hence was flushed as the tides and waves would ebb and flow.

The first photo (left) shows the projection into the sea from the south. Part of the palace was in the ocean and the other part was

anchored onto the land as you might note from the columns to the right in the picture. The second photo (right) shows the rectangular swimming pool, which was within the palace complex. Various rooms surrounded the pool. The palace area became eventually part of the apostle Paul's experiences. When Paul returned to Jerusalem from his third journey, some Jews stirred up a riot accusing Paul of bringing Gentiles into the Temple (Acts 23:1-24). When a plot to kill Paul was revealed, the Roman authorities spirited



Paul away to Caesarea where several hearings were eventually conducted before Felix, Festus and Agrippa (Acts 23:31-26:32). The text explicitly states that Paul was kept in guard in the praetorium, which is the governor's quarters—what part of the quarters is not known. This is not to imply that Paul was living in luxury, but probably, since he was a Roman, his imprisonment at this point was not the typical oppressive, rat-infested, damp environment that many people often assume. Eventually, the hearing before Agrippa and Bernice took place (Acts 25:23) and many infer that the audience hall is the one shown in the center of the photo where the circle is located (above right; this hall is on the land-based part of the palace).



After spending 4 ½ hours at the site, we ventured further north to our overnight stay near the spring of Harod—the location where Gideon thinned his troops to fight against the Midianites (Judges 7:1).

On Saturday morning we headed further north, around the Sea of Galilee to the site of Caesarea Philippi. The original name of the site was connected with the pagan worship of Pan, the goat god of the nature. The name of the site was corrupted from ancient Panion (Polybius 16.18.2) to Paneas (Pliny, Natural History 5.74) to Baniyas. Herod's son, Philip, who had become tetrarch renamed the town *Kaisereia* to honor Caesar Augustus (Josephus, *Ant* 18.2.1, 28; *Wars* 2.9.1, 168). The term Caesarea Philippi is the better known term and the attachment of "Philippi" is partly to differentiate the site from the Caesarea on the coast (often referred to as Caesarea Maritima).

Agrippa II (ca. 54 A.D.) enlarged the town of Caesarea Philippi and eventually renamed it Neronias to honor Nero (*Ant* 20.9.4, 211; *Wars* 3.10.7, 514); of course the name did not stick. Excavations have uncovered remains of Agrippa's impressive palace. There were two sets of



semi-circular towers that guarded entrances into the palace. Some of the passages remain (see photos above left and right). The Agrippa who built this palace is the same one before whom Paul had his hearing in Acts 26 when Agrippa and Bernice visited in Caesarea Maritima



(described briefly above). The third photo (left) shows an opening immediately to the left of the apsidal tower foundation. The debris in front of the tower remains in place, hence the opening is significantly below the current debris level.

Before returning to Jerusalem for the day, we travelled to the extreme north of Israel, bordering Lebanon. The ancient tell of Abel-beth-maacah stands sentinel over the northern end of the Jordan Valley (photo below; the brown flat hill with the terrace to



its right is the site overlooking the northern end of the Jordan Valley; photo is taken toward the south). It is an impressive two-tiered site and is currently under excavation by Nava Panitz-Cohen of Hebrew University and Robert Mullins of Azusa Pacific University.



After returning to our quarters for the night, our excavation resumed for its third week. One of the goals had been to section the olive press. Three photos show part of the work. One shows the stones of the structure exposed before we remove them (photo above left). The second shows the press from the top (photo above right). The third shows the press directly from the north (photo left). Our goal is eventually to remove the two walls that extend out immediately to the left and right of the press, remove the stones from the wall of the press and see the whole thing as if it had

been sliced through with a knife.

We had hoped to reach the mudbrick destruction debris of the palace of Level 9. This debris is appears in the last photo above as the intense dark brown, black and reddish color in the lower right of the photo. There is a pit that is filled with layers of debris and ash to the left in the photo. Before we reach the Late Bronze Age palace of Level 9, we need to remove all that debris. Regretfully, it looks like we may not make it this year.

Several interesting and important finds came to light, however. One is the crushed ruins of a cooking oven, usually called a tabun (photo right). Tabuns are usually made of a thick layer of clay, which has broken pottery sherds coating





its exterior. The fire is kindled inside the opening at the top and the cooking jars and other implements are placed above the coals. The second slide (left) shows the remains of an almost intact tabun that the excavations at Beth-Shemesh found in 2003. (I was not at the dig that year. I am indebted to my excavating colleague, Shawn Bubel of the University of Lethbridge for this photo and who supervised the tabun's excavation.)

Some small finds included a bronze arrowhead (photo below left) and a broken "cup-and-saucer" vessel (photo below right), which is usually thought to be used for some kind of ritual, although no one knows exactly for what. The vessel consists of a cup formed within the interior of a larger bowl (i.e., the saucer). This one had a small hole at the base through which liquid could pass between the interior chamber to the exterior bowl.



Another find was a horse head with the bridle represented (photo below left). This artifact was broken off its base. It may have been part of a hollow model horse in which liquid would have been placed. Alternatively, it may have been part of a more elaborate vessel called a kernos.



were placed and which could serve as pouring spouts (photo below right; from the Eretz Israel Museum).

The pouring spouts might include attached vessels, attached ceramic pomegranates, bull heads, or horse heads, etc.

