

LIFESTYLE ENGINEERING DURING THE FIRST CENTURIES OF THE COMMON ERA: A STUDY OF THE CAPITAL CITIES OF THE LEVANT

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study examines lifestyle engineering in the major cities of the Levant during the first centuries of the Common Era, focusing on how the construction and renovation of these capitals – Tiberias, Caesarea Philippi, and Jerusalem – influenced the worldview of their inhabitants and contributed to the spread of Christianity.

Methods: Historical and archaeological analysis methods were employed, along with a review of existing literature on urban planning in Greece and Rome, to understand Greco-Roman influences on the cities of Palestine during the New Testament period.

Results: The study revealed that construction activities in the Levantine capitals were deliberate strategies by rulers to demonstrate power and wealth, and that these urban developments not only improved the quality of life but also shaped the cultural and religious beliefs of the citizens. The influence of Roman culture in constructions such as theaters and temples contributed to the "social engineering" that facilitated the spread of Christianity.

Conclusions: Urban transformations in the Levantine cities, promoted by the rulers, played a significant role in creating environments that allowed for the spread of Christianity. The research suggests that these cities, with their structures and architectural designs, can still be used today to influence the worldview of populations.

Keywords: Lifestyle. Social engineering. New Testament. Jesus. Levant. Cities. Tiberias. Caesarea Philippi. Jerusalem.

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ENGENHARIA SOCIAL DE ESTILO DE VIDA DURANTE OS PRIMEIROS SÉCULOS DA ERA COMUM: UM ESTUDO DAS CAPITAIS DO LEVANTE

RESUMO

Objetivo: Este estudo examina a engenharia de estilo de vida nas principais cidades do Levante durante os primeiros séculos da Era Comum, com foco em como as construções e renovações dessas capitais – Tiberíades, Cesareia de Filipe e Jerusalém – influenciaram a visão de mundo dos seus habitantes e contribuíram para a disseminação do cristianismo.

Métodos: Foram utilizados métodos de análise histórica e arqueológica, juntamente com uma revisão da literatura existente sobre planejamento urbano na Grécia e em Roma, para entender as influências greco-romanas nas cidades da Palestina no período do Novo Testamento.

Resultados: O estudo revelou que as atividades de construção nas capitais do Levante eram estratégias deliberadas dos governantes para demonstrar poder e riqueza, e que essas obras urbanas não apenas elevaram a qualidade de vida, mas também moldaram as crenças culturais e religiosas dos cidadãos. A influência da cultura romana nas construções, como teatros e templos, contribuiu para a "engenharia social" que facilitou a disseminação do cristianismo.

Conclusões: As transformações urbanas nas cidades do Levante, promovidas pelos governantes, desempenharam um papel significativo na criação de ambientes que permitiram a propagação do cristianismo. A pesquisa sugere que essas cidades, com suas estruturas e design arquitetônico, podem ainda hoje ser usadas para influenciar a visão de mundo das populações.

Palavras-chave: Estilo de vida. Engenharia social. Novo Testamento. Jesus. Levante. Cidades. Tiberíades. Cesaréia de Filipe. Jerusalém.

INTRODUCTION

City planning was given much importance in the Mediterranean basin in antiquity. Urban design can influence the life, health, comfort, security, habits, and culture of city dwellers. The building activities in these cities could improve the quality of life and at the same time change the culture and worldview of the population. Aware of this phenomenon, rulers usually paid special attention to it and used it to their advantage. Often rulers would build or renew cities in order to be their capital cities—places that would express their ideas and display their power and wealth. These cities were also used politically to affirm a ruler's allegiance to the emperor.

Thus, it would be beneficial to look at some cities of Palestine during Jesus's ministry and see how pervasive the Greco-Roman culture was in these cities. The capital cities tend to display the best works rulers could offer. Hence, the capital cities of Palestine during Jesus's

ministry were chosen for this study. In order to be able to analyze Greco-Roman influence in the capital cities of first century Palestine, first I will analyze cities and city planning starting with Greek and then moving on to Roman cities in antiquity. Then, with a defined picture of Greco-Roman settlements, I will focus on changes in Palestine and in its capital cities: Tiberias, Caesarea Philippi, and Jerusalem. I will consider these cities' history around the NT period, available archaeological data, possible biblical connections, and will suggest some implications.

HISTORY OF GRECO-ROMAN CITIES

Urban settlements were a mark of the Greco-Roman period. The conquests of Alexander the Great made a bridge between the East and the West as there had never been made before. Hellenistic dissemination was not only in politics, and economy, but also in culture. The Greek city, the *polis*, was the key to spread Greek ideas and lifestyle (RAINEY; NOTLEY, 2014, p. 307).

It is told that Alexander himself established about seventy cities (RAINEY; NOTLEY, 2014, p. 307). His successors maintained the same pace and established more than 350 *poleis* (RAINEY; NOTLEY, 2014, p. 307). The planting of these new cities, combined with the movement of many Greeks eastward, propagated Greek culture in Palestine. In the south Levant, with a higher concentration of Jews, there was more resistance to Hellenism. However, archaeological evidence shows that there was permeation of Greek culture around Judea too.

During the Greek period, there was not only the construction of a great number of *poleis*, but also the buildings inside those cities were impressive by their size and architecture. The monumental building activities “advertised and highlighted the ruler’s power and wealth.” (MARSHAK, 2015, p. 250). Henceforth, the following centuries would testify to the foundation of many new cities and the development of sciences pertaining to urban planning such as geometry, mathematics, water engineering, and architectural structure.

Around the middle of the eighth century BC, the Greeks began to establish permanent settlements in the West (e.g., Sicily and South Italy). These areas became known as Magna Graecia. (STAMBAUGH, 1988, p. 243). Excavations and aerial photography of these sites show the concept of orthogonal urban planning.² These settlements in Sicily and southern Italy

² This urban planning is characterized by wide streets crossed in a right angle by narrower ones. There were also open spaces reserved for the public buildings and the remaining area was distributed in a uniform grid with long blocks for residential purposes.

are dated to the seventh century BC. Later, in the fifth century BC, the Greek philosopher Hippodamus of Miletus refined the grid concept. (STEPHENS, 1935, p. 10). The orthogonal urban planning facilitates the circulation of people, improving the security—an essential element for times of constant military campaigns.

Roman city planners encountered practical problems of urban planning in the new military colonies in the fourth century BC as a fast-growing political power. Furthermore, cities are changing entities, experiencing constant mutating demands. Thus, Roman authorities always needed the work of city planners laying out the new areas in the cities.

Roman surveyors divided the land (*centuriation*—division process) in squares or rectangles (*centuriae*—square unit) of 2400 by 2400 Roman feet. With two main streets oriented according to the cardinal points East-West (also known as *decumanus*)³; and the North-South, (also known as *cardo*) the most important and widest street (STAMBAUGH, 1988, p. 248).

These professionals used Greek geometry, techniques, training, vocabulary, and equipment.⁴ Therefore, it is possible to say that the Romans' great accomplishments in city planning were achieved on the firm basis of the Greek theoretical and practical experience. The Greeks were using surveying methods comparable to the *centuriation* of the Roman land surveyors centuries before the Romans (WARD-PERKINS, 1994, p. 4).

The Romans adopted the Greek political concept that the city was the best way to govern the provinces. Therefore, the demand for new units of administration to impose pacification grew as much as the Roman territory after the battle of Actium in 31 BC when Rome became the major power in the Mediterranean (WARD-PERKINS, 1994, p. 29).

In order to connect these new cities and to meet military and administrative needs, over 900 miles (1500 km) of roads were built only in Palestine. The construction began in the second half of the first century AD. A good road example is *Via Nova Trajana* that connected the Red Sea to Syria (RAINEY; NOTLEY, 2014, p. 348). The concept of a city was either unknown or a recent innovation in many of the new territories. Hence, the first task in the new territories was to establish urban centers. Thus, they were forced to develop in detail codes of urban planning in order to have solutions to most of the situations that they faced (GRIMAL, 1983, p. 10). Therefore, cities of Roman pattern were being built all around the western provinces⁵

³ The orientation of the *decumanus* may have its origins in a religious motive. It is known that for the Romans the foundation of a new city was a sacred act (GRIMAL, 1983, p. 12).

⁴ A cross-shaped surveying instrument called *groma* was used to start the perpendicular grid at the center of the new town.

⁵ There were about 1,000 cities ruled by Rome. Only 10 percent of the population lived in cities. Most cities had populations of 10,000 to 15,000, only a few were larger (STEPHENS, 1935, p. 80).

“within a generation” (WARD-PERKINS, 1994, p. 29). However, the Romans did not have a philosophical conception about the ideal city as the Greeks had.

The use of the fertile coastal lands for agriculture and commerce was the main purpose in founding these new colonies. Thus, the most important factors considered when choosing the location of new cities were communications, agricultural wealth, harbor facilities, and river-crossing control. After the location was decided the next priority was the establishment of public works available to every citizen: water, drainage, civic center, entertainment, and security (WARD-PERKINS, 1994, p. 33).

The typical Roman architectural icons (theater, amphitheater, circus, and public baths)⁶ may have been too bulky to build at the center of some cities that already existed, or to fit nicely in the preexistent grid. Thus, in many areas these constructions are found outside the city center.

Even though Rome was already established when the Italian city planning rules were solidified, it suffered a great fire⁷ in AD 64 that gave the opportunity for Nero to rebuild it. Tacitus describes the regulations stipulated by Nero at this occasion (TACITUS, 1939). They represent the best planning of the time—wide streets with porticoes, limited height of buildings, and the use of fireproof materials. With this misfortune it was possible to establish the Roman way of urban planning and make a showcase of its advantages in the capital of the Roman empire, Rome.

Things were different in the East with the tradition of urban life established for a long period. The assimilation of Roman style of urban planning was subtler. Roman works of infrastructure (water drainage, roads, bridges, aqueducts, and so forth) opened the door for the Roman style urban planning and architecture in the East. Many of these constructions demanded Roman builders or Roman trained constructors.⁸ Gerasa is a good example of Roman planning and architecture in the East with its colonnaded streets in a grid, monumental stairway, and piazza. In addition, there is also Beit She’an (Scythopolis), the only city of the Decapolis west of the Jordan. Another good example of the NT period is Pergamon in Asia Minor.

It is clearly visible that the cities in Palestine also went through the process of Romanization. This becomes more evident with Herod the Great. His extensive building projects show Roman influence.⁹ In Jerusalem, Herod was cautious to carefully integrate

⁶ Many aqueducts were built in order to bring fresh water to the city. The oldest aqueduct in Jerusalem is 50 miles (80 km) long and dates to Herod’s reign (RAINEY; NOTLEY, 2014, p. 348).

⁷ It has never been proven, but at the time Christians were blamed for this fire.

⁸ The most successful Roman building type was the bath. Some theaters were westernized, but the amphitheater never really became popular in Palestine.

⁹ Roman baths and later works in Jericho show Roman techniques of laying bricks (*opus reticulatum*).

Greco-Roman influence with Jewish tradition. The temple shows this clearly. While Roman architectural influence is visible in the staircase arches, and colonnades in the surrounding areas, Herod kept the blueprint of the building according to that of Solomon's temple. The temple looked Roman to the Romans and Jewish to the Jews (MARSHAK, 2015, p. 325). The outside platform looked mostly Roman. However, the inside retained the design and dimensions prescribed in the Torah.

While on the one hand there was the spreading of Roman culture in Palestine, on the other hand there was a counter Romanization movement with the proliferation of synagogues. In Palestine there are remains of synagogues predating AD 70 (RAINEY; NOTLEY, 2014, p. 348).

Next, Tiberias, Caesarea Philippi, and Jerusalem will be discussed. They were the capital cities of Palestine during the time of Jesus's ministry. Tiberias and Caesarea Philippi were governed by Herod the Great's sons: Herod Antipas and Herod Philip. By AD 6 Jerusalem was already governed by a Roman procurator.

TIBERIAS

Herod Antipas, one of the sons of Herod the Great, became the tetrarch of Galilee and Perea—around 4 BC. In the beginning of his reign the capital of his tetrarchy was Sephoris. Later, Antipas built Tiberias to be his new capital, transferring the administration from Sephoris to Tiberias. The city was founded either in AD 18 or 20.

The chosen territory was a promising area with great topography and the convenience of close trade routes, which facilitated communication. The waterfront to the East—the Sea of Galilee—gave mobility and protection, and an elevation to the West was a great place for an acropolis, overlooking the city and the sea. Furthermore, it was close to the plain of Gennesaret, the most productive agricultural area¹⁰ of Palestine during the NT period (DEVRIES, 1997, p. 325). In addition, the city was close by to therapeutic springs. They attracted visitors and boosted the local economy. These springs are mentioned in the pilgrimage literary works of Theodosius and Antoninus of Placentia (HIRSCHFELD, 2004, p. 220).

Nevertheless, when Tiberias was being built, the constructors came across an unexpected problem: a cemetery. According to Jewish laws, this made the city unclean and unfit for Jews. Josephus (*Ant.* 18.38) states that Antipas even offered free houses and land for people to live

¹⁰ Tiberias presented a number of characteristics recommended for the construction of a new city according to the Roman standards.

there in order to encourage new dwellers. The connection of the city with the cemetery may account for the reason why the NT does not mention any visit of Jesus to the city. On the other hand, the Gospels narrate Jesus touching dead people. The NT mentions Tiberias only in the Gospel of John (6:1, 23; 21:1) and it refers to the Sea of Galilee, also called Sea of Tiberias.¹¹ The new capital was geographically close to many places where Jesus visited, passed by, and grew up.

Only in the second century AD was Tiberias purified from its unclean (necropolis) status under the supervision of Simeon bar Yohai and declared fit for Jewish population. Then, the Sanhedrin moved from Sephoris to Tiberias in AD 150. It became an important rabbinic center and the location for the compilation of the Talmud in the end of the fourth century AD (RAINEY; NOTLEY, 2014, p. 354).

Roman Influence in Architecture and Planning in Tiberias

Being a son of Herod the Great, Antipas—ruler of Galilee and Perea—had learned with his father some important principles in order to remain in power.¹² First, he applied the Roman urban planning rules and building style to his new capital. Additionally, he named the new city after the emperor at the time, Tiberius. These actions were strategies to show his allegiance to Rome and the power of his tetrarchy. This had been previously done by Antipas’s father—Herod the Great—in Caesarea Maritima.

Among the list of Roman urban architectural features in Tiberias are: an aqueduct, a theater,¹³ bathhouses, and a villa that was decorated with columns, marble, and *opus reticulatum*.¹⁴ Some suggest that this villa might have been the house of Herod Antipas.¹⁵

The Sea of Galilee was the determining factor in the urban plan of Tiberias. The *cardo* was parallel to the sea. So were most of the walls, with few exceptions (HIRSCHFELD, 2004, p. 219). They all had the same orientation: 16 degrees West deviation of the North (HIRSCHFELD, 2004, p. 219). As excavations uncovered buildings and a street grid following the same orientation, it is reasonable to suggest a pre-planning with the observation of building

¹¹ Probably by the time that John wrote the Gospel, Tiberias was a big and influential city that even named the lake. John 6:1 says: “After these things Jesus went over to the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias” (ESV – all cited Biblical texts will be from ESV). John’s explanation of the name hints that by the time that the gospel was written the name of the sea had already been changed from Sea of Galilee to Sea of Tiberias.

¹² It is possible to see Antipas’s political shrewdness when in Luke 13:32 Jesus calls him a fox.

¹³ A theater would not be well accepted in a city that had a long Jewish tradition. However, Tiberias was a new city populated with mostly gentiles in its beginnings.

¹⁴ A Roman building technique of laying bricks to build walls.

¹⁵ The use of marble would be unusual this early, if it were Herod Antipas’s palace. Palestine became a big user of marble only after the Great Revolt of 66–74 (MEYERS; CHANCEY, 2012, p. 119).

parameters for a long period of time. Even centuries later (AD 1100) the same building orientation of walls was still followed (HIRSCHFELD, 2004, p. 219).

CAESAREA PHILIPPI

Different from Tiberias, Caesarea Philippi had an occupational tradition at the time when it became the capital of the tetrarchy. During the time of Antiochus the Great, Caesarea Philippi was called Panion, and later it became known as Paneas.¹⁶ The name Panion was given from a cave with flowing water (CHARLESWORTH, 2006, p. 48) dedicated to the “nature god” Pan.¹⁷ Herod Philip, another son of Herod the Great, inherited this territory and named it Caesarea Philippi. Later, Antipas the Great named it Neronias. But the most used name was Caesarea Paneas, which honors both the emperor and the pagan god (WALKER, 2006, p. 93). Nowadays, the village’s name is Banias, the Arabic version of Paneas.

This area became part of the Palestinian rule again when emperor Caesar Augustus presented it as a gift to Herod the Great, who built a magnificent temple of marble near a cave to honor the emperor. When Herod Philip inherited his part of Herod’s kingdom and became the tetrarch of Trachonitis, he decided to enlarge Paneas (KUTSKO, 1992, v. 1, p. 803), and make it the capital of his territory. However, it was only an administrative city at that time. There were no residential quarters.

Following the footsteps of his father, Philip also honored the emperor with his domains, but now instead of constructing a temple to the emperor, Philip named the capital of his territory after Caesar, calling it Caesarea. This action did not leave any doubt about his loyalty to the Roman emperor. Later the city became known as Caesarea Philippi to distinguish it from Caesarea Maritima at the coast.

A coin associated with Caesarea Philippi was found with the title: “Caesarea-August, Sacred and with Rights of Sanctuary—under Paneion” (SAULCY, 1874, p. 315–316). This title may indicate that Pan and Caesar may have shared divine worship in the city; Pan in the cave and Caesar in the marble temple (MCRAY, 1991, p. 173), not leaving much space for the Jewish God. Considering that Caesar and Panion were the two main deities of the city, it is not surprising that the most used name is a combination of the two gods: Caesarea Paneas.

Caesarea Philippi was the most important city in the extreme North of Palestine during

¹⁶ It is the feminine of the Greek adjective *Paneion*.

¹⁷ Knowing that the city was named after a nature god, it is possible to think that it presented an exuberant nature. Being at the northern part of Israel, the city enjoys milder weather and enjoys abundant supply of water.

the NT period (DEVRIES, 1997, p. 264). It is located 40 km north of the Sea of Galilee, along Nahal Hermon (Wadi Banias) on the Southwest foot of Mount Hermon, 1,150 feet above the sea level with a strategic military position between Syria and Palestine. Josephus mentions that it was close to the fountains of the Jordan River (*Ant.* 18.2.1). A spring in the large cave was one of the main water sources of the Jordan River, which is the most important water source of Palestine (MURPHY-O'CONNOR, 2008, p. 203). In addition, the melting of snow from mount Hermon brought fresh water to the site. Thus, considering that the city used to be called “nature god” and that it enjoyed an abundance of water resources, it is possible to suggest that the city had the characteristics that come with water in Palestine, like gardens, green vegetation, pools, and more bearable heat.

Roman Influence in Architecture and Planning

The site of Caesarea Philippi is identified with a high certainty due to its proximity to the cave with springs by Mount Hermon (WALKER, 2006, p. 99). During the survey done by Moshe Hartal and his team from 1983 to 1985 in the area, different city quarters were identified (TZAFERIS; HARTAL, 1994–, v. 5, p. 1587–93). Among them there were domestic sectors with plastered walls, mosaic floors with patterns in black and white, covered ducts, and clay pipelines for sewage and water. In addition, public buildings were located close to the spring, and a section of an aqueduct was found on the hill north of the city. The aqueduct was discovered in 1983, surveyed until 1985 and excavated from 1983 to 1991 by Moshe Hartal. It is 4 km long and brings running water to the large residences of the city.¹⁸ After 1988, two teams worked at Banias. One in the sanctuary of Pan by the cave led by Zvi Uri Ma'oz and another directed by Vassilios Tzaferis that excavated large parts of a Roman palace and the *cardo maximus* (TZAFERIS; HARTAL, 1994–, v. 5, p. 1592). Tzaferis also found a system of vaults of three different construction techniques. One of them is Roman and is dated to the same period of the palace. The other two vault styles present gothic style arches (TZAFERIS; HARTAL, 1994–, v. 5, p. 1592).

Biblical Connections

Caesarea Philippi was the northernmost Galilean city visited by Jesus. The following biblical passage mentions Jesus passing by this place with His disciples: “When Jesus came to

¹⁸ The Aqueduct was built by Philip's successor, after the time of Jesus's ministry.

the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say that the Son of Man is?’” Then Peter answered: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt 16:13, 16). Having in mind that they were in a city that was formerly named after the “nature god,” which is not a living god, or named after Herod Philip, it is interesting that Peter declares Jesus to be the son of the living God, in other words, a better and true God in this city.

Following this passage, in Matthew 17 is the account of Jesus’s transfiguration. Many scholars believe that the location of this episode is Mount Hermon for its proximity to Caesarea Philippi and this is the city previously mentioned in the Bible.

Mark 7:31 records Jesus departing from Tyre and Sidon to the Sea of Galilee through the Decapolis. “And again, departing from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, he came unto the sea of Galilee, through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis” (KJV). This route described in the gospels is not the most direct or obvious one. To go from Tyre to the Sea of Galilee, the shortest way it is to go south, but instead Jesus goes first to Sidon, which is north, then to Decapolis, which is east of the sea, to finally arrive in the Sea of Galilee. The way from Sidon to Decapolis passes by Caesarea Philippi. The gospel does not mention it but chances are that Jesus passed there in His way to the Decapolis (RAINEY; NOTLEY, 2014, p. 361–362). Most likely Jesus had some plan in mind that made Him take a longer way.

JERUSALEM

Jerusalem experienced great turbulence and oppression under Antiochus IV (second century BC). He forced the Hellenization of the land and prohibited Jewish religious manifestations. The Maccabean revolt which reacted against the Seleucid rule eventually restored the kingdom to the Jews. Then Judea enjoyed the status of an independent state from 142 to 63 BC. Jewish sovereign rule ended when the Romans conquered Palestine with Pompey (63 BC). In 44 BC, Herod the Great was appointed king of Judea by the Roman senate. Seven years later (37 BC) he had control over Jerusalem and the major part of the land of Palestine.

Under Herod the Great’s administration and building activities, Jerusalem became a showcase of Greco-Roman culture (DEVRIES, 1997, p. 294). With these intense building activities Herod displayed his wealth, stated his control over his kingdom, and augmented his fame and glory as one of the most important builders of the first century BC (MARSHAK, 2015, p. 251).

After Herod’s death his will revealed that he thought his son Antipas was the most worthy son to become king. Nevertheless, Archelaus was chosen by the Roman emperor to rule. After

protests, the emperor decided to divide Herod's territory in three parts—giving the richest part to Archelaus and the two other regions to his brothers Antipas and Philippi. But Archelaus's reign did not last very long (from 4 BC to AD 6). After his reign, Roman procurators were appointed over Judea: first Coponius then Pontius Pilate (SIMONS, 2008, p. 216).

Unfortunately, it is quite difficult to delineate precisely the map of Jerusalem in the first century due to layers of destruction and reconstruction in different subsequent periods and the establishment of the modern city on top of them. Much of what we know today comes from literary sources instead of archaeological excavations. Thus, I will now analyze Josephus's writings about Jerusalem together with the most relevant archaeological findings for this study.

Description according to Josephus

Jerusalem was fortified with three walls in most parts of its extension. However, across the valleys there was only one wall (JOSEPHUS, *J.W.* 5.136). The city was built upon two hills with a valley dividing them and a row of houses in each hill end by the valley. The valley ends in Siloam. There was a third hill in Jerusalem with a wide valley separating it from the others, but during the Hasmonean reign they filled the depression to unite the city with the temple. In addition, they reduced the height of the second tallest hill so the temple, which seated in the highest hill, would be higher than its surroundings. Later, with the city growth, Herod Agrippa I started to build a wall north of the temple, enlarging the city limits (JOSEPHUS, *J.W.* 5.148). But he was prevented from finishing it, fearing the Romans' reaction to such a strong wall.

Josephus describes three towers in Jerusalem built by Herod the Great for beauty, largeness, and strength (JOSEPHUS, *J.W.* 5.161). Hippicus (named after Herod's friend), Phasael (named after Herod's brother), and Mariamne (named after Herod's wife). These towers were in the old city wall, which was on top of a hill. Thus, they seemed very tall for those approaching the city from the valley (JOSEPHUS, *J.W.* 5.156). These towers were part of the complex of Herod's palace, which had such beautiful interior that exceeded the ability of the historian to describe it (JOSEPHUS, *J.W.* 5.176). The palace contained beds for a hundred guests, porticoes, deep canals and cisterns, groves, and long walks between them (JOSEPHUS, *J.W.* 5.181). By this description, it looks like the palace was an oasis with resort-like features.

There was another tower in Jerusalem called Antonia located northwest of the temple. The inside had the largeness of a palace with its rooms, courts, spaces for bathing and so many conveniences that itself could be compared to a city according to Josephus. The tower had direct access to the temple and housed a Roman legion. Therefore, soldiers could protect the city from

external dangers and also watch for internal rebellions “for the temple was a fortress that guarded the city, as was the tower of Antonia a guard to the temple; and in that tower were guards of those three” (JOSEPHUS, *J.W.* 5.245). Antonia fortress and the temple in the first half of the first century were the northern limits of Jerusalem, which was the most vulnerable side of the city for it was in a plateau. The other limits of the city were circumscribed by valleys, which made enemy assaults more difficult due to the upward topography.

There is the famous Talmudic text that says: “He who has never seen the Temple of Herod has never seen a beautiful building” (b. Baba Bathra 4a). In fact, Herod’s temple was the largest religious building in the ancient world (MARSHAK, 2015, p. 316). It is one of the greatest building feats of Herod the Great. The combination of great engineering and architecture makes it Herod’s most significant construction (NETZER, 2006, p. 137).

Josephus describes the temple’s richness mentioning that a lot of gold and silver were used. According to him, the front of the temple was all covered with gold and that “at the first rising of the sun, [it] reflected back a very fiery splendor, and made those who forced themselves to look upon it to turn their eyes away, just as they would have done at the sun’s own rays” (JOSEPHUS, *J.W.* 5.222). The parts that were not golden were really white, looking like a snow mountain from a distance (JOSEPHUS, *J.W.* 5.223). Nowadays, from what remained, only few portions of the temple complex are visible, such as the Wailing Wall and the South Steps. Another urban feature mentioned by Josephus is that Pilate¹⁹ raised a disturbance by spending the sacred treasure of Corban on aqueducts (JOSEPHUS, *J.W.* 2.175). Therefore, Pilate was also interested in improving the urban setting of Judea and wanted to leave his legacy. But the Jewish population did not like the spending of the Temple’s resources by Pilate. This disturbance in itself shows the different values held by the Romans and the Jews.

Archaeological findings

Ronny Reich and Eli Shukron led an excavation group in the lowest part of the Tyropean Valley in 2004 and exposed approximately 30m of the 50m-long eastern side of the Siloam Pool. Coins and pottery give a clear dating to the construction: first century BC and abandonment around the year AD 70. Three flights of 4–5 steps separated by narrow landings have been found. According to the dating, the Siloam Pool was probably built by Herod the

¹⁹ Though mentioned by Josephus, Pilate’s existence was long questioned. Recently, however, the historicity of his name was further established. An inscription from the first century AD was found in Caesarea Maritima in 1961 by a team led by Antonio Frova (CHARLESWORTH, 2006, p. 334).

Great²⁰ as part of his Romanization project of Jerusalem. It was a major construction that demanded a dam wall. A stepped street has also been found and it connected the Siloam Pool to the Temple. It dates to the Second Temple period. This street is known as Jerusalem's *cardo*.²¹

Another important site in Jerusalem regarding its urban setting is the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and the location of the crucifixion of Jesus. Excavations at the church of the Holy Sepulcher showed that it was the place of a quarry outside the city walls of first century AD Jerusalem, making it the most probable place for the crucifixion and burial of Jesus.

Excavations around the Temple Mount in Jerusalem helped to reveal and/or clarify a number of structures. Among them are: *mikvot* (purification baths) under a Second Temple period bridge that gave access to the Temple Mount (BAHAT, 2019, p.94–103); reconstruction of a raised road that connected the Upper City to one of the western gates of the Temple Mount across the Tyropeon Valley; a broad dam wall that supported it; a monumental building dating to the period of King Herod (ONN; WEKSLER-BDOLAH, 2019, p.104–122); two public dining rooms with a fountain and pool between them (ONN; WEKSLER-BDOLAH; PATRICH, 2019, p. 123–135); and a theater like structure from the second century AD, which helped dating Wilson's arch to the first century AD. Many of these structures used arches in its structures, indicating Roman influence.

After Titus's conquest of Jerusalem in AD 70, there was still great unrest in the city that led to the AD 135 revolt. At the time, Roman emperor Hadrian completely rebuilt the city under the Roman style with a *cardo* (north-south) crossing in right angle with another street (east-west), the typical Roman urban plan. This renovated version of Jerusalem was called Aelia Capitolina and had a theater, a forum, temples to Jupiter and Venus, a hippodrome, and Roman baths. Only in the fourth century AD were Jews allowed to enter there again (LEVINE, 1992, p. 143).

CONCLUSION

In order to better understand the capital cities of first century Palestine, we began reviewing Greek city planning and its influence on Romans. This influence reached the peoples of the Levant. This influence was initiated centuries before by Antiochus the Great. Later, when the Romans came, the cities of the Levant were already greatly Hellenized.

²⁰ The Siloam Pool indicates that the city already had fresh water sources in the first century AD. According to Josephus (*J.W.* 5.181 and *J.W.* 5.6.1), there were other buildings that demanded fresh water sources in Jerusalem—Herod's palace and Antonia Fortress. Thus, Pilate's construction of an additional aqueduct point to an increased demand of water inside the city during his tenure.

²¹ Doron Ben-Ami, "Has the Acra Citadel Been Discovered in Jerusalem?" (paper presented at annual meeting of the American Schools of Oriental Research, San Antonio, TX, 18 November 2016).

The construction of new cities was the most efficient means of spreading the Greco-Roman culture. Some Roman urban structures, like theaters and temples, led to cultural and religious changes in the population, which can be seen as worldview engineering. At the same time, other structures like roads and water works, raised the quality of life of city's inhabitants.

These capital cities of the Levant became important centers of commerce, administration, and religion. They attracted people from various locations. Hence, when constructing and renovating these capital cities rulers intended to show their wealth, power,²² and strengthen their political connections with Rome. To accomplish these goals, the rulers ordered the construction of structures using vanguard Roman architecture, named the cities after emperors, and erected temples in their honor.

The building activities in Palestine during the NT period brought greater connectivity, sanitation, and security to communities in the Levant. Moreover, large Roman structures—like theaters, market places, and squares—allowed for multitudes to meet together. Such public works, in turn, created better circumstances for the spread of Christianity. The construction of such cities allowed people to safely travel, live longer, and have more opportunities to acquire and share knowledge in this new reality.

Therefore, even though most Greco-Roman cities were built as a means of cultural engineering, these cities together with the connecting Roman roads were conducive means to the Christianization of the Roman Empire. Nowadays, the cities with their buildings and designs may still be used to shape/manipulate a population's worldview, but they can also be a great opportunity for the spread of the Christian message.

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²² People took pride of their city of origin. In the NT, for instance, the apostle Paul himself talked about his city of origin, Tarsus, exemplifying the importance given to a city and its status (cf. Acts 21:39). Therefore, the rulers would be politically wise when acting as agents of city improvement.

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