CAESAREA IN THE TIME OF EUSEBIUS

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Caesarea, the capital of Syria Palaestina, was the seat of the Roman governor and of the financial procurator of that province. Under Severus Alexander (222–235 CE) it acquired the title of Metropolis Palaestinae, reflecting its superior administrative status in the province. According to Flavius Josephus Herod the Great, who had founded the city, built there a vast harbor, a temple dedicated to Rome and Augustus, a theater and an amphitheater, a royal palace, market places, dwellings, and an underground sewer system. Soon after its foundation Caesarea became a prosperous maritime city, of a heterogeneous ethnicity and a cosmopolitan flavor, as is reflected by the archaeological record: the city coins, statuary, and inscriptions, attesting to its pantheon, and the imported ware and numismatic finds, attesting to its international commerce (Fig. 1).

How did the city look like in the time of Eusebius, after more than three centuries since its foundation? after the crisis of the third century, and the reforms of Diocletian and Constantine, when the Latinate element in the provincial and municipal administration everywhere in the East gave way to Greek speaking officiales. According to Eusebius on April 2, 306 a severe earthquake struck the city, making the entire city to tremble, so that people had supposed that the whole place, together with its inhabitants, was about to be destroyed on that day. Neither casualties, nor damages are mentioned by him. So far this

1 Caput provinciae, according to Tacitus, Hist., II.78.
earthquake had not been recognized in the archaeological record at the site. Hence, it seems that it was not as devastating for Caesarea. A late third century Rabbinic source denotes it and its territory (together with Tyre and its territory), as a city of plenty, where everything is cheap.\(^4\) A 4th c. literary source praises Caesarea as “wealthy in all good things”, excelling in its purple cloth, olive oil, wine, and grains.\(^5\) The period that followed the Diocletianic persecutions and the “Peace of the Church” marks the beginning of a new age for the Roman Empire, but the end of paganism and the takeover of Christianization in the urban space were gradual; their pace in Caesarea is not reported by any ancient source. Seemingly, like in other cities, such as Gaza, or Alexandria, it took about a century until the pagan temples were abandoned.

Although Latin was still a living language among the more educated people of Caesarea,\(^6\) the epigraphic habit had changed. All the inscriptions of the new era in Caesarea are in Greek or in the local Semitic scripts and languages (Aramaic, Hebrew and Samaritan).\(^7\) The Greek, that returned to be the language of administration in the entire