INDIVIDUAL HERODIAN SITES
HEROD’S CAESAREA ON SEBASTOS: URBAN STRUCTURES AND INFLUENCES

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Abstract

Starting in 22 BCE, Herod the Great began to build an enormous artificial harbour and city on the coast of his realm. He devoted a major portion of his and his kingdom’s wealth and resources to the project, probably ceasing work on any other but the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

In building the harbour Sebastos and the city Caesarea, Herod and his builders faced a multitude of decisions about placement, design, and construction techniques for the facilities. Some of their choices were dictated by the terrain, some by the technology available; but many appear to have been the result of Herod’s plans for what sort of city Caesarea was to be, and what place he would take within it.

This paper analyses the siting of, influences on, and motives behind all the major structures of the project. Everything began with the harbour, which was vital for the provision of materials for its own construction as well as that of all the rest. The Temple of Augustus and Rome was to dominate the harbour and seacoast, while the street grid of the settlement followed its own rationale. Gates and walls marked out the city for its intended population, the first of whom was Herod himself, who established his palace on the only promontory not devoted to harbour works. Theatrical venues were provided, not just for the celebration that marked the city’s inauguration, but for a continuing sacred festival in honour of its namesake Augustus, and likely for subsequent gatherings of the citizens of Caesarea and of the wider province. The absence or presence of further facilities may be traced via archaeological remains or ancient texts.

Through cult, through sacred festivals, and by their very names, Caesarea and Sebastos were visible proof of their founder’s alliance with Rome and its ruler. The harbour became a practical success, and its accessibility to trade by land and sea justified all that had been spent on it. Furthermore, the city’s population appears to have been more devoted to Herod than was true elsewhere, so that it formed a bulwark for his kingdom. Finally, for the wider Graeco-Roman world, Caesarea on Sebastos served as a show-window onto Herod’s realm. In all these ways, the harbour and city accomplished the designs of this cosmopolitan king.

Around 22 BCE, Herod the Great began to build an enormous artificial harbour and city on the coast of his realm (Fig. 1, to be referred to throughout).* He named the one Sebastos, the other Caesarea, both in

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