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The Problem of the Location of Straton's Tower

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The Hellenistic Period in the northern Plain of Sharon was one of agricultural prosperity. Wealthy manor farms were scattered across a hinterland that had a mild climate and was watered by several perennial streams. Small seaports such as Mulberry City and Crocodile City provided contact with the rest of the world (fig. 1). The major crops were probably the cereals, grasses, and vines still cultivated today. The Crocodile River was the principal stream, providing a constant if limited water source. Within the river were the crocodiles that gave it its name. These flourished in the valley, whose climate was milder than the rest of northern Palestine and not unlike that of Egypt. Crocodiles even lasted until modern times: Richard I camped by the river in 1191 and two of his men were eaten by one (*Itinerarum Regis Ricardi* 4.14), and the last definite sighting of the reptiles was as late as 1906 (Mülinen 1907: 141).

The market town of the region was Stratonopyrgos, the elusive city of Straton's Tower, which is known today largely because Herod the Great built Caesarea Maritima on its ruins. Were it not for the founding of Caesarea late in the 1st century B.C., Straton's Tower would probably be no better known than Crocodile City or Mulberry City; as it is, the city has become a major enigma in the history of Palestine.

It was founded by Straton I of Sidon, who reigned from 376 to 361 B.C. (Levine 1973: 75–81; but see Ringel 1975: 21). Straton, the "Philhellene," is well known to Greek literature and art: he was said by his contemporary Theopompos (quoted by

Athenaios, 12.41) to have led a licentious life surrounded by women who had been imported from the Peloponnesos; and his sarcophagus, now in Istanbul, shows a number of his friends mourning his demise. The sarcophagus, in fact, is one of the earliest examples still in existence of Levantine interest in Greek art. One might expect any city founded by Straton I to be strongly Classical in form.

The founding of the city may be represented on a cup now in the Louvre. Professor Ernest Will, who is publishing the cup, has kindly provided some details. The cup, acquired by the Louvre in the 1960's, is of a technique and style associated with the 4th century A.D. The subjects are grouped in several scenes, three of which concern a certain Straton. There is a consultation of an oracle of Apollo, a maritime expedition, and a *dexiosis* between Straton and Asklepios. In addition, there is a divine figure that seems to be the well-known Tyche of Caesarea. Thus the cup blends the founding of the Greek city of Straton's Tower with that of Roman Caesarea, making Straton the founder of the latter city.

Straton's Tower was probably an agricultural storehouse in its earliest stages (Levine 1975a: 6). This seems more probable than to assume that it was a lighthouse, for there is no reason to place a lighthouse at this particular point on the coast. Little is known about the site other than what can be inferred from the contemporary history of coastal Palestine. The earliest citation of Straton's Tower is on a papyrus (PCZ 59004) of the 3rd

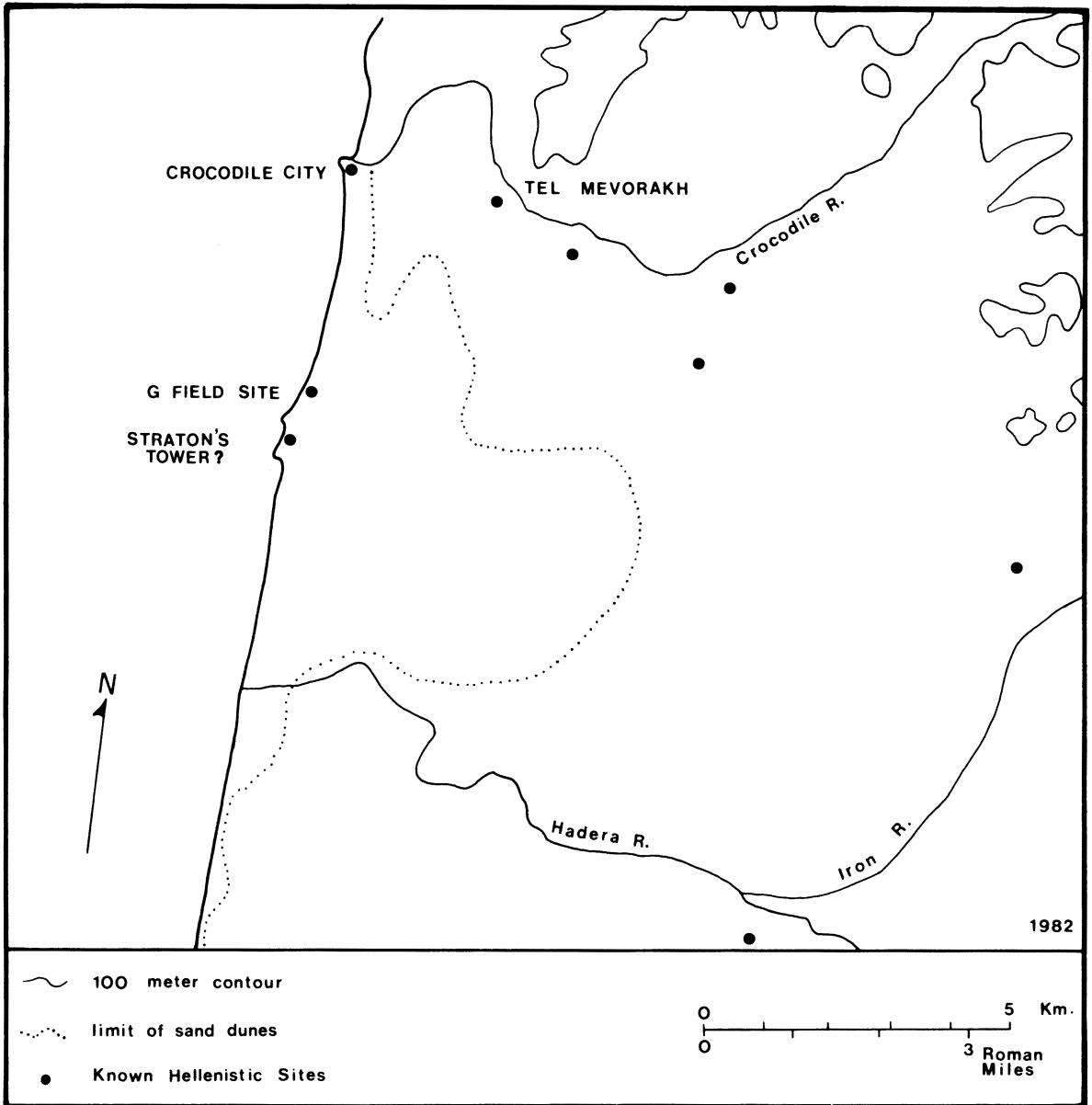


Fig. 1. The Northern Plain of Sharon in the Hellenistic Period.

century B.C., which records a visit by the Ptolemaic agent Zenon (Abel 1923: 410–11). The next mention is a passing reference by the geographer Artemidoros of Ephesos (ca. 100 B.C.), quoted by Stephanos of Byzantion (in his entry for “Doros”). Late in the 1st century B.C., Strabon (16.2.27) noted that Straton’s Tower had an anchorage. The remaining citations are from the Roman period, well after Straton’s Tower had been replaced by Caesarea (Roller 1982a: 45–46). Josephus men-

tioned the earlier town several times in the context of events of Hellenistic Palestine, noting the rise of the local tyrant Zoilos in the 2nd century B.C. (*Ant* 13.324–26); the subsequent incorporation of the town into the territory of Alexander Jannaeus (*Ant* 13.395); the freeing of the city by Pompey in 63 B.C. (*JW* 1.156; *Ant* 14.76); its presentation to Herod by Octavian after Actium (*JW* 1.396; *Ant* 15.217); and Herod’s founding of Caesarea at the site (*JW* 1.156; *Ant* 15.293). But by the time of

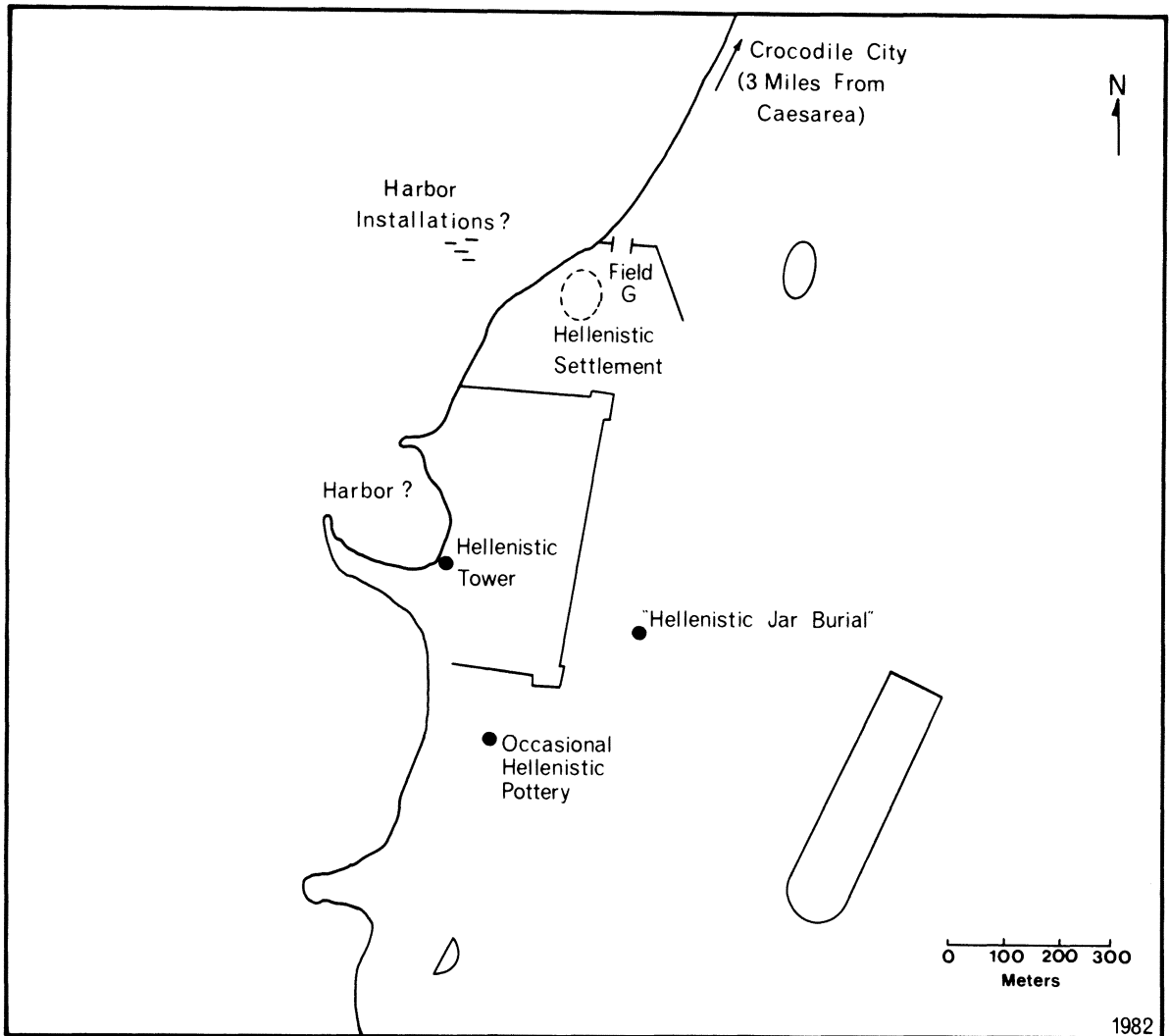


Fig. 2. Hellenistic Finds at Caesarea Maritima.

Herod the city was in a state of decay, perhaps because of an earthquake in 31 B.C. (*JW* 1.370–72, 408; *Ant* 15.121).

Little is added by archaeology to this scant evidence. Most excavators in the Caesarea area have tended rather uncritically to associate any Hellenistic finds with Straton's Tower. Yet this particular portion of the coast seems to have been a dense network of villages and farms, especially after 200 B.C. Thus most of the Hellenistic material around Caesarea probably does not belong to Straton's Tower. The precise location of the Hellenistic city remains unknown, although it in all probability was at Caesarea, since Josephus was consistent in noting that Herod founded his city at

Straton's Tower. Yet no archaeological evidence uncovered thus far can definitely be associated with the earlier settlement.

There is, nevertheless, a fair amount of Hellenistic material from the vicinity of Caesarea (fig. 2). Most comes from the northern reaches of the Roman site, approximately 200 m. north of the northern wall of the Crusader fortress of Caesarea. The site, designated Field G by the Joint Expedition to Caesarea Maritima, lies 50 m. inland today, although coastal erosion since antiquity has been extensive. It is a brush-covered mound that rises approximately 10 m. above sea level and thus is the highest point on the coast of Caesarea. It has been the scene of a series of excavations since the 1950's.

In 1956 and 1962, Israeli excavations cleared a Roman synagogue and probed inland (Negev 1975: 272–73). Italian excavations from 1959 to 1963 cleared the city wall to the north of the mound (Frova 1966: 247–92). Since 1976 the American Joint Expedition has excavated both on the mound and along the wall, and Israeli underwater excavators have examined the offshore areas (Raban 1981a).

Excavations of a Roman synagogue revealed at lower levels “a large house . . . covered by a considerable accumulation of Hellenistic pottery characteristic of the third and second centuries B.C.” (Negev 1975: 273). This house is said to have been “quite similar to the sea quarters of Delos, with the rooms looking out on a courtyard facing the sea” (Levine 1975a: 8). It was identified by M. Avi-Yonah (1956: 260) as “belonging to the Tower of Straton which preceded Caesarea,” and it was concluded (Negev 1966: 20; 1975: 273; Levine 1975a: 8) that the mound on which these houses lay was the mound of Straton’s Tower.

Such an identification seems premature. Although the pottery was dated vaguely to “the third and second centuries B.C.” it seems unlikely that any of it is earlier than ca. 200 B.C. Houses from Delos were cited as a parallel; most of the Delos houses, however, date only to the period after 136 B.C. when the island became a free port at Roman instigation (Lawrence 1967: 247–49). It seems more probable, therefore, that the house discovered by the Israeli excavations belongs to a small settlement or villa of the 2nd century B.C., rather than to the earlier town of Straton’s Tower.

In 1978 the Joint Expedition, under the supervision of this author, excavated on the top of the mound. These excavations revealed that the mound was not a tell but an outcrop of bedrock, which was only 1.6 m. below the surface. Hellenistic pottery but no Hellenistic architecture was found (Roller 1980: 35–42). The major occupation of the site seems to have been a manor farm or villa of late antiquity, and the Hellenistic pottery was part of the fill into which these foundations were placed. Other probes in the same general area in 1978 and 1980 tended to confirm these findings. Slightly to the north, where two round towers belonging to the Herodian wall of Caesarea are visible, probing since 1976 has revealed Hellenistic pottery at the lowest level; again, however, this is merely the fill and should not be associated with the Herodian wall construction itself (Roller 1982: 92; J. A.

Blakeley, forthcoming).

Nevertheless the Hellenistic pottery found in these probes, as well as a number of Hellenistic coins found in the same area, provides a consistent picture. With one exception (Roller 1980: no. 1), none of the material found by the Joint Expedition dates to before 200 B.C. The one exception is a cyma kantharos rim of the late 4th century B.C., which may have been an heirloom imported from elsewhere. But there is a consistent amount of pottery from the period after 200 B.C., or after the conquest of Palestine by Antiochos III (Rostovtzeff 1928: 190–91). The earliest coins (e.g., C80–23) date from the same period. The lack of material before 200 B.C. makes it difficult to believe that 3rd century pottery, which is often little different typologically from that of the 2nd century, was actually found in the synagogue excavations.

Thus there seems no doubt that a Hellenistic settlement existed at Field G Site after 200 B.C. But there is at present no substantial evidence for earlier occupation. The history of Field G Site may be parallel with that of nearby Tel Mevorakh, which was probably deserted during the 3rd century B.C. but occupied after the Seleucid conquest of 198 B.C. (Stern 1978: 84), which changed the balance of power and began a period of prosperity for the coastal cities (Rostovtzeff 1928: 190–91).

It is therefore unlikely that Field G Site is Straton’s Tower. The origins of Straton’s Tower are in the early 4th century B.C., and although it may have expanded with the advent of the Seleucids, it existed before their time. Moreover, Field G Site is well away from the center of Herodian Caesarea; in fact, it is at the northern limit. Josephus explicitly wrote (*War* 1.408; *Ant* 15.293, 331–33) that Caesarea was founded at—not near, or somewhat south of—Straton’s Tower. The two cities were so close that their names were virtually interchangeable (*War* 1.156; *Ant* 14–76, 15.293, 331). Finally, the Field G Site seems to have been well inland in antiquity and may not have been a coastal village at all; the coastal village associated with a probable Hellenistic anchorage recently found offshore (Appendix) has long since washed away. It seems best to assume that Field G Site is an otherwise unknown Hellenistic village or estate, founded after 200 B.C., and that Straton’s Tower is to be sought near the center of Herodian Caesarea.

This center is now the tourist zone at the Crusader Fortress, not a good place for archaeological exploration. Occasional Hellenistic finds have been

reported outside the perimeter of the Crusader wall, but they are very limited. In the early 1950's a "possibly Hellenistic jar-burial" was reported east of the fortress (Yeiven 1952: 143). A small amount of Hellenistic pottery has been found recently south of the fortress (Roller 1980: no. 15). But the most promising find is the discovery of towers within the harbor area itself (Raban 1979; 1981b: 7). These towers seem to be the first distinct evidence of a harbor prior to the great Herodian construction, and they provide the most promising possibility regarding the Hellenistic predecessor. The existence of such a harbor would not contradict Josephus' statement (*War* 1.408–10) that Straton's Tower had no harbor when Caesarea was built, if the earlier harbor had been destroyed in the earthquake of 31 B.C. (Appendix).

Despite the absorption of Straton's Tower by Caesarea, the name of the Hellenistic city survived well after its demise. Josephus, writing a century later, occasionally called Herod's city "Straton's Tower" with no reference to the Roman name (*War* 2.97; *Ant* 17.320). In a list of cities with a context of 30 B.C., Straton's Tower appears along with Samaria, another city rebuilt and renamed by Herod (*War* 1.396; *Ant* 15.217). But in another list, referring to 4 B.C., Samaria has been replaced by Sebaste, although Straton's Tower remains unchanged (*War* 2.97; *Ant* 17.320). Pliny, writing a century and a half after the founding of Caesarea, called the city "Straton's Tower, the same as Caesarea" (*NH* 5.14 [69]). The geographer Ptolemy, somewhat later, called it Straton's Caesarea (5.15). The 4th-century bowl mentioned earlier shows Straton as the founder of the Roman city, avoiding any mention of Herod, and as late as the 6th century A.D., Straton is joined with Vespasian as a cofounder of Caesarea (Justinian, *Novella* 103). Clearly the Hellenistic name and founder were preserved for political reasons, making it possible to avoid mention of the renegade Herod.

Straton's Tower on the coast was not the only Straton's Tower in Hellenistic Palestine. According to Josephus (*War* 1.75–80, *Ant* 13.307–13), there

was another Straton's Tower, in Hellenistic Jerusalem. Antigonos, the son of John Hyrcanos, was murdered by his brother Aristoboulos in 104 or 103 B.C. in a dark passageway called Straton's Tower, somewhere in or near the Hasmonean fortress that later became Herod's Antonia. This fulfilled a prophecy that Antigonos would die at Straton's Tower. He had naturally taken care to avoid the coastal city, but had failed to note the locale of the same name in Jerusalem. This story, almost Herodotean in form, is part of a longer account of the relationship between the brothers Aristoboulos and Antigonos (Klausner 1972: 222). It provides a toponym that is both obscure and otherwise unknown. Josephus called the Jerusalem Straton's Tower a "most unlighted passageway" and similar phrases; admittedly it was an excellent place for an assassination but hardly a tower. Yet it was located in or near the Hasmonean fortress, which was called locally a *baris*, a word of Egyptian origin that could mean a tower (Benzinger 1897a: 17). Clearly there is more here than is comprehensible to the modern reader, and although the topographical uncertainties regarding the Antonia and its predecessors make the story virtually impossible to analyze, it should not be dismissed as a mere folk tale.

In conclusion, therefore, the problem of Straton's Tower is one that has almost too much evidence. Hellenistic population along the northern coast was dense. Which of the settlements in the immediate vicinity of future Caesarea was actually Straton's Tower cannot easily be determined. The Field G Site has the most evidence and is best known, but the abundance of Hellenistic material here is in large part due to more extensive excavation and the limited overlay. It does not seem to have been founded early enough or in the right location to be Straton's Tower. It is better to take the texts of Josephus literally and to assume that Straton's Tower lay at the center of Caesarea and that the anchorage of the Hellenistic city became the nucleus of the harbor of its Roman successor.

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APPENDIX

The Caesarea Maritima Coastline Before Herod:
Some Preliminary Observations

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The underwater explorations of the Caesarea Ancient Harbour Excavation Project (CAHEP) have concentrated thus far on the outer component of the main harbor constructed by Herod the Great.¹ The facility was known in antiquity as Sebastos (Raban and Hohlfelder 1981; Hohlfelder and Raban 1981; Hohlfelder 1982; Hohlfelder *et al.* 1983). In addition to this effort, some preliminary surveys have been undertaken along the entire expanse of the shoreline of ancient Caesarea Maritima. During these investigations, some evidence of the use of this section of the Levantine coastline prior to the building of Caesarea and its harbor has come to light.

In 1981, an extensive underwater exploration was conducted immediately south of Sebastos in an area once thought to have been the Herodian harbor itself (Reifenberg 1950/1951: pl. 9), and more recently suggested as the possible location of Caesarea's Byzantine port (Raban and Hohlfelder 1981; Hohlfelder and Oleson 1980). While no evidence was uncovered to indicate the presence of any significant structures under water, it appears that the bay served as a mooring area and anchorage during favorable sea conditions from at least the late Bronze Age. The discovery of several pre-Herodian stone anchors, in particular one found in 1981 that can be securely dated to ca. 1175 B.C., suggests the existence of a minor coastal station or haven for small craft long before either Straton's Tower or Caesarea. No data were found to document specific use in the Hellenistic era, but continued maritime activity during the centuries before the founding of Caesarea is a distinct probability.

Underwater excavations conducted by the Center for Maritime Studies of the University of Haifa in the 1970's revealed the existence of what is thought to be an enclosed boat basin from the Hellenistic era. A circular tower, similar in design and construction to two structures uncovered north of Sebastos by the Missione Archaeologica Italiana in the early 1960's and to one of Hellenistic origin excavated by Moshe Dothan at Akko in 1974, was discovered under ca. 1.5 m. of water, ca. 20 m. from the present shoreline, within the confines of the later Sebastos (Frova 1966; Raban and Linder 1978). This circular tower with an associated wall is believed to have marked the entrance to an artificial harbor of undetermined size constructed to the north and in the lee of the largest promontory along the Caesarea coastline. It was dated by Avner Raban to the 2nd century B.C. on the basis of its design and ceramic evidence. A cooking pot of this era had been found wedged into the circular tower's lower courses. While nothing was discovered to link this harbor specifically to Straton's Tower, it is possible than an enclosed basin was an integral part of the Hellenistic settlement.

This conclusion is strengthened by the proximity of the

promontory directly to the north and in whose protection the harbor had been constructed. The placement of a harbor to the north of such a headland was standard practice along the Levantine coast before Roman maritime engineering technology made dependency on natural features unnecessary (Raban 1980). This particular promontory is the highest one along the Caesarea coastline and would have been a likely location for the tower of Straton's Tower, if such a structure ever existed (Roller, above). Perhaps the tower itself was actually a lighthouse or beacon for ships seeking the adjacent harbor (Hohlfelder and Oleson 1980).

To the north of this enclosed harbor at a distance of ca. 500 m., an ancient quay was discovered under water in the 1970's, seaward of Field G of the Joint Expedition to Caesarea Maritima and adjacent to the synagogue excavated by Avi-Yonah in 1956 (Avi-Yonah 1960; Bull 1982). The earliest visible component of this sea wall is a line of headers extending for some 33 m. seaward before disappearing beneath sand and rubble. In design and construction, it is similar to Phoenician quays discovered by Raban at Akko and Atlit. The wall, which is now underwater ca. 0.30 m. owing to a slight fluctuation of sea level since its construction, clearly antedates the founding of Caesarea. Its presence suggests some other harbor facility at this location dating back to the Hellenistic era and perhaps even earlier. Test probes, undertaken on land along the inner face of this quay in 1981, revealed large quantities of Hellenistic pottery.

By the time of Caesarea's foundation, the earlier quay, perhaps already awash because of a gradual sea level change since its construction, was used as a lower course for a new sea wall built of the finely worked *kurkar* blocks held together by dovetail clamps, a heavy building technique found at various places along the coastline and associated with the age of Herod. Much later in the early Byzantine era, when the sea level had risen, this Herodian sea wall in turn served as a foundation for massive new fortifications. These maritime structures will be the focus of future land and underwater excavations.

Even at this stage of the explorations, it appears that the coastline of Caesarea Maritima saw considerable maritime use before the actual founding of this great metropolis. As Roller has shown above, there can be no doubt that a coastal station existed here. It may well have had a long history before its mention in this 3rd century document. It also seems that a harbor or harbors were associated with the settlement of Straton's Tower. There is the distinct possibility that the existence of significant harbor facilities may have been one of the reasons Herod selected this particular location for his magnificent new city.

NOTE

¹The Caesarea Ancient Harbour Excavation Project (CAHEP) operates under the aegis of the Center for Maritime Studies of the University of Haifa, the American Schools of Oriental Research, and the Israeli Department of Antiquities. CAHEP's director is Avner Raban; codirectors are John P. Oleson of the University of Victoria, B.C., R. Lindley Vann of the University of Maryland, and the author. I wish to thank the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Geographic Society, the Social Sciences and Research Humanities Council

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