



## **Press Release**

**Wednesday, April 26, 2017**

# **The Edmond de Rothschild Foundation is Investing more than NIS 100 Million in Exposing Caesarea's Hidden Treasures and Upgrading the Tourism Product**

**An unprecedented renewal project that will upgrade Israel's tourism product and enhance the glorious past and future of Caesarea, as well as the entire area, was announced at a press conference held today (Wednesday) by the Edmond de Rothschild Foundation, Caesarea Development Corporation, Israel Antiquities Authority and Israel Nature and Parks Authority**

**Among the archaeological discoveries that have been exposed and can be visited by the public – the altar of a temple built by King Herod c. 2,000 years ago in honor of Emperor Augustus and the goddess Roma, mentioned in the writings of Josephus Flavius, and the synagogue of Caesarea**

The Edmond de Rothschild Foundation, Caesarea Development Corporation, Israel Antiquities Authority and Israel Nature and Parks Authority today (Wednesday) announced cooperation on an unprecedented scale in exposing, conserving and making accessible the important public buildings of ancient Caesarea in Caesarea National Park, and developing and making the settlement's beaches accessible. This involves an overall investment of more than NIS 100 million that were allocated for the project by the Edmond de Rothschild Foundation and the Caesarea Development Corporation.

The Ancient Caesarea Renewal Project was announced to the public at a press conference that took place today in Caesarea National Park, with the participation of **Guy Swersky, vice chairman of the Edmond de Rothschild Foundation, Michael Karsenti, CEO of the Caesarea Development Corporation, Shaul Goldstein, director-general of the Israel Nature and Parks Authority and Dr. Doron Ben-Ami, the IAA Central Region archaeologist.** The renewal project enhances and upgrades the visitor's experience in Caesarea National Park as the foremost antiquities site in Israel, together with Jerusalem. The project is being implemented as part of realizing the vision of 3 million tourists in Caesarea by the year 2030, and is becoming an important tourist-economic anchor for the residents of the region.

One of the unique features of the project is the support of the general public – pupils from Or Akiva, cadets, students and ordinary citizens who come to volunteer and take part in the archaeological excavations at the various sites throughout Caesarea – turning Caesarea's fascinating past into a glorious future for the entire region.

Caesarea has been a vibrant port city since its establishment about 2,030 years ago and throughout the various ensuing periods. Its importance and architectural wealth made it one of the premier cities in the Roman and Byzantine Empires. The archaeological excavations that are being conducted at the site in recent years on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority, which are a continuation of the excavations



from the 1990's, have revealed many remains that range in date from the time of Herod until the Crusader period.

Together with the large-scale archeological excavations, extensive conservation and restoration measures and development of the harbor are taking place in Caesarea National Park. In fact, this is one of the largest and most important conservation projects ever undertaken in Israel. There is no other site in Israel where in recent years so many funds, resources and means of conservation and development have been allocated. This is a complex operation, which poses many challenges in planning and execution, while maintaining the values of the place. The project is being directed by **conservator Yoram Sa'ad and architect Ya'ara Shaltiel of the IAA Conservation Department**. Upon completion of these activities the Caesarea Development Corporation and Israel Nature and Parks Authority will construct an innovative visitor center, installations for benefit of visitors, a spectacular archaeological park and an enchanting promenade that will begin at the ancient aqueduct (Aqueduct Beach) and connect to the city wall and fortifications promenade of ancient Caesarea.

**Guy Swersky, vice chairman of the Edmond de Rothschild Foundation noted**, "Since its establishment the Edmond de Rothschild Foundation has contributed hundreds of millions of shekels to the advancement of higher education in Israel and has been at the forefront of innovative initiatives throughout the country. The foundation made a strategic decision to invest more than NIS 100 million in uncovering the layers of history and exposing the fascinating past of ancient Caesarea. This enormous project has unprecedented archaeological significance, but it is no less important as a catalyst for tourism and economic activity that will benefit the entire region. The wealth of artifacts already discovered in the excavations greatly enhances one's experience when visiting the national park and Caesarea's harbor, and provides a rare glimpse into the historical story of Caesarea as the Roman and Byzantine capital, and as an important rabbinic center for generation. The ancient Jewish past of the city, of Rabbi Akiva and the ten martyrs is revealed before our very eyes".

**Michael Karsenti, CEO of the Caesarea Development Corporation adds**, "For the first time, the three relevant entities – the Israel Antiquities Authority, Israel Nature and Parks Authority and Caesarea Development Corporation – are working together to implement a plan that will ensure the meticulous preservation of the archaeological, historical and nature values of Caesarea throughout all of the periods, along with making them easily accessible to the vast visiting public from Israel and the world. These works include exposing, conserving and making accessible the Old City and its treasures to visitors from Israel and abroad. We are meticulous about maintaining the "Caesarea Standard" – the highest level of planning and execution, as is customary in all activities undertaken by the Caesarea Development Corporation. The aim is to enrich and expose the centers of archaeological, cultural and religious content throughout ancient Caesarea – from Jisr az-Zarqa in the north by way of the aqueduct, the ancient harbor, to Kibbutz Sdot Yam and the Odeon – and turn them into the main tourism site in Israel, together with Jerusalem. This is a comprehensive development momentum that will change the reality and transform the entire area into an international tourist destination".

**According to Shaul Goldstein, director general of the Israel Nature and Parks Authority**, "It was in Caesarea that Hannah Szenes wrote the prayer '*My God, My God, I pray that these things never end...the prayer of Man*'. Szenes' poem is a continuation of the prayers that were uttered in the ancient synagogue from the time of the Second Temple, that is identified with Rabbi Akiva, who said '*Love*



*your fellow as yourself which is a great principle of the Torah*’ and was among the ten martyrs murdered by the Romans. As part of the project, the synagogue will be partially renovated and it will be permitted to hold ceremonies there. The launching of this exciting project, particularly during the period of national memorial days, symbolizes the connection to the roots and history of the people and this land. Caesarea was an important port city, a gateway to world culture in the Land of Israel. We are extremely pleased with the excellent cooperation that we have with the other parties and hope that the site will continue to attract a great many travelers. The Israel Nature and Parks Authority is working to develop the heritage sites in Israel, and this project is an important element in the discovery of additional parts of the story of the Land of Israel”.

**According to the Israel Antiquities Authority director Israel Hasson**, “The joint project is meant to expose, conserve and make use of Caesarea’s secrets for the enjoyment of the general public. To date, only about six percent of Caesarea's treasures have been discovered, and magnificent finds on a global scale are buried beneath its sand dunes. This initiative must be a springboard for an ongoing national project to develop the Caesarea site in all its glory. It should be noted that beyond the archaeological activity, groundbreaking conservation measures are being carried out led by the IAA Conservation Department. We consider this project an opportunity for fostering educational activities at the regional and national levels, and invite the public and discharged soldiers to come, work, volunteer, and be partners in this creative effort”.

**A number of significant archaeological discoveries and conservation measures were presented for the first time at the press conference:**

**A system of vaults in the front of the "temple platform" built by King Herod:**

At the center of the excavation and conservation activity is the impressive façade of the main public building of Caesarea from 2,030 years ago - the sacred precinct (*temenos*) that Herod built in Caesarea as a tribute to his patron Augustus, emperor of Rome, and to the goddess Roma. In his book *The Wars of the Jews* (I:408–414) Josephus describes the construction of the Temple of Augustus and Roma, which looked out over the sea. According to him, Herod built the temple at the top of the hill, and its size and appearance were wonderful. Inside the temple stood a huge statue of the emperor in the image of Olympian Zeus, and another statue of the goddess Roma, in the image of Hera of Argos. These sculptures have yet to be found in the excavation, and they may have been taken from the site in later periods. The hill mentioned by Josephus is actually an extensive artificial platform that is even evident in the area today, measuring about thirteen dunams. Archaeologists refer to this elevated area as the temple platform.

**In the most recent excavations, directed by Dr. Peter Gendelman and Mohammed Hater on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority, an impressive system of vaults was revealed that stood in the western facade of the temple platform.** “This façade included two halls (20 × 25 m) whose western side was open to the harbor, each of which was covered by four vaults. An array of smaller vaults constructed between the two halls supported a monumental staircase which led visitors from the harbor to the sacred precinct. One of the country’s largest conservation and development projects of an archaeological monument is being carried at the site. After the vaults are completely stabilized and



restored by the staff of the IAA Conservation Department, the site's main visitor center will be built inside them, which will tell the story of Caesarea over the years.

**Recently, a rare and important discovery was revealed at the front of the temple - the foundation of a large stone altar that stood in an enclosure, open to the sky, similar to Augustus' peace altar, the Ara Pacis, located in Rome.** This altar was used for sacrifices offered in honor of Emperor Augustus.

The foundations of other smaller altars were exposed alongside the main altar. According to the excavators, dozens of deep holes that were exposed in the excavation around the main altar were intended to hold torches or standards (symbols of the Roman legion carried by soldiers on poles). Josephus relates that when the Roman army burst into the Temple Mount, the soldiers set their standards up opposite the eastern gate, offered up a sacrifice and proclaimed Titus *imperator* (victor).

**According to researchers Gendelman and Hater,** "It is possible that the legionnaires in Caesarea also left their standards at the altar when they offered a sacrifice honoring the emperor in his temple. All these reflect the strong ties that existed between Caesarea and Rome, which spread its patronage over Herod's city, and the ceremonies that were held at Caesarea in honor of Emperor Augustus and the goddess Roma".

A major change in the sacred precinct occurred at the end of the fifth century CE, during the Byzantine period. An octagonal church was erected on the foundations of the Temple of Augustus and Roma. The altar built by Herod was dismantled, and a new entrance and staircase were constructed that connected the pier to the church. New vaults that served as storerooms were built on the foundations of the arched Herodian hall. With the establishment of Muslim Caesarea on the ruins of Roman and Byzantine Caesarea in the ninth and tenth centuries CE, some of the buildings that were still standing were reused, and new structures were erected in adjacent areas.

**The ancient synagogue in Caesarea** was first discovered in the 1940's. Archaeological excavations at the site revealed artifacts that attest to the presence of a synagogue from the Byzantine period, some 1,500 years ago. Among the finds that were exposed are column capitals adorned with menorah symbols, mosaics and inscriptions, including a dedication to donors and fragments of an inscription of the twenty-four priestly divisions. Synagogues were built in Caesarea since the time of Herod. In his book *The Wars of the Jews*, Josephus describes the desecration of a synagogue in Caesarea, which led to the outbreak of the Great Revolt in 66–70 CE. In the Talmud there is also a story about the "*kenista d'mardata*" (the synagogue of the revolt). It is also known that after the Romans suppressed the Bar Kokhba revolt (132-136 CE), Rabbi Akiva was brought to trial in Caesarea, and he was executed as one of the ten martyrs. Development work slated to be done at the site of the ancient synagogue will include conserving the remains, reconstructing the synagogue's mosaic and making the site accessible to the general public, while content that is related to the Jewish heritage of ancient Caesarea will be presented there.

**The Crusader market.** Impressive remains of a vibrant market place that existed in Caesarea during the Crusader period, more than 700 years ago, were revealed in an excavation conducted by Dr. Uzi 'Ad, Dan Kirzner and Mohammad Hater on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority, in the eastern part of the temple platform. The ground floor of the buildings that were exposed were occupied by shops and

their first floor was used as dwellings. Some of the rooms were paved with colorful mosaics; others were covered with marble slabs.

**A spectacular fountain (*nymphaeum*) from the Roman period.** A public fountain was built in the northwestern corner of the temple platform in the first century CE. The walls of the *nymphaeum* and the pool were treated with plaster and covered with paintings, and marble statues were placed in its three niches. The fountain was re-exposed in 2014 and the IAA Conservation Department carried out restoration work of the channel around the pool and the waterworks there.

### **Other Special Finds:**

The excavations in Caesarea in recent years have yielded interesting finds, including parts of marble statues, granite and marble capitals and columns, two of which bear inscriptions and drawings, coins, pottery vessels, stone objects and metal and bone items etc.

**A very important find that was just discovered recently while conserving the vaults attests to the Jewish life that existed in Caesarea** since the city was founded by Herod 2,000 years ago: **a tiny mother-of-pearl tablet engraved with a seven-branched candelabrum and a coal pan.** During the Middle Roman and Byzantine periods Caesarea was an important Jewish center, and the Jews were an integral part of the economic and social system of this multicultural city.

Another important find that was discovered in the Caesarea excavation project is **a statue of a ram that was found next to the vaults in the façade of the temple platform.** In Christian art the ram is often depicted carried on the shoulders of the “Good Shepherd” (that is, Jesus, who is portrayed as the shepherd tending his flock), and sometimes the ram is situated alongside of Jesus. The statue might have been part of the décor in the octagonal church from the sixth–seventh centuries CE at Caesarea. By the same token it could also be earlier, from the Roman period, and was incorporated in secondary use in the church structure”.

Still another interesting find is **a carved marble fragment of a figurine of the head of a bearded man from the Roman period.** According to Dr. Rivka Gersht of the Department of Classical Studies at Tel Aviv University, “The 2,000 year old head depicts Asclepius, the god of medicine. Asclepius and his daughter Hygieia, goddess of health, were of great importance in Roman and Byzantine Caesarea. It is interesting to note that several statues of Asclepius have been found so far in Caesarea, but this is the first time that his head has survived”.

**[Click here to download high resolution photographs of the works and discoveries in the Caesarea project:](#)**

- 1–2. Aerial view of the work in the harbor. Photographic credit: Griffin Aerial Photography.
3. The beginning of conservation work on the vaults at the front of the temple platform that Herod built in honor of Emperor Augustus and the goddess Roma.
- 4–6. Conservation work and reinforcement of the vaults at the front of the temple platform that Herod built in honor of Emperor Augustus and the goddess Roma.
7. The altar that Herod built in honor of Emperor Augustus and the goddess Roma at the front of the temple. Photographic credit: Griffin Aerial Photography.



8.

Volunteers

participating in the excavation and conservation work in the Caesarea project. In the picture: Architecture students from the Tel Aviv University. Photographic credit: Yoli Shwartz, Israel Antiquities Authority.

9. The Crusader market. Photographic credit: Assaf Peretz, Israel Antiquities Authority.

10. A public fountain (*nymphaeum*) from the Roman period. Photographic credit: Yoli Shwartz, Israel Antiquities Authority.

11. The ancient synagogue of Caesarea. Photographic credit: Assaf Peretz, Israel Antiquities Authority.

12. A visualization of the development plan of the ancient synagogue in Caesarea. Visualization: Architect Ya'ara Shaltiel and Architect Eldad Greenfeld, Israel Antiquities Authority.

13–14. The small tablet engraved with a seven-branched menorah and a coal pan. Photographic credit: Clara Amit, Israel Antiquities Authority.

15. Statue of a ram that was discovered next to the vaults at the front of the temple platform. Photographic credit: Caesarea Development Corporation.

16. Fragment of a figurine of the head of a bearded man from the Roman period depicting Asclepius, the god of medicine. Photographic credit: Clara Amit, Israel Antiquities Authority.

17. A video clip about the project. Photo: EYECON, courtesy of Israel Antiquities Authority.

18. A video clip (with English subtitles) about the project. Photo: EYECON, courtesy of Israel Antiquities Authority.

**For further information, kindly contact:**

**Yoli Shwartz – spokesperson for the Israel Antiquities Authority, 052-5991888**

**Tali Tenenbaum – spokesperson for the Israel Nature and Parks Authority, 050-6444477**

**Ahuva Leef – spokesperson for the Caesarea Development Company, 050-5513674**