

## Advanced schools in Caesarea Maritima during the third century AD<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** A short overview of Caesarea Maritima is succeeded by an examination of the schools dedicated to advanced learning in the capital of the Roman province of Palaestina during the third century AD. Although the available evidence is limited, it appears that these schools were quite numerous, primarily concentrating on religious education.

**Keywords:** Caesarea Maritima, schools, third century AD

### Caesarea Maritima: General Presentation

A city situated on the shore of the Mediterranean, Caesarea Maritima (Caesarea of Palestine) was built on the site of a Phoenician colony called Straton's Tower, most probably bearing the name of a king of Sidon in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. The one who embellished the city with buildings and gave it an outstanding makeover was Herod the Great, king of Judea and a client king of Rome (the character in the gospels), a ruler known for his remarkable architectural achievements, among which worth mentioning are the renovation of the Second Temple of Jerusalem, the erection of the fortress at Masada and of the Herodium. It is Herod himself who gives the name of the city: in honour of Caesar Augustus, the city will bear the name Caesarea and will emulate the models of other Gentile cities.

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The city had been colonised by the Jews as early as the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, who thus joined the Phoenicians. The Romans annexed it to the Province of Syria in 63 BC, and then ceded it to Herod in 31 BC. Nevertheless, the profile of the city, as elaborated by Herod, is that of a Roman ‘pagan’ city: if the port is a culturally neutral building, other buildings, such as the forum, the temple dedicated to Rome and to Caesar Augustus, the theatre, all indicate a ‘pagan’ city (see also Bull et al. 2017). Tiberieum and Hadrianeum will later on enhance the ‘pagan’ character of the city. Administratively, the city is run just as other Hellenistic cities: it has a ‘senate’, magistrates, and a royal resident.

When Judaea becomes a Roman province in 6 AD, Caesarea will become its civil and military capital, replacing Jerusalem. Under these circumstances, the city population rapidly increased, being estimated at around 70,000 inhabitants<sup>2</sup> of different ethnic origins and various religious identities. This seems to have been the cause of numerous revolts: in 26 AD, the Jews living in the city revolt against Pontius Pilate’s decision to display the banners of the Roman eagles on the Temple Mount, while in 66 AD the slaughter of birds in front of a synagogue will spark the Jewish revolt leading to the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. In 70 AD, following the suppression of the revolt, many Jews were killed in Caesarea during the games celebrating Titus’ victory.

Vespasian transforms the city in a colony (Pummer 2016, 174) in 71, turning it into one of the four colonised cities in the region of Syria and Phoenicia. The city is administered, as many others within the empire, by elite that could afford to support the city current expenses. However, Caesarea is the most economically developed city in Palestine.

The status of the city stands out clearly, from the Jewish perspective, in the Mosaic of Rehob: mostly inhabited by non-Jewish population, and situated outside the territory inhabited by the Jews after their return from the Babylonian captivity, the rules regarding sacrifices, kept all over the territory of Israel, do not fully apply in the case of Caesarea (Habas 1996; Levine 1996<sup>3</sup>). Nevertheless, the city was, even in this difficult situation, the home to many Jewish scholars. *Pirkei Avot* (6.9) tells how a third generation tanna, living in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, Jose ben Kisma, was lured to leave Caesarea of Palestine

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<sup>2</sup> See the estimates made by Reinhard Pummer, 2016, p. 174.

<sup>3</sup> Levine (1996, p. 399) confirms this: the Greek inscriptions of Caesarea that make reference to the life of the Jewish community follow the classification of offices as present in the diaspora, but they also contain elements specific to the Semitic inscriptions of the Palestine of that time.

in exchange of a great amount of dinars, gold and precious stones, but he refused to leave the ‘great city of scholars and scribes’.

The emergence of Christianity brings more diversity in the city’s already complex religious landscape: Paul the apostle is accommodated in Caesarea by Philip the deacon as the Christian Scriptures indicate (see the Acts of the Apostles 21: 8; also 6: 1-5). It is here that Peter baptizes Cornelius the centurion (the first one to be baptized among the Gentiles – see the Acts of the Apostles 10: 11), thus becoming a place of refuge for the apostle Paul when he was in danger in Jerusalem (see the Acts of the Apostles 9: 30). Eusebius of Caesarea, bishop of the city in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, draws up a list of the bishops of this see, Theophilus being mentioned first in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.<sup>4</sup> It may well be the case that among the ‘Jews’ executed by the Romans after Bar Kochba’s revolt were also Christians, since the distinction would have been difficult to make by someone unfamiliar with the situation in the East.

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, the population of the city is both multi-ethnic and multireligious. This implies tensions, as it is always the case wherever that may happen, but it equally means reciprocal influences. The Roman, Greek, and Oriental cults co-existed side-by-side. Samaritans<sup>5</sup>, Jews and Christians were permanently interacting with one another.

One may suppose that there were interactions between Christians and Jews<sup>6</sup>, between Christian scholars and the Jewish scholars and rabbis of Caesarea: these are mentioned in writing both by the Christians, and by rabbinic sources, indicating several sources of information and, among others, generically referring to some minim (most probably Christians) who go into debate with rabbinic authorities<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> See Eusebius of Caesarea. 1857. *Historia ecclesiastica*, 5.23.25. *Constitutiones apostolicae*, mention the bishops of the 1<sup>st</sup> century: Zacchaeus the tax-collector, Cornelius (the centurion?), Theophilus (the one Luke’s Gospel is addressed to?), 1048b-1049a.

<sup>5</sup> For generic information about the Samaritan population of Caesarea, see Pummer, 2000, pp. 181-202.

<sup>6</sup> One has to notice the very reserved assumption in Stemberg, 2010, p. 438, who considers that such contacts between Jews and Christians would have been possible in cities along the Mediterranean coast, such as, for instance, Caesarea, but the Abodah Zarah can also be a sign of the Jews’ reticence towards meeting the Gentiles.

<sup>7</sup> It is exemplary the conversation carried by Rabbi Abbahu with several minim (most probably Christians), conveyed by the Babylonian Talmud in the treatise Abodah Zarah 4a: Rabbi Safra, a Jew from Babylon present in Caesarea of Palestine, is approached by minim in a matter of scriptural interpretation. Receiving no answer, the minim denounce Rabbi Safra for incompetence before Rabbi Abbahu. The latter explains: Rabbi Safra is skilled in tannaitic teachings, but not in the Scriptures (as those from Babylon), while Jews from Caesarea, due to their endless polemics with the minim, studied the Scriptures thoroughly.

There have been discussions about the kind of interaction taking place between Christians (those known to us through their writings) and Jews. The lack of clarifying information encourages speculation: in the case of the Christian Origen, an inhabitant of 3<sup>rd</sup> century Caesarea, some posit a peaceful relationship with the Jews (de Lange), others speak about a competitive situation (Runia, Blowers)<sup>8</sup>, or even about a superficial contact (Brooks).<sup>9</sup>

### **Caesarea of Palestine: Third century schools**

A regrettable fact is that there is no mention of any active philosophical school in Caesarea in the 3<sup>rd</sup> AD. This does not however exclude the possibility that it once existed (the city was built as the ‘pagan’ counterpart of Judea; there were ‘classical’ institutions present; in the city that became the province capital, there was also an elite providing the conditions for a significant intellectual life), just as it could have been the case that certain disciplines had outstanding representatives in Caesarea. But mere conjectures are not enough to make up an argument.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, there is no mention of any school of the Samaritans existing in Caesarea. It is difficult to estimate the situation of the Samaritan institutions in the city (whether they existed or not: the oldest Samaritan writings extant today were dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD – the ones previous to this date must have disappeared during the Christian or Islamic anti-Samaritan persecutions, unless they perished due to the elements; Samaritan *halakhah* manuscripts extant nowadays go no further back than the Middle Ages<sup>11</sup>). The doctrinal differences between the Samaritans, on the one hand, and the Mosaic and Christian adepts, on the other, must have been subject of discussion (the

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<sup>8</sup> According to Hirshman, 1996<sup>1</sup>, pp. 74-75, Origen polemicises against rabbinical doctrines.

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion on perspectives, see Otto, 2018, pp. 98-100. For a bibliography of the studies focusing on the relationship between Origen and the Jews, see McGuckin, 1999, p. 23.

<sup>10</sup> Burrell, 1993, pp. 287-295, offers the text of a Greek inscription discovered on a marble column excavated in the area of the palace on the headland of Caesarea, according to which Varius Seleukos, curator of the ships of Caesarea, thanks his patron, Titus Flavius Maximus, philosopher (p. 291). Supposing that „philosopher” does not have a generic meaning in this case, we have here the confirmation that there was a philosophical practitioner in Caesarea of Palestine. Burrell considers that the inscription would have been made after the year 71, when Caesarea becomes a colony, but before Probus’ rule (276-282). It is difficult to find out who this Titus Flavius Maximus was (his name is found on a tomb stone in Carthage and the person bearing it was a procurator Augusti in the Eastern provinces). His identification with Maximus of Tyre (Cassius Maximus Tyrius) is doubtful, given the name written on the column.

<sup>11</sup> See Pummer, 2000, p. 182.

Samaritans accepted only the Torah, with changes here and there as compared to the Jewish version, rejected the Mosaic traditions, and considered Garizim as the mountain indicated by God to perform the cultic ceremonies), but there are no written testimonies of Samaritan origin about all these facts. As such, what we know about the Samaritans originates solely from the way they were reflected in the Christian or Mosaic writings. For the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, we have only Christian witnesses belonging to Origen, of certain dating, which nevertheless convey nothing about any Samaritan ‘school’ or scholar.

Certainly, one may speculate about the existence of a Samaritan ‘school’, given that the city was very important for the Mosaics, with who the Samaritans were in direct competition. But then again, one cannot argue based on conjectures.

There is however mention about rabbinic and Christian ‘schools’ existing in Caesarea of Palestine in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, and about the scholars in charge of them. Such mentions are present in various writings.

The available texts (both Christian and rabbinic) confirming the existence of such ‘schools’ are diverse in terms of authorship and dating.

Thus, we know the names of Christian authors (Origen, Pamphilus, Eusebius) who led ‘research groups’ or ‘schools’, and the writing of their works can be (even approximately) dated. For instance, the Christian Origen settles in Caesarea of Palestine in 232<sup>12</sup>, following disputes with the Bishop of Alexandria, Demetrius (see Heine 2010, 145-170). From there he travels to various parts of the empire, thus settling in the multi-ethnic and multireligious city.<sup>13</sup> According to the relevant literature, Origen founded a ‘school’ in Caesarea, most likely following the model of the one he was in charge of in Alexandria.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Origen makes his first trip to Caesarea already in 215, so it may well be that his interactions with the Jews living in Caesarea took place prior to him settling down in the city (unless there had been Jews of Caesarea living in Alexandria at the time Origen lived there, without their presence being attested in the extant writings of the interpreter).

<sup>13</sup> In the 4<sup>th</sup> century, Epiphanius of Salamis conveys a piece of information that contradicts the Vulgate: Origen would have lived for only two years in Caesarea, and then moved to Tyre, where he lived for 28 more years. See Panarion, 1863, 2.403-2.406. Few contemporary authors give Epiphanius credit for this (see, for instance, Panayotis Tzamalikos, 2020, p. X).

<sup>14</sup> Information about the curriculum of this school and the authors studied there is provided by one of Origen’s disciples, Gregory, who also wrote an Address of Thanksgiving to Origen, a discourse that has come down to us (see *Oratio panegyrica in Origenem*, 1857, col. 1051-1104). The relevant literature is quasi-unanimous in speaking about this ‘school’; one has to notice that Eusebius of Caesarea gives us very little details about any institution run by Origen in Caesarea in his *Historia ecclesiastica*, chapter 6.

There seems to be a succession of the ‘diadochi’: this Christian ‘school’ of Caesarea is ruled, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, by Pierius, followed by Pamphilus, the master of Eusebius of Caesarea.

The Christian Pamphilus and Eusebius (the latter carrying out a prodigious literary activity in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, which goes beyond the area of interest of the present text) lived in 3<sup>rd</sup> century Caesarea, built an impressive library (gathering manuscripts and copying them), which implies at least the existence of a ‘research center’, but also of disciples: Eusebius was so attached to Pamphilus as his disciple that he called himself ‘Eusebius of Pamphilus’. Pamphilus ran a ‘school’ and we know several names of disciples (Eusebius, Apphianus, Aedesius, and Porphyrius).

On the other hand, Mosaic literature gathers many testimonies – though unfortunately disparate and not always of great credibility,<sup>15</sup> considering the way in which the texts conveying the testimonies<sup>15</sup> were written – about 3<sup>rd</sup> century scholars and rabbis connected, one way or another, with Caesarea of Palestine<sup>16</sup>, and about scholars in charge of ‘schools’. It was even hypothesized that there was a ‘rabbinic academy’ in Caesarea that would have produced the *Nezikin Treatise* in the *Jerusalem Talmud*. The hypothesis, which is a matter of controversy, is still under investigation at the moment.<sup>17</sup> This does not however imply that we lack the material needed to reconstruct an ‘academic’ rabbinical context in 3<sup>rd</sup> century Caesarea.

Hayim Lapin (1996) mainly focuses on two important names in the rabbinical tradition: Rabbi Jose b. Hanina and Rabbi Abbahu. The researcher’s conclusion, taking into account what the written

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<sup>15</sup> Thus, in the context of 3<sup>rd</sup> century Caesarea AD, both the tannaim and the amoraim are mentioned: Hiyya, Iosua b. Levi, R. Samuel of Nehardea, R. Hanina, Bar Kappara, R. Abbahu, R. Chalafta of Caesarea, R. Manna, Isaac ben Eleazar, Zuga of Caesarea, R. Hezekiah, R. Jochanan, R. Jose b. Hanina, R. Ammi, R. Marinos, R. Hoshaya. Some of them are inhabitants of the city, where they run ‘schools’, while others travel to Caesarea for discussions on religious matters or to mediate for their communities before the emperor’s representative. A few episodes evoking the counselling offered by the rabbinical circles of Caesarea of Palestine are illustrated in Miller, 2006, pp. 294-295.

<sup>16</sup> The discussion of the credibility of the information supplied by the Talmud is ongoing: Jacob Neusner, for instance, has questioned the justification of attributing the traditions conveyed by Talmudic literature, coming up with principles of selecting the materials that can be attributed to the known authors of the Talmud with sound arguments.

<sup>17</sup> The hypothesis goes back to Israel Lewy in 1895: in his commentary on the *Nezikin Treatise* in the *Jerusalem Talmud*, he remarks that the latter must have been composed in a special place (the great number of Greek and Latin terms represented an important argument). One disciple, Saul Liberman, proposed as the place of its composition Caesarea of Palestine; another, J. N. Epstein, refuted the hypothesis. For a concise presentation of the idea, see Hirshman, 1996<sup>2</sup>, pp. 469-475. See also Lapin, 1996, pp. 496-512.

testimonies convey to us, is that the ‘Christian school’ run by Origen and the ‘rabbinical schools’ contemporary to him in Caesarea have a similar organisation (a scholar surrounded by disciples, in relation with other scholars, masters or colleagues). Moreover, both types of schools were the product of wealthy elite that was establishing ‘orthodoxy’ in the context of its own religion, playing a significant transformative role. The significant difference Hayim Lapin notices between the two types of ‘schools’ is their commitment to what is external to them: the ‘Christian school’ assumes the Greek-Latin culture either polemically or peacefully, whereas the ‘Mosaic school’ shows openness only to the Aramaic-speaking audience (see Lapin 1996, 499-500).

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