

Shlomit Weksler-Bdolah, *Aelia Capitolina—Jerusalem in the Roman Period in Light of Archaeological Research (Mnemosyne Supplements – 432)*, Brill, Leiden–Boston 2019, 244 pp., 97 figs.; ISSN 2352-8656; ISBN 978-90-04-40733-6

The progress of research on Jerusalem’s past since 1967 is so vast that it is difficult to keep track of it all. The main reason for these developments is the intensive archaeological research that has taken place in the “Holy City.” So much data has been accumulated that using it to recreate a picture of the city in various periods of its history is extremely difficult.

One of the less well-known stages in the history of Jerusalem is the one when it bore the name Colonia Aelia Capitolina. During this period, the city lost its previous ethnic, cultural and religious characteristics. Emperor Hadrian settled veterans there, while the city received the status of colony and a new name, and as a result its urban layout changed radically. There is also a shortage of written sources from the period, and those we do have are unclear and therefore of limited value. As a result, our knowledge of various aspects of the life, history and shape of the city of Aelia Capitolina is mostly based on epigraphic, numismatic and archaeological evidence. An especially significant source of knowledge is archaeological data, the amount of which is increasing steadily and rapidly, and which frequently makes it necessary to reinterpret previous findings. However, it is considerably harder to make adequate use of this information, as the results of archaeologists’ work are often published only many years after conclusion of excavations. An excellent tool has arrived to help scholars in this difficult situation, in the guise of Shlomit Weksler-Bdolah’s archaeological guide to the remains of Aelia Capitolina, *Aelia Capitolina—Jerusalem in the Roman Period in Light of Archaeological Research*.

The author is an archaeologist, associated professionally with the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) and for many years carrying out excavations at various sites within the Old City of Jerusalem. This book is a successful attempt to show the urban development of the “Holy City” in the period between 70 and 400 CE on the basis of archaeological data. Though based on her doctoral dissertation, presented in 2011 at the Hebrew University, it also covers areas not included in this work (p. xii), as well as taking into account the current state of archaeological research, using published reports, unpublished accounts from the IAA archive and information obtained directly from the heads of excavations carried out in various areas of the Old City.

The book consists of eight chapters of varying lengths. It opens with the “Introduction” (pp. 1–18), an important part of which is subsections on the history of research on Aelia Capitolina from the end of the 19th century to the present (pp. 6–14) as well as the

historical and archaeological evidence concerning its urban layout (pp. 14–18). Analysis of these sources leaves no doubt that the urbanised area of the colony did not exceed the boundaries of the Old City. In Chapter II (“The Camp of the Legion X Fretensis,” pp. 19–50), the author tackles the issue of the camp’s location, which has long been a matter of debate among scholars (cf. pp. 6–14). Among the numerous hypotheses that have been presented, the most likely is the one based on Josephus (*BJ* 7.1–2), according to whom the legion’s camp was located on the Western Hill. Weksler-Bdolah also agrees with this view. Based on an analysis of various types of artefacts connected to the presence of *leg. X Fretensis* in Jerusalem, she shows that the legion’s camp occupied an area almost twice as large as has previously been thought (see Fig. 12). Thanks to these findings, it was possible to reconstruct the probable shape of the fortifications surrounding the camp and the course of the *via principalis* and *via decumana*, as well as to identify other material evidence of the camp’s operation (pp. 26–42). The conclusions the author presents are well documented and make it possible to better define the place and role of the legion in the life of Aelia Capitolina (pp. 42–50). This chapter is certainly the most detailed and also most complete presentation of the presence of the *leg. X Fretensis* camp in the subject literature to date. This is not to say, of course, that the author succeeded in finding a satisfactory response to all the questions connected to this presence. But it is possible that further research will provide answers to at least some of them.

Chapter III (“Aelia Capitolina,” pp. 51–130) features an analysis of archaeological data concerning the urban layout of the colony. This information permitted the author to reconstruct a map of Aelia Capitolina, determining where the main streets ran and the location of the city gates and certain places of worship and public buildings (Fig. 24). Chapter IV (“Aelia Capitolina in the Fourth Century,” pp. 131–146) concerns the phase of the history of Aelia Capitolina associated with its Christianisation in the 4th century CE (pp. 142–144). This process was characterised not only by the demolition of old temples on the emperors’ orders, with increasing numbers of Christian ones erected in their place. It was also marked by the arrival of new residents causing a growth in the inhabited area of the city (cf. Fig. 74), as well as the continuing change in Aelia Capitolina’s cultural aspect, manifested in the increasing presence of Greek in daily and public life. The author described this time as “a century of change” (p. 146). In her view, this phase ended when the city was surrounded by new defence walls in the first half of the 5th century CE, marking the beginning of a new, Byzantine chapter in its history.

The next three chapters (V: “Water Supply: Cisterns, Pools and Aqueducts,” pp. 147–150; VI: “The City’s Cemeteries,” pp. 151–168; VII: “The Rural Hinterland of Aelia Capitolina,” pp. 169–200) concern the infrastructure needed for delivering water to the colony and burying its inhabitants, the roads leading out of Aelia Capitolina, and its economic hinterland, in broad terms, in relation to the presence and economic activity of *leg. X Fretensis* (pp. 183–185), various forms of settlement near to the colony (pp. 185–195), and associated cemeteries (pp. 195–198).

The final chapter (VIII: “The City and Its Population 70 CE–c. 400 CE: Discussion and Summary,” pp. 201–210) contains a concise summary of the arguments given in the book (pp. 207–210) and observations on the changes that took place in the topography of Aelia Capitolina in the period from the 1st to the 4th century CE (pp. 201–202), the types of building materials and ceramics used in the colony (pp. 202–203), religious life

and burial practices (pp. 204–205), the nature of the epigraphic documents from Aelia Capitolina and its environs, and their language (pp. 205–206).

This brief overview of the book's contents is unable to convey the wealth of details concerning archaeological data, interpretations and conclusions the author discusses and analyses. It is important to note that by using results of archaeological research conducted in Jerusalem and the surrounding area that have been published as well as those as yet unavailable to scholars more widely, the author sketches a picture of Aelia Capitolina, its urban layout and various aspects of its life that no one has hitherto managed to provide. An undoubted virtue of this picture is not only the new archaeological data that helped to create it but also the impressive and very high-quality original photographic, graphic and cartographic documentation that accompanies it. Much of these are published in this book for the first time. Particularly noteworthy are the maps of Aelia Capitolina in various periods of its history produced by the author (see Figs. 24, 74, 75), including one concerning her proposed location of the *leg. X Fretensis* camp (Fig. 12). But it is regrettable that there is no archaeological map of contemporary Jerusalem with all the archaeological remnants of Aelia Capitolina mentioned in the book. A reader lacking the author's level of familiarity with the topography of the city could have problems identifying the precise location of the finds and sites.

There is no doubt that this book brings many new elements to our knowledge on the life and activities of Aelia Capitolina's residents, urban layout and its transformations. Scholars are likely to use it for a long time as a source of knowledge on this period from Jerusalem's past. It is important, however, for readers to remember that it is first and foremost an archaeological portrait of the city, and only to a limited extent a historical one.

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