

# The *carceres* of the Herodian hippodrome/ stadium at Caesarea Maritima and connections with the Circus Maximus

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The Herodian hippodrome/stadium at Caesarea was exposed between 1992 and 1998.<sup>1</sup> It runs parallel to the shore between the Herodian harbour and the theatre, at the location specified by Josephus.<sup>2</sup> Josephus refers to the structure as an amphitheatre but it is clear from him<sup>3</sup> and from the archaeological evidence to be described below that equestrian events were an integral part of the games held in it.<sup>4</sup> In the very late Republic and early Empire, the term amphitheatre was used indifferently to designate a stadium or a hippodrome rather than the traditional Roman oval *amphitheatrum*.<sup>5</sup> Josephus also calls this building 'the great stadium' in conjunction with events at the time of the procurator Pontius Pilate in A.D. 26,<sup>6</sup> and it was still known by that name in the 4th c.<sup>7</sup> It was inaugurated in 10/9 B.C.<sup>8</sup> The games held included athletics (*gymnika*), horse- and chariot-races (*hippika*), and Roman spectacles (*munera gladiatorum* and *venationes*),<sup>9</sup> so the structure had to serve the needs of the contestants and spectators of all these events. The present article is a preliminary report that focuses on the *carceres* excavated by the team from the University of Haifa, but it will first be helpful to summarize the history of the building as a whole as known from the adjacent work by the Israel Antiquities Authority.

- 1 The structure was divided between two expeditions: the first, by the Israel Antiquities Authority under Y. Porath, exposed the *cavea* and most of the arena; the second, by the University of Haifa under J. Patrich, exposed the starting gates and a strip c.40 m wide of the adjacent arena. For preliminary reports on the IAA work see Y. Porath, "Herod's 'amphitheatre' at Caesarea: a multipurpose entertainment building," in J. H. Humphrey (ed.), *The Roman and Byzantine Near East* (JRA Suppl. 14, 1995) 15-27; id., "Herod's 'amphitheatre' at Caesarea (preliminary notice)," *Atiqot* 25 (1995) 11-19 [Hebrew] and *Qadmoniot* 112 (1996) 93-99 [Hebrew] (on information up to the 1995 season); for the Haifa work see J. Patrich, *ASOR Newsletter* 47.2 (1997) A43-44, and *infra* n.9.
- 2 *AntJ* 15.9.6 (341); *BJ* 1.21.8 (415).
- 3 *AntJ*. 16.5.1 (137-41).
- 4 The same is true of the hippodrome/amphitheatre structures at Jerusalem and Jericho (cf. J. Jeremias, *ZDPV* 54 [1931] 279-89).
- 5 R. Etienne, "La naissance de l'amphithéâtre: le mot et la chose," *REL* 43 (1966) 213-20; J. H. Humphrey in A. Raban and K. G. Holum (edd.), *Caesarea Maritima. A retrospective after two millennia* (Leiden 1996) 121-29.
- 6 *BJ* 2.9.3. (172); at *AntJ* 18.3.1 (57) it is called simply a stadium (the context suggests that the event took place near the Roman *praetorium* on the site of Herod's palace — that is, in the structure under discussion here).
- 7 Euseb., *History of the martyrs of Palestine* (Syriac text, Eng. transl. by W. Cureton) (London 1861) 21-23 (Syr.), 19-21 (Eng.); 51 (Syr.), 47 (Eng.); Eusèbe de Césarée, *Les martyrs en Palestine, text grec, traduction et notes* (ed. G. Bardy; Sources chrétiennes 55, 1967) VI. 3-7 (pp. 139-40 [Greek]). Christian martyrs were let as prey for wild beasts in the stadium. Eusebius, a resident of Caesarea, speaks about events that he and other citizens had seen, so his testimony that the locals identified the building as a stadium is significant. Hunts (*venationes*) conducted in a stadium are also familiar from the Rabbinic sources: M. Bava Qamma 4.4; cf. M. 'Avodah Zarah 1.7.
- 8 *BJ* 1.21.8 (415). See the comment by Marcus in the Loeb transl. of *AntJ* 15.9.6 (341) p. 165; A. Schalit, *Herodes: Der Mann und sein Werk* (Berlin 1969) 127-31; D. R. Schwartz, "Caesarea and its 'Isactium'," in *Studies of the Jewish background of Christianity* (Tübingen 1992) 167-81; M. Lämmer, *Kölner Beiträge zur Sportwissenschaft* 3 (1974) 95-164.
- 9 For further details on the games held in this structure see J. Patrich, "Herod's hippodrome/stadium at Caesarea and the games conducted therein," in L. Rutgers (ed.), *What has Athens to do with Jerusalem* (*Essays in honor of Gideon Foerster*) (Louvain 2001).