

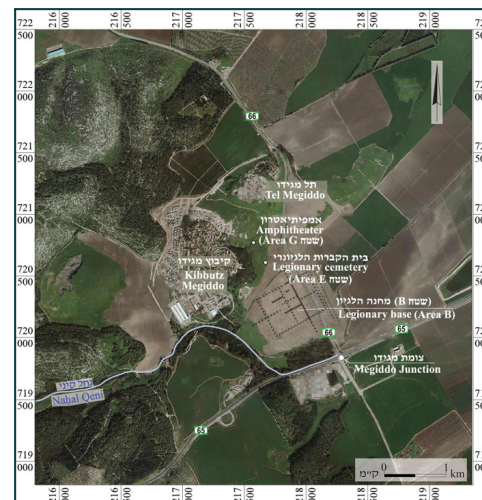
Legio – 2023

Mark Letteney, Matthew J. Adams, Margaret Cohen,
Wiesław Więckowski, Emily Anderson, Julia Chyla, Chana
Farrell, Andrea Garza Díaz-Barriga and Yotam Tepper

22/04/2025
Preliminary Report

In June and July 2023, excavations were conducted at Legio (License No. J-23/2023; map ref. 217762–8040/720007–585), as part of a research project on the Roman military base at the site, serving the II Traiana and IV Ferrata legions. The excavation, undertaken on behalf of the Jezreel Valley Regional Project (JVRP), was directed by M.J. Adams and Y. Tepper, with the assistance of M. Letteney (assistant director; Area G supervisor), M. Cohen (Area B supervisor), W. Więckowski (paleoanthropology; Area E supervisor), H. Azrad (registration), E. Anderson, J. Chyla, H. Farrell and A. Garza (assistants to area supervisors), L. Perry-Gal (archaeozoology), Y. Gorin-Rosen (glass), O. Peleg-Barkat (architecture), W. Eck (epigraphy), A. Shapiro and N. Willer (geology), B. Zin and H. Mamalia (quarrying methods), R. Linn (conservation), E. Ernenwein (remote sensing), J. Dray and N. Mammon (metal detector), Israel Institute of Archaeology (logistics), A. Lavit-Cohen (community outreach) and A. Linder and G. Tal of Kibbutz Megiddo (security and logistics). Further support was provided by the IAA and the community of Kibbutz Megiddo, with assistance from workers from Jenin, students and volunteers allocated by the JVRP, as well as from Kibbutz Megiddo and the wider region.

The 2023 excavation season at Legio continued to investigate the Roman army legionary base (*castrum*) situated at the site between the early second and late third – early fourth centuries CE at latest, first for the II Triana legion and later for the VI Ferrata legion (Tepper, David and Adams 2016; Adams et al. 2019) and previously identified in a survey (Tepper 2002). The excavation continued the work in Areas B, E and G (Fig. 1) that had been opened in the previous seasons (Tepper, David and Adams 2016; [Adams, Tepper and Cohen 2023](https://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/Report_Detail_Eng.aspx?id=26263&mag_id=135) (https://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/Report_Detail_Eng.aspx?id=26263&mag_id=135); Letteney et al. 2025 (https://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/Report_Detail_Eng.aspx?id=26643&mag_id=139&previewit=TrUe)). The expedition returned to excavate in the central part of the *castrum*, the headquarters building (*principia*; Area B), in a part of the building identified as a cultic chamber dedicated to the imperial cult (*sacellum*), referred to as the western *sacellum* complex and which was part of a basilical hall of the *principia*. Additional work was conducted on a ridge where Roman-period cremated interments were uncovered, which were part of the legionary cemetery (Area E; see Tepper et al. 2021), and in the eastern gate of the



1. Location map.
(Images//j23-1(1).jpg)



2. Area B, remains of the altar in the main sacellum, looking southwest.
(Images//J23-2(1).jpg)



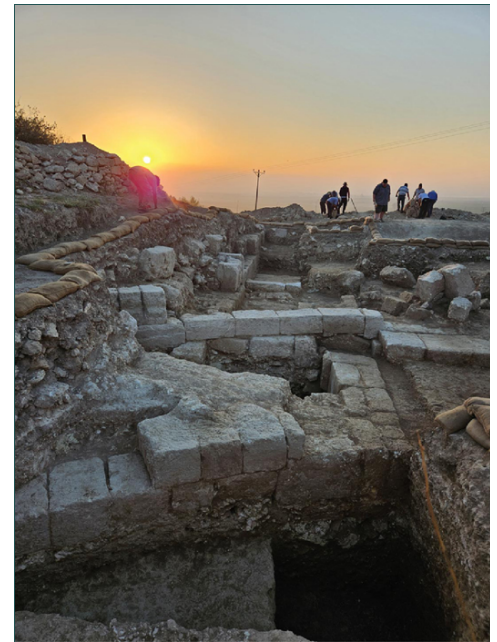
3. Area E, a cremation burial from the legionary cemetery.
(Images//J23-3(1).jpg)

legionary amphitheater (Area G), both areas also excavated in the 2022 season (Letteney et al. 2025).

Area B. The excavation in this area continued to expose the western part of the *principia*'s *sacellum*, last excavated in 2019, with the aim of connecting that part of the excavation with other parts opened in 2015 and 2017 (Adams et al. 2019; Adams, Tepper and Cohen 2023 (https://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/Report_Detail_Eng.aspx?id=26263&mag_id=135)). To date, the expedition exposed half of the basilical hall at the rear of the *principia*, while the 2023 season went on to fully reveal the *sacellum*'s central altar (Fig. 2), identifying two major building phases of this part of the structure: an early phase in which the altar was flanked by a rectangular 'apse' and a late phase in which that construction was modified into an apse with a traditional rounded shape; the modified apse reused stones from the partly dismantled original construction. While absolute dates for the remodeling of the *sacellum* are not yet available, it appears that the change occurred during the period of occupation by the Roman legion (early second–early fourth centuries CE). A phase of stone robbing appears to have occurred in the Byzantine (fourth–seventh centuries CE) and Early Islamic (seventh–ninth centuries CE) periods based on the ceramics found from these periods. Evidence for the secondary use of the *principia* furnishings was found in a room immediately to the north of the *sacellum*, though the precise nature and date of the reuse have yet to be determined.

Area E. The legionary cemetery, previously excavated in the 2020 and 2022 seasons, was further exposed in a northward direction in 2023, revealing numerous cremation burials in pottery vessels (Fig. 3). Some of these burials were found beneath rectangular stone grave markers. Funerary offerings and other small finds of glass, metal and pottery vessels were recorded near several of the burials.

Area G. Excavations in the eastern gate of the legionary amphitheater (*ludus*) confirmed the expectation that it was constructed in the Roman period (second–third centuries CE; Tepper 2002). The gate was shown to comprise at least two phases: an early phase, which culminated in the dismantling of much of the construction, followed by infilling, and a late phase in which the gate was rebuilt with the new wall meant to enclose an expanded arena (*cavea*; Fig. 4). In the early phase, the gate was erected atop a leveling fill and comprised a curved wall of limestone ashlar that had enclosed the amphitheater's *cavea*, of which two courses survived. The excavation further revealed the remains of a foundation wall from this phase built atop bedrock (2 m high), which apparently supported the entrance threshold of a monumental gate complex. The amphitheater's late phase comprised the remains of a gate threshold, a limestone vault and decorative architectural elements that had collapsed. At that time, a new curved arena wall was constructed 3.3 m east of the earlier wall, suggesting the enlargement of the *cavea*.



4. Area G, remains of the eastern gate of the amphitheater, looking east. (Images/J23-4(1).jpg)

The 2023 excavation season at Legio uncovered the western part of the legionary *principia*'s main *sacellum* (for a discussion of the expected location of additional *sacella* along the *principia*'s western wall, see Tepper, Adams and Ernenwein 2023). Further research in this area will enable us to precisely date the two documented phases of use of this structure and the time of its abandonment by the Roman legionary forces. The excavation revealed extensive stone looting dating back to a period that began in the early or mid-fourth century CE and continued through to the Early Islamic period. The evidence of stone looting in this area corresponds to the timing of such activities documented in the *principia*. Also documented during this season were two construction phases of the eastern gate of the amphitheater and its arena wall, both of which will be more precisely dated through further analysis of the small finds. The additional cremation burials recorded in the legionary cemetery allow for a detailed study of the funerary customs associated with the legionary base, which are atypical for the local population in the region.

Adams M.J., Cradic M., Farhi Y., Peers M. and Tepper Y. 2019. A Betyl with a Decorated Base from the Principia of the Roman VIth Ferrata Legionary Base, Legio, Israel. *Israel Museum Studies in Archaeology* 9:68–91.

Adams M.J., Tepper Y. and Cohen S.L. 2023. Legio – 2019. *HA-ESI* 135 (https://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/Report_Detail_Eng.aspx?id=26263&mag_id=135).

Letteney M., Adams M.J., Więckowski W. and Tepper Y. 2025. Legio – 2022. *HA-ESI* 137 (https://www.hadashot-esi.org.il/Report_Detail_Eng.aspx?id=26643&mag_id=139&previewit=TrUe).

Tepper Y. 2002. Lajjun – Legio in Israel: Results of a Survey in and around the Military Camp Area. In P. Freeman, J. Bennett, Z.T. Fiema and B. Hoffmann eds. *Limes XVIII 1 (Proceedings of the XVIIIth International Congress of Roman Frontier Studies held in Amman, Jordan, September 2000)* (BAR Int. S. 1084). Oxford. Pp. 231–242.

Tepper Y., David J. and Adams M.J. 2016. Excavations at the Camp of the Roman Sixth Ferrata Legion at Legio (El-Lajjun), Israel: A Preliminary Report of the 2013 Season. *Strata BAIAS* 34:87–120.

Tepper Y., Eck W., Leyfirer G. and Adams M.J. 2021. A Roman Military Funerary Inscription from the Legionary Base of the VI Ferrata at Legio, Israel. *Tel Aviv* 48:248–266. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03344355.2021.1958626> (<https://doi.org/10.1080/03344355.2021.1958626>)

Tepper Y., Adams M.J. and Ernenwein E. 2023. The Principia of the Sixth Legion at Legio/Caparotani: Ground Penetrating Radar and Excavations in a Legionary

Base. 'Atiqot 111:149–174. <https://doi.org/10.70967/2948-040X.1066>

(<https://doi.org/10.70967/2948-040X.1066>)

1. Location map. (Images//j23-1(1).jpg)

2. Area B, remains of the altar in the main sacellum, looking southwest. (Images//J23-
2(1).jpg)

3. Area E, a cremation burial from the legionary cemetery. (Images//J23-3(1).jpg)

4. Area G, remains of the eastern gate of the amphitheater, looking east. (Images//J23-
4(1).jpg)