

Legio – 2022

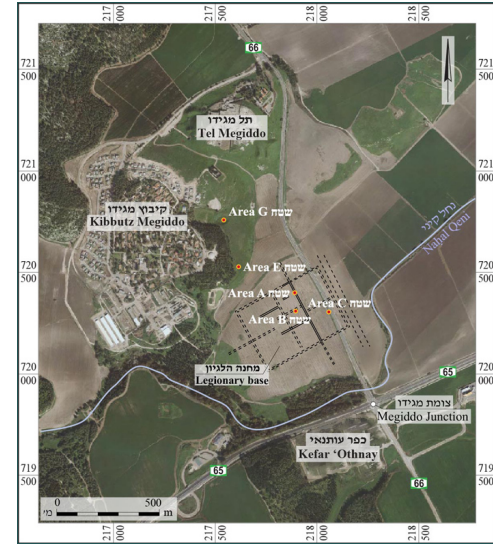
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Preliminary Report

In May and June 2022, excavations were conducted at Legio (License No. J-19/2022; map ref. 217762–8040/720007–585) as part of a research project on the Roman legionary base at the site (the II Traiana and VI Ferrata Legions). The excavation, on behalf of the Jezreel Valley Regional Project (JVRP), was directed by M.J. Adams, S. Cohen and Y. Tepper, with the assistance of M. Letteney (assistant director, area supervisor), S. Gutfeld and O. Gutfeld (administration), A. Linder of Kibbutz Megiddo (security and logistics), K. Fauria, T. Keep and L. Nash (area supervisor assistants), H. Azrad (registration), W. Więckowski (paleoanthropology), L. Perry-Gal (archaeozoology), Y. Gorin-Rosen (glass), T. Levine (pottery restoration), A. Shapiro (geology), H. Mamalya (quarrying), R. Linn (conservation), E. Ernenwein (remote sensing), T. Meltsen (artistic reconstruction), S. Huot (OSL dating) and S. 'Ad (drawing). Further assistance was provided by workers from Jenin, volunteers allocated by the JVRP, and those from Kibbutz Megiddo.

The excavation site is located southeast and adjacent to Kibbutz Megiddo (for a survey of the region see Tepper 2003:29*–31*). Previous excavations to the south have established the location of the base (*castrum*) of the Roman VIth Legion and identified a general sediment horizon associated with legionary occupation between the early second – late third to early fourth centuries CE at latest (Tepper, David and Adams 2016; Adams et al. 2019). Previous excavation seasons of the research project at Legio investigated three areas (A–C; 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)) in the central part of the *castrum* (*principia*). Two new areas (E, G; Fig. 1) were opened in the 2022 season north of the *castrum*: a ridge containing cremated interments dating from the Roman period (Area E; see Tepper et al. 2021) and a large depression identified by G. Schumacher as a theater (Schumacher 1908:173–175), later proposed by Y. Tepper to have been the legionary amphitheater (Area G; see Tepper 2002).

Area E. The excavation revealed seven cremation burials from the second–early fourth centuries CE. Six of the cremation burials were contained within cooking pots—some with a lid (Fig. 2)—consistent with other burials of the Roman legion from this period (Tepper 2002), while another burial was contained within a jar;



1. Location map.
(Images/J19-1.jpg)



2. Area E, a cremation burial in a cooking pot.
(Images/J19-2.jpg)



3. Area G, aerial photograph, looking west.
(Images/Letteney_J19hp_3.jpg)

burnt bones were found within each of these vessels and retrieved through meticulous excavation of the fill inside them. The cooking pots and the jar were mostly found either placed directly atop bedrock, apparently within small hewn pits or trenches, or deposited in the ground near a stone wall that was erected to serve as a grave marker. One of the cremation burials was discovered in a deep rectangular cut in the bedrock, likely an empty interment pit that had been repurposed for this use. Four of the cremation burials contained enough skeletal material to conclude that each represented an adult male, identified as such from measurements of the well-preserved bone fragments, especially the femur and skull diameters. The area also yielded two primary burials and several empty trenches that had been prepared for burials that never took place. The poor state of preservation of the two inhumations precludes observations about their sex; however, the size of the bones suggests that the individuals died as adults. Small finds near the cremation and the other burials include a few Roman-period coins, pottery and glass fragments, as well as a limestone gravestone fragment. A few stone quarrying marks discovered during the excavation may postdate the use of the Roman-period cemetery, based on the pottery associated with them, while the use of an unroofed cave discovered nearby dates to the Middle Bronze Age, as indicated by the pottery found in and around its entrance.

Area G (Fig. 3). The excavation further substantiated the identification of a large depression (35 × 60 m), 400 m northwest of the legionary *castrum*, as the legionary *ludus*, probably of the sixth legion, built in a style typical of legionary amphitheaters known from the Western Empire of the imperial period (Somme 2009). The depression sits precisely at the center of a natural, 60-m-wide north-south band of the Paleocene Taqiye Formation. It may have initially formed due to quarrying of the soil in the depression for use as raw material in pottery production.

The amphitheater is built against the natural slopes of the depression on the north and west, while a large ramp (c. 15 m wide, c. 8 m high) was erected to enclose the *cavea* on the south and east with what appears to be the refuse from stone-quarrying activity. The quarrying refuse was intermixed with large quantities of Roman-period coarse wares. Also found was a variety of other, more ancient wares from the Middle and Late Bronze Ages, likely originating from tombs of these periods located on the nearby ridge and destroyed in antiquity by quarrying activity. The ramp was capped with a sloping surface of limestone quarry rubble, on top of which a seating area that had not survived was built either from stone or wood. Remains of a monumental gate were uncovered on the eastern side of the amphitheater, and cut architectural elements were exposed at its lowest level around the perimeter of the *cavea*. Small finds, including a *ballista*, suggest the use of the space for legionary games.

The excavation outside of the legionary base at Legio (Areas E, G) revealed a part of the legionary cemetery and amphitheater in its immediate vicinity. The exposed cremations and other burials speak to the burial customs of Roman soldiers and

the non-local residents living near the base who accompanied the Roman legions. The *Iudus* (Roman army amphitheater) of Legio, previously identified only in a survey (Tepper 2002), was probably one of the larger constructions of its kind in the province of Syria Palaestina. A few of the findings pertained to the use of the area before and after the Roman-period legionary presence.

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