

Sepphoris in the Galilee was larger than previously thought, this season's Hebrew University excavations show

Jerusalem, September 2006 – Further excavations at the Sepphoris National Park in the Galilee have revealed signs of a larger city than was thought previously about this all-important Roman-Byzantine-Jewish center

Excavations at Sepphoris were carried out this past season under the direction of Prof. Zeev Weiss of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem Institute of Archaeology.

Sepphoris or Zippori, known also in ancient times by the Roman name of Diocaesarea, is located west of Nazareth. It was an important center during the Roman and later the Byzantine period and was also the home of the Sanhedrin, the central body of Jewish and legal and spiritual life during the Roman period. Rabbi Judah Hanasi (Judah the Prince), codifier of the Mishna, lived and worked in Sepphoris.

The great development of Sepphoris is testified to by the elaborate public and private buildings and colonnaded streets uncovered by the archaeologists in previous seasons on the site of the ancient city. Most prominent are several brilliantly executed mosaic floors dating back to both the Roman and Byzantine periods, which testify to Sepphoris having been one of the important centers of mosaic art in the eastern sector of the Roman empire for an extended period.



General view of Area 68.2.

The “eastern cardo” with the channel to its left (in foreground).
Parts of the decumanus with the channel to its north (above).

In this season's work – interrupted by the war in Lebanon and completed after the fighting stopped – excavations revealed a further section of the stone-paved decumanus, or one of the two main streets of the city, as well as a section of another stone-paved street that ran perpendicular to the decumanus. Adjacent to the intersection of the two latter streets, the excavators found water channels and pipes which were part of the extensive water system that brought water to Sepphoris from a spring to the east of the city.



The decumanus, looking westward.
Blue arrow indicates the steps on the northern side.

“The findings this year shed new light on a number of areas of research in Sepphoris,” said Prof. Weiss, “especially regarding the Roman period, illustrating an impressive road system.” It has become obvious, he continued, that Sepphoris was larger than we previously thought, particularly on its eastern side. We also have learned from our work this season of the point whereby water entered the city from its natural source to the east.”

Participating in this year's excavations at Sepphoris were students from the Hebrew University Institute of Archaeology, youths from the nearby community of Hoshaya and local workers. The work was financed by the Hebrew University and contributors from abroad and was dedicated to the memory of Dr. Noam Shudofsky. Noam Shudofsky was a close friend and strategic supporter of the development of the Sepphoris National Park. Support was also provided by the Israel National Parks and Nature Reserves Authority.