FLAVIA NEAPOLIS

SHECHEM IN THE ROMAN PERIOD

YITZHAK MAGEN

FLAVIA NEAPOLIS

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VOLUME I

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To my Wife,
Judith

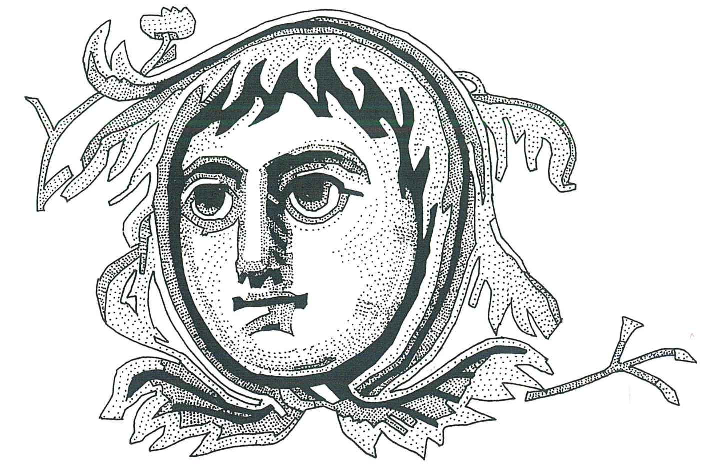
CONTENTS

VOLUME I

Preface IX
Abbreviations XV
Introduction 1
Chapter One: Shechem Before Neapolis 15
Chapter Two: Neapolis—Plan and Finds 41
Chapter Three: The Theater 93
Chapter Four: The Hippodrome 149
Chapter Five: The Amphitheater 189
Chapter Six: Cults, Gods, and Temples 233
Chapter Seven: Burial 287
Chapter Eight: Neapolis—A Roman City 353

VOLUME II

Pottery of Roman Neapolis—Sivan Sarig 1
Glass Vessels from Ras el-'Ein—Sivan Sarig 23
Plates 39
The Coins of Neapolis—Ariel Berman 167
Plates 259
Appendix: A Unique Coin of Magnesia ad Maeandrum Discovered in Excavations at Neapolis (Nablus), Samaria—Gabriela Bijovsky 275
Bibliography 281
Index Vols. I–II 299



CHAPTER EIGHT

NEAPOLIS—A ROMAN CITY

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The history of Neapolis is inextricably intertwined with that of the Samaritan people; any account of the evolution of this Roman city must therefore take into account how the findings in the city relate to them.

Three distinct settlements existed in the Shechem area during the Hellenistic period: a) the Samaritan city on top of Mt. Gerizim with the temple at its center[1]; b) Ma'abarta, a town on the northern slope of Mt. Gerizim founded in the third century BCE; and c) Tell Balatah, biblical Shechem.[2] The city on Mt. Gerizim was Samaritan, but it is uncertain whether during this period the inhabitants of the other two settlements were Samaritan as well. During the Roman period, the Samaritans resided in two other sites in Shechem: 'Ein Sychar, located in today's town of 'Askar, and the village of Ilana Ṭaba (Elon Moreh), next to Tell Balatah.

John Hyrcanus I and his son Alexander Jannaeus destroyed the area of Shechem in 112–111 BCE.[3] The city on top of Mt. Gerizim and the much smaller settlement at Tell Balatah were abandoned, never to be rebuilt.[4] Ma'abarta's fate after the Hasmonean conquest is unclear. We know, however, that it was resettled some time in the Early Roman period and that it became the Roman city named Neapolis, the "New City," in the first century CE. The entire history of Ma'abarta, a town that existed for over 180 years, is completely missing; in fact, had Josephus neglected to mention its name (*War* IV, 449), we would not know even that. No historical or archaeological evidence has been found for a Samaritan settlement or populace in Ma'abarta.

THE SAMARITANS AFTER THE DESTRUCTION OF THE CITY ON MT. GERIZIM

Despite extensive excavations and surveys conducted throughout Samaria, we have an incomplete picture of what happened in that region during the Hasmonean conquest and of the extent of the destruction there. We know that the hostilities were not limited to Mt. Gerizim, but extended to the many Samaritan villages in its vicinity as well. The conquest disrupted Samaritan life. From the archaeological surveys, it appears that the Samaritan presence was greatly reduced at the beginning of the first century BCE, and a gap in Samaritan settlement can be discerned from the Hasmonean period until the reign of Herod.[5]

Sources concerning the Samaritans' history at this time do not reveal what happened to them during the Hasmonean period and whether they were able to continue revering Mt. Gerizim or were forced to accept the Jewish belief in the sanctity of Jerusalem, as happened to the Idumeans.[6] No formal act of conversion would have been required of the Samaritans, since they and the Jews shared the same faith and basic commandments; the main difference between the two groups concerned the identity of God's chosen site. In order to prevent the Samaritans from resettling on Mt. Gerizim, the Hasmoneans stationed a garrison there and built a fortress overlooking the road that led to it. Remnants of this fortress, mentioned by Josephus (*Ant.* XIV, 100), were unearthed in the excavation next to the stairway to the Roman temple (see Chapter Six). Another garrison may have been stationed at Ma'abarta, at the foot of the mountain.[7]

After John Hyrcanus I annihilated the Samaritan presence on Mt. Gerizim, the Samaritans disappeared from the historical record for some time, and reports about them resurfaced only at the end of the first century BCE.[8] Despite Hasmonean religious and political pressure on the Samaritans, they did not succeed in severing the Samaritans' adherence to Mt. Gerizim or their belief in its sanctity. We learn this from the Samaritan woman's words to Jesus in the New Testament: "Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship" (John 4:20).

After the Roman conquest of the Land of Israel in 63 BCE, Pompeius and Gabinius gave the Hellenistic cities their freedom and repaired the damage caused by the Hasmonean rulers (*Ant.* XIV, 75–76, 87–88; *War* I, 155–158, 165–166).[9] The Samaritans were not included in this rehabilitation project as the Romans did not consider them part of the Gentile population. Still, the Roman conquest freed the Samaritans from Hasmonean control and enabled them to revert to their ancient religion, with its focus on the sanctity of Mt. Gerizim, and to renew their evolution as an independent religious and national entity.

The Samaritans' lot did not improve in Herod's reign. Like the Romans, he considered the Samaritans a Jewish sect, not part of the country's Gentile population, whose favorable opinion he desired. To him they were neither a potential ally nor an element to be taken into account. He supported Sebaste because it was a potential refuge from the Jews,[10] and settled there many who had helped him in his wars, giving them land in the vicinity (*Ant.* XV, 292–293, 296–298). Herod also married a Samaritan woman who bore him three children: Antipas, Archelaus, and Olympias (*Ant.* XVII, 20; *War* I, 562–563). This woman was probably from Sebaste and belonged to an assimilated Samaritan or Gentile family. However, the marriage brought no close ties between the king and the Samaritan community.[11] This state of affairs did not change during the reign of his successor, Archelaus.

Herod did not permit the Samaritans to rebuild their town or their temple on Mt. Gerizim. This was in contrast to the generosity he showed other peoples, as testified by: his reconstruction of the Temple in Jerusalem; the two sacred precincts he built for the Idumeans in Hebron (the Cave of Machpelah and Elonei Mamre); and the pagan temple he erected in Augustus' honor at Sebaste.[12] Clearly, he saw no need to take the Samaritans' desires or beliefs into account; perhaps he also feared a Jewish reaction to a reconstruction of the Samaritan sanctuary.

It is thus not surprising that the Samaritans played no role in the upheavals in the Land of Israel associated with the division of Herod's inheritance (4 BCE), called "Varus' war" in Jewish sources. The Samaritans did not consider themselves part of Herod's kingdom, and thus not among his heirs.[13] Josephus states that in return for their passivity during the upheavals, the Samaritans were exempted from one-fourth of the taxes paid by Idumea, Judea, and Samaria (*Ant.* XVII, 319).

Josephus distinguished between the Samaritan community and the Gentile population in Samaria, whose center was in Sebaste. Indeed, it is in the first century CE that we first hear of the Samaritans as a separate people, an element to be reckoned with in Samaria, pursuing an independent policy distinct from that of the region's Gentile inhabitants.

In 6 CE the Samaritans joined the Jews in complaining to the Roman Emperor about Archelaus' despotic and cruel ways (*Ant.* XVII, 342). Their complaint was accepted and Archelaus removed from office and exiled to Gaul. In the following years there were more reports of Samaritan activity, generally derogatory in nature. Josephus relates that during the governorship of the Roman prefect Coponius (6–9 CE), the Samaritans entered Jerusalem on Passover in the middle of the night and spread human bones on the Temple courtyard floor (*Ant.* XVIII, 29–31). Did they manage to gain entrance to the Temple because they celebrated Passover with the Jews in Jerusalem during this period?[14] Be that as it may, entry to the Sanctuary was hereafter forbidden at night and the Temple was more closely guarded (M *Tamid* 1, 1).

As the Samaritan population grew in number and strength it came into increasing conflict with the Jewish inhabitants of Galilee, who needed to pass through Samaritan territory on their way to Jerusalem for the pilgrimage holidays. The tense relations between the two communities are also evident in Jesus's conversation with the Samaritan woman (John 4: 3–26), as well as the Samaritans' refusal to provide for Jesus's needs when he wanted to pass through Samaria to Jerusalem (Luke 9: 52–53). Yet another act of hostility towards the Jews was the

raising of false beacons to confuse the announcement of the New Moon (M *Rosh Hashana* 2, 2).

The worst flare-up between Jews and Samaritans occurred in 48–52 CE, during the governorship of the Roman procurator Cumanus. Samaritans ambushed Jewish pilgrims from Galilee at Ginea (today's Jenin), killing some of them, and attacked a number of villages near the district of 'Aqraba, whose populace was Jewish. The Jews fought back and representatives of both sides were eventually summoned to appear before the emperor. Only Agrippa II's intervention saved the Jewish representatives from execution (*Ant.* XX, 118–136; *War* II, 232–246).[15]

Thus, in the first century CE the Samaritans recovered their strength and took control of central Samaria. One consequence of this was a rebirth of national and religious fervor and a desire to renew the cult on Mt. Gerizim. The first Samaritan attempt to take over the mountain by force occurred during the governorship of the prefect Pontius Pilate (26–36 CE), in the wake of a rumor that Tabernacle utensils buried by Moses were discovered there. According to a still-extant Samaritan tradition, after the Tabernacle disappeared its utensils were hidden in a cave on Mt. Gerizim, and will be found again when the *Taheb*, the Samaritan messiah, comes.[16] A large crowd of armed Samaritans gathered in the village of Tirathaba near the road leading up to Mt. Gerizim, but Pontius Pilate seized the road before they reached it and killed many of them. Pilate's vigorous and violent steps showed that the Romans did not intend to permit the Samaritans to return to Mt. Gerizim, which although being a holy site, was also an important strategic locality that overlooked the Shechem Valley and the main roads crossing Samaria. In consequence, the Samaritan *boule*, which looked after Samaritan political interests, complained before Vitellius, governor of Syria (*Ant.* XVIII, 85–89).

The Romans, certainly conscious of growing Samaritan national sentiment and of the Great Revolt that occurred then, must have increased their sensitivity to security issues in the Land of Israel and aroused their awareness of the possibility of additional revolts. The Samaritans, however, misread the political and military situation and did not take into account the Romans' determination to prevent another revolt. They felt strong enough to confront the Romans and wanted to exploit the latter's engagement in putting down the Jewish revolt to take over Mt. Gerizim and present the Romans with a fait accompli. On the 27th of Sivan, 67 CE, while Vespasian besieged the Jewish city of Yodfat, a multitude of armed Samaritans took possession of the mountain. Apparently unsurprised by this move, Vespasian sent, in addition to the Roman garrison stationed in Samaria, six hundred horsemen and three thousand foot soldiers under Cerealis, commander of the Legio V, as reinforcement. Although large in numbers, the Samaritans were roundly defeated by the Romans (*War* III, 307–315). The quantity and quality of the forces sent to put down the revolt clearly reflect the Romans' worry and their determination to prevent the creation of a second front in Samaria. This was not a minor event concerning a few thousand people going up to Mt. Gerizim, but an organized revolt that had spread throughout Samaria.

The Flavian emperors learned the lesson of the Great Revolt and saw to it that no further revolts occurred in the Land of Israel. Following the conquest of Jerusalem, the status of the province of Judea (that included Samaria),[17] which had been established after Archelaus was removed from office, was changed with respect to the standing of its governor and the garrison stationed in it. Judea became an imperial province ruled directly by the emperor and the governor of Syria, and received a regular legion under the command of the province's governor instead of the auxiliary forces stationed there before.[18] Caesarea, the provincial capital, was raised in status to Roman *colonia*; and Jaffa, an important Jewish port destroyed during the Revolt, was rebuilt by Vespasian and renamed Flavia Joppa in honor of the reigning imperial family. A colony of Roman veterans was founded at Emmaus (*War* VII, 217).[19]

The Flavians undertook few large building projects in Syria and the Land of Israel[20]; in fact, there is no evidence that they initiated any large-scale original construction. Their actions were limited to implementing the lessons of the revolts in the Land of Israel, changing the province's status, and stationing larger forces in the area.[21]

In light of the above, how can we explain the founding of Neapolis by the Flavians? In addition, why did they choose Shechem as its location? We can only surmise that the Romans desired to prevent the Samaritans from rebuilding their city and temple on Mt. Gerizim, since this had caused their uprisings in the past. Roman Neapolis was founded in the wake of the Samaritans' revolt and their attempted revival of worship on Mt. Gerizim.

THE FOUNDING OF NEAPOLIS

In his account of Vespasian's journey from Emmaus to Samaria, Josephus relates that he passed through a town called "New City" or Neapolis, which the local people called Mabartha (Ma'abarta) (*War* IV, 449); according to Pliny the Elder, the city was formerly named Mamorth.[22] As Josephus spoke Hebrew, it is more likely that his spelling of the name is more reliable than is Pliny's. The names Ma'abarta and Neapolis are unattested before the Flavian reign. The name change from Ma'abarta to Neapolis most likely occurred when the latter was founded; Josephus anachronistically used the name Neapolis in his account of Vespasian's journey, which had taken place some six years earlier.

The coins of Neapolis date precisely when the city was founded. The first coins were minted during the reign of Domitian (81–96 CE) and the date they bore referred to the city's founding: AI = the year 11 (83 CE), and EI = the year 15 (88 CE). The city's name on these coins, "Flavia Neapolis which is in Samaria," indicates that the Flavians founded it. The same dating system used on the coins of Antoninus Pius dates them to the year 88 to the city's founding (160 CE), and those of Marcus Aurelius, to the first year of his reign, the year 89 to the city's founding (161 CE). According to the testimony of these coins, the city was founded in 72 CE, after the Great Revolt was suppressed and Jerusalem destroyed.[23]

Inscriptions on the coins minted in Neapolis from its beginning until the reign of Philip I (244 CE) were in Greek characters, as befitted a provincial city of inferior status to that of a Roman *colonia*. After the Bar-Kokhba Revolt, the Land of Israel was annexed to Syria and consequently, the city's title was changed to "Flavia Neapolis which is in Syria-Palaestina" on the coins of Antoninus Pius (138–160 CE).

Some scholars characterize the depictions on the coins of Neapolis from the reign of Domitian as those of a Samaritan city.[24] Instead of the usual pagan images encountered in the coins of other Roman cities, here one side depicts the emperor and the other displays various decorative images: a laurel wreath, a pair of cornucopiae, a date palm, two ears of corn, or a vine stalk with a leaf and a cluster of grapes. Similar depictions are found on the coins of Sepphoris and Tiberias that were minted in Trajan's reign. The abovementioned scholars argue that both emperors took the religious sensibilities of the Samaritan and Jewish inhabitants of these cities into consideration, and refrained from putting pagan images of gods and temples on the coins, using Jewish/Samaritan symbols instead.[25] Adopting this hypothesis assumes that Ma'abarta, which became Neapolis, was a Samaritan town, and that the Flavians' concern for the Samaritans' welfare led them to found a city for them and consider their feelings when designing the city's coins.

We contend, however, that the symbols on the coins of Neapolis are neither specifically Samaritan nor Jewish. They bear no similarity to Jewish coins minted during the two Jewish revolts and consist of plant motifs commonly used in the Land of Israel at the time. Thus, a date palm appears also on the *Judaea Capta* coins minted by Domitian to celebrate the Roman victory over the Jews and the destruction of Jerusalem,[26] under circumstances that were hardly

conducive to a desire to appease the Jews or consider their feelings. The three aforementioned cities were not Greek *poleis* and any pagans living there would not have had a municipal pagan tradition or a pagan temple. The first temple in Neapolis was built towards the end of the reign of Antoninus Pius, in the mid-second century CE. Decorative patterns on the coins of Neapolis can therefore tell us nothing about the city's ethnic composition, or about the Romans' attitude towards it. In fact, there is no historical or archaeological evidence to support the claim that Ma'abarta was a Samaritan town before becoming a Roman city.

Furthermore, during the second century CE Neapolis was a Gentile city with a pagan temple and a Roman administration, and no hint of a ruling Samaritan population, culture, or religion. Is it likely that within the span of a few decades, from the reign of Domitian to the mid-second century CE, a predominantly Samaritan population became so assimilated that Samaritan culture and religion disappeared completely?

This is not to say that Neapolis did not possess a sizable Samaritan population, as did other Roman cities like Sebaste, Beth Shean, Caesarea, Emmaus, etc. However, the Flavians founded Neapolis against the Samaritans, not for them. Domitian, who may himself have participated in suppressing the Samaritan revolt, would hardly have created a city for them at the foot of Mt. Gerizim while forbidding them to rebuild their sacred sanctuary on the mountain. On the contrary, the establishment of Neapolis and the construction of the temple to Zeus made it impossible for the Samaritans to take over the mountain and ensured Roman control of the road leading to it, as a means for preventing yet another revolt.[27] Neapolis was founded as a pagan Roman city and was most probably populated with veteran legionnaires. It was established because of the lessons drawn by the Romans from the Samaritan revolt.[28]

The steps taken by the Romans indeed succeeded in calming the Samaritans and preventing further uprisings. Samaritan cultural and perhaps religious assimilation during the second and third centuries CE, which included the rural population as well, proved that the Romans' decision to establish Neapolis as a pagan city had been the right one, from their viewpoint. The Samaritans did not rebuild their sacred precinct and refrained from rebelling until the Byzantine period, when Emperor Zeno built a church on the site of the Samaritan shrine in 484 CE.

The purpose of the preceding, rather extended discussion on the Samaritans was to clarify the reasons for the establishment of Neapolis. The Romans now possessed two large cities in Samaria, Neapolis and Sebaste, which fragmented the formerly continuous area of Samaritan settlement that rabbinical sources named the "strip of Cutheans." Samaria was now divided into two regions, each controlled by a Gentile city, which in turn controlled the Samaritans' villages and towns administratively, culturally, militarily, and religiously.[29]

The Samaritans' conditions in the second century CE lead to another historical question: did the Samaritans participate in the Bar-Kokhba Revolt? This largely Jewish revolt, which took place mainly in southern Judea during the reign of Emperor Hadrian, was the result of the establishment of Aelia Capitolina and the construction of a temple dedicated to Jupiter on the Temple Mount.[30] Jewish midrashic legends from the fifth century CE and the Samaritan Chronicles, composed more than a millennium after the event, which mention a Samaritan association with this revolt have no historical foundations. According to one midrashic account, Hadrian wanted to establish a Jewish temple in Jerusalem, but the Samaritans frustrated this aim (*Gen. Rabbah* 64:10). Another source tells of a Samaritan who handed the city of Bethar over to Hadrian (JT Ta'anith 4:68d; *Lam. Rabbah* 2:4). Some scholars have taken these sources as evidence that the Samaritans participated in the revolt.[31]

As for the later Samaritan Chronicles, all events related there of the period in question, for

example that Hadrian built a city and a temple on Mt. Gerizim, are entirely imaginary and have no historical or archaeological basis in the Roman period.[32] These stories are a Samaritan attempt to identify themselves with the revolt in the days of Bar-Kokhba as described in Jewish midrashic sources. The Samaritans had no reason to participate in the revolt, and even less so the inhabitants of Neapolis, which had been a Gentile town from the outset and was ruled and administered as a Roman city.[33]

The Bar-Kokhba Revolt had disastrous consequences for Judea: it was virtually emptied of its Jewish inhabitants; Jerusalem became a Gentile city and a temple to Jupiter was erected on the Temple Mount. In contrast, there is no evidence that the Samaritan population in Samaria was at all affected in the wake of the revolt. On the contrary, the Samaritan rural population burgeoned from the second century CE on, and in the third century Samaritans began spreading beyond the limits of Samaria and settled in all the Roman cities. According to rabbinical sources, Samaritans settled in abandoned Jewish towns after the "persecution" (Bar-Kokhba Revolt). The Jerusalem Talmud relates, "Said R. Abbahu: Thirteen towns were mixed up among the Samaritans in the time of the persecution" (JT *Yebamoth* 8:9d; *Kiddushin* 4:65d). We therefore conclude that neither the Samaritans nor the city of Neapolis rose up against Hadrian or participated in the revolt.

The Gentile Roman cities of Neapolis and Sebaste were situated in the Samaritans' territory and wrought a deep change in their lives, culture, and religion. The Samaritans became deeply assimilated in the Roman period: they took Greek and Latin names, adopted Roman culture and, seemingly, the Roman pagan religion as well. Paradoxically, the rise of Christianity saved the Samaritans from total assimilation.

In the second century CE, Neapolis, as reflected in its architecture, culture, and cult, could only have been a Gentile rather than Samaritan city.

NEAPOLIS IN THE SECOND CENTURY CE

We possess scant knowledge of the Land of Israel and the Roman cities in it during the second century CE, when Roman power was at its height. Most of what we know comes from inscriptions, coins, and archaeological excavations, as well as from Jewish sources, the Mishna and the Talmud. Since no Jews lived in Neapolis and Samaria, Jewish sources contain very little information about them. As has already been pointed out, the Samaritan sources are late and unreliable, and therefore cannot be used for learning about the Roman period.[34]

The emperors of the Flavian dynasty did not build much; large-scale construction in the city of Neapolis started only at the beginning of the second century CE, during the reigns of Trajan and Hadrian. First the hippodrome (circus) was built, followed by the theater, the main streets, and other important public buildings. The temple of Zeus Hypsistos was completed on Mt. Gerizim in the mid-second century, during the reign of Antoninus Pius. This event was honored by the renewed minting of coins in the city, this time with a depiction of the temple.

Pompeius Falco apparently played an important role in the history of Neapolis, to judge by an inscription in his honor inscribed on the base of a statue in Ephesus, in Asia Minor.[35] The people of Neapolis, represented by two ambassadors, Flavius Juncus and Ulpius Proclus, erected the statue with the inscription in 123/4 CE. The inscription was placed there in the name of the people (*demos*) and the city council (*boule*) of Flavia Neapolis in Samaria:

> Κόιντον Ῥώσκιον Μου|ρήνα Κούελλον Πομ|πήιον Φάλκωνα, πρεσ|βευτὴν Σεβαστοῦ καὶ ἀν|τιστράτηγον Λυκίας καὶ | Παμφυλίας καὶ Ἰουδαίας καὶ | Μυσίας καὶ Βρεταννίας | καὶ πολλας ἄλλας ἡγεμονίας | διατελέσαντα Ἀσίας ἀνθύ|πατον ἐτείμησεν Φλαουι|έων Νεαπολειτῶν Σαμαρέ|ων ἡ βουλὴ καὶ ὁ δῆμος τὸν | σωτῆρα καὶ εὐεργέτην, | διὰ πρεσβευτῶν καὶ ἐπιμελητῶν | Φλαουίου Ἰούνκου καὶ | Οὐλπίου Πρόκλου.
>
> The *boule* and *demos* of the people of Flavia Neapolis in Samaria honored Quintus Ruscius Murena Quellus Pompeius Falco, legatus Augusti pro praetore (=governor) of Lycia, Pamphylia, Judea, Moesia and Britain, who also filled other governorship posts and was the proconsul of Asia (Minor), as savior and benefactor, through the ambassadors appointed to this task, Flavius Juncus and Ulpius Proclus.

At the beginning of his career, Pompeius Falco was an officer of the Legio X, then stationed in Jerusalem, and was later appointed commander of the Legio V. In 105–108 CE he was governor of Judea; he also served in Pamphylia, Moesia, Lycia, and Britain. In 108 CE he was promoted to consular rank and in 123/4 CE, when the statue was dedicated to him, he held the post of proconsul of Asia Minor.[36] It is also known that he corresponded with Pliny the Younger.[37]

Why did the people and city council of Flavia Neapolis honor Pompeius Falco 18 years after he had left his post as governor of Judea, and why is he called "savior and benefactor"? When did he help the people of Neapolis and how? If he assisted them when he was governor of Judea, why did the people of Neapolis wait so many years before erecting the statue in his honor at Ephesus?[38] It is thus more likely that the people of Neapolis honored him for his help as proconsul of Asia Minor, not long before the statue was erected. Pompeius Falco also had business dealings in Rome, and we do not know where and how the connection between him and Neapolis began. Perhaps it did go back to when he was governor of Judea, when he may have developed a special relationship with the veteran Roman soldiers and officers who constituted Neapolis' Gentile population. To judge by their names, the two ambassadors who erected the statue in Ephesus, Flavius Juncus and Ulpius Proclus, were Romans and were probably among the city's administrators.

Another inscription worth mentioning was found in Aphrodisias in Caria; it dates from the early part of Marcus Aurelius' reign (165 CE). The inscription lists the victories of one Alius Aurelius Menandrus in various sports competitions held in a number of cities in the Land of Israel, among them Neapolis.[39] Such competitions would have been held in the hippodrome or theater.

Most of the large building projects in Neapolis were probably completed at the end of Antoninus Pius' reign, when construction of the temple on Mt. Gerizim was finished. An inscription found in Shechem dedicated to Antoninus Pius is to be ascribed to this period.[40] According to the testimony of Van-Kootwyck, the inscription was seen in Shechem as early as the end of the sixteenth century, and then disappeared. Clermont-Ganneau attempted unsuccessfully to trace its whereabouts again in the nineteenth century. It had been incised on a large marble altar whose top and lower part were shaped like a cornice. The altar was used as part of a tower wall at the southern extremity of the new bazaar in the western part of the city. The transcription is not precise:

> Αὐτοκράτορι Ἀδριανῷ Ἀντωνείνῳ Καίσαρι Σεβαστῷ Εὐσεβῖ κυρίῳ μοῦ φιλίας ---
>
> To Emperor Hadrian Antoninus Caesar Augustus Pius, my master, for friendship's [sake...]

Clermont-Ganneau, who published the inscription, pointed out that it was dedicated to Antoninus Pius, in whose days the Roman temple on Mt. Gerizim first appeared on the city's coins. He believed that the Roman temple was constructed a few years before, in Hadrian's reign. He also identified Antoninus Pius with the "good" Emperor Antoninus mentioned in Jewish and Samaritan sources.

We believe that the altar in question was erected in the temple on Mt. Gerizim or in the city itself

when the temple to Zeus Hypsistos was completed in 160 CE by Antoninus Pius.

Evidence for close relations between Neapolis and other cities in the Greco-Roman world is provided by the tripod base placed in the temple to Zeus on Mt. Gerizim (see Chapter Six). The person who dedicated the tripod, Marcus Aurelius Pyrrhus Meliteus, was a member of the Athenian *boule*. We believe the tripod is to be dated to the second phase of temple construction, in the reign of Caracalla (212 CE). That an Athenian city councilman dedicated a tripod to the temple on Mt. Gerizim is evidence for close relations between the two cities; presumably, such relations did not include the Samaritan residents of Neapolis.

At the end of the second century CE (192/3 CE) Neapolis became embroiled in the armed conflict between Septimius Severus and Pescennius Niger, who fought for control of the Empire.[41] Septimius Severus, then governor of Upper Pannonia, was declared emperor after taking power by force, whereupon Pescennius Niger, governor of Syria, declared himself emperor with the support of the legions under his command. A civil war ensued, with both cities and legions taking sides. Laodikeia and Tyre supported Severus, while Antioch and Beirut joined Niger. In the Land of Israel, Sebaste and the Legio VI favored Severus; Neapolis and the Legio X supported Niger.

Septimius Severus was the victor in this war. He avenged himself on the cities that had not supported him, among them Neapolis, whose city status (*ius civitatis*) was revoked, including the right to mint its own coins.[42] Was there a connection between the Legio X's support for Niger and the support given him by the city of Neapolis? The legion was stationed in Jerusalem, but evidence exists that it was also in Neapolis: a roof tile with the legion's stamp was found in Shechem, and a coin of the city from the reign of Trebonianus Gallus (251–253 CE) features the legion's symbol, a standard with an eagle on top and a boar on the bottom. The people of Neapolis may thus have been forced to support Niger under pressure from the legion stationed in the city. At any rate, the support for Niger was clearly unconnected with the Samaritans, who at the time did not constitute a political entity capable of taking an independent position.

Eventually, either Severus or his son Caracalla rescinded the punishment given to Neapolis.[43] Written sources reporting on the Severan dynasty relate that Severus let his son celebrate the victory over Judea[44]; however, some scholars have pointed out that this is inconsistent if he is indeed Emperor "Antoninus," claimed by Jewish sources to be a friend of the Jews.[45]

Another, albeit problematical, historical source for the period in question is the *Hieronymus Chronicon*, ascribed to 197 CE. In it, Hieronymus tells of a fierce war between Jews and Samaritans; however, it is not clear which war this was or whether it was connected to the civil war mentioned above.[46] It is possible that the temple to Zeus was damaged in this war and that Caracalla rebuilt it. In his reign, Mt. Gerizim appeared on the city's coins after a gap of some fifty years. Caracalla granted Roman citizenship to all the Empire's inhabitants, thus canceling the Italians' advantage over residents of the other provinces.

The war between Niger and Severus presaged what was to happen in the Roman Empire during the third century CE, a century of political and military instability, regicide, and power grabs by legion commanders. The Land of Israel suffered greatly from this instability, which had significant consequences in Neapolis in terms of the city's structure and the military force stationed there.[47]

In 244 CE, Philip I, known as "the Arab" because of his ethnic origin, came to power after having assassinated Gordian III.[48] Like the other emperors of his time, Philip did not remain in power for long and was assassinated in 249 CE by another legion commander, Trajanus Decius. In Philip's reign Neapolis was given the status of Roman *colonia* and named "Flavia Iulia Sergia Neapolis"; coins were again minted in the city, after an 18-year interruption.[49]

The coins from Philip's reign were inscribed in

Latin and not in Greek as before. Depictions on the coins are typically colonial and include, for example, "Marsyas of the Forum," the figure of a drunkard carrying a wine-skin on his back, who symbolized the new status of the provincial cities, which now enjoyed the same rights as the Empire's capital. On the coins of Philip's wife, Otacilia Severa, the ceremony of founding the new *colonia* is represented by a plow pulled by oxen, which were used at the founding ceremony to make the furrow marking Neapolis' future city wall. Another of Philip's coins depicts the she-wolf suckling Romulus and Remus, symbolizing Neapolis' being a Roman *colonia*. The she-wolf was also the symbol of the Legio VI. Coins with the symbols of Legio X (i.e., a boar) and of Legio III continued being minted during the reigns of the emperors who succeeded Philip, Trebonianus Gallus and Volusian. One coin of Volusian has depictions of Zeus-Amon, an ear of corn, and a legion standard, symbolizing the stationing of Legio III, in Neapolis.

We do not know why Philip promoted Neapolis to the status of Roman *colonia*, although it must be said that the title had become quite common by the third century. However, the fact that legions were commemorated on Philip's coins and those of his successors shows that the change in status was not accidental and had to do with the military units being stationed in the city. This also explains why an amphitheater was built at the time in question (see Chapter Five) and how tombstones of Roman soldiers were found in Shechem (see Chapter Seven).

The amphitheater was built in the second half of the third century CE, and like others of its kind in the Land of Israel and Syria, its construction was associated with the military. It was built by soldiers of the legions stationed in the city who needed a sports and entertainment facility of the type common in the western Empire.

The inscription that mentions the *mesochorion*, a fortress built by the military, belongs to this period, in which there was a Roman military presence in Neapolis (see Chapter Two).[50]

We have only scant information concerning Neapolis in the third and fourth centuries CE. In his *Chronicles*, written in the fourth century, Ammianus Marcellinus counts Neapolis among the main cities of the Land of Israel.[51] The title of Roman *colonia* and the stationing of military units in the city seem to have benefited it and increased its importance. Despite the rise of Christianity in those years Neapolis remained a pagan city and the temple on Mt. Gerizim was in use until the beginning of the fifth century CE, as were the theater and amphitheater. Christian penetration into Neapolis and Samaria, in particular the construction of the Church of Mary Theotokos on Mt. Gerizim in 484 CE, encountered difficulties, and was met with a serious Samaritan uprising.

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND POPULATION

It will be recalled that eleven inscriptions were found on the first row of seats in the theater of Neapolis, with the names of the urban tribes that participated in the city's administration. Eight of these tribes were named after different gods, headed by Zeus. Only two of the three other names have been preserved with certainty, the tribe of Antiochus and that of the Flavians. No such division into tribes had previously been found in the Land of Israel, but is well attested in Gerasa, Asia Minor, Greece, and Alexandria (see Chapter Three). The origins of the system are Greek and Hellenistic; it evolved further and was modified under the Romans. The tribe or *phyle* was an administrative division based on ethnic and perhaps geographical origin. The division into tribes in Neapolis probably went back to the Hellenistic and Early Roman periods, and reflects the eclectic makeup of the city's populace.

Like most cities in the Greco-Roman world, Neapolis was run by the *boule*, an elected city council. The term "member of the *boule*" appears in an inscription on a stone in secondary use found in the amphitheater. In the inscription honoring Pompeius Falco discussed above, the *boule* of

Neapolis is mentioned together with its *demos*, which consisted of all the citizens with legal rights, who would gather at specified times and places to elect the city's officials.[52]

Three funerary inscriptions found in the city of Tomis in Lower Moesia, on the western shores of the Black Sea, shed light on the municipal administration of Neapolis, its foreign relations, and its populace in the second century CE.[53] One of these epitaphs mentions a certain Periscus Ennianus of Tomis who held numerous posts of a ceremonial, and perhaps religious, character. In addition to his functions in Tomis, this Periscus, whose name is typically Roman, was also a member of the *boule* and an honorary citizen of Flavia Neapolis.[54] His wife, Julia Apulausta, was a high priestess.

Another inscription, identical in content to the previous one, tells of another prominent citizen, Aurelius Periscus Isidorus, who held similar positions in Tomis and was a member of the *boule* and an honorary citizen of Flavia Neapolis.[55] His wife Ulpia was a high priestess as well.

In a third epitaph the name of the deceased has not been preserved, but another citizen of Flavia Neapolis is mentioned. The text of the inscription is in the form of a poem. It tells of the deeds and positions held by a native of Neapolis who pursued a very successful career in Tomis.[56] There is possibly a connection between the three inscriptions, all of which speak of prominent citizens of Tomis who were also members of the Neapolis *boule*. Perhaps the first person mentioned above was the father of the second. The latter had received Roman citizenship from Marcus Aurelius; the inscriptions thus date from the middle of the second century CE.

During the period in question, it was not rare for citizens of one city to be honorary members of the *boule* of another. What is surprising in this case is that citizens of Tomis, which is far from Neapolis, so proudly maintained their honorary citizenship and membership in the *boule* of that city. A similar case is reflected in the inscription at the base of the tripod from the temple of Zeus on Mt. Gerizim: there, the person who dedicated the tripod, Marcus Aurelius Pyrrhus Meliteus, was an Athenian, and member of that Neapolis's *boule*. How did these connections come into being? Were these Samaritans who emigrated to far-away lands yet retained ties with their homeland? Alternatively, were these pagan soldiers who settled in Neapolis after completing military service, became citizens and then returned to their native Tomis but still maintained contact with Neapolis?

An interesting personality who can shed more light on life in Neapolis in the second century CE is St. Justin Martyr, a Greek-Christian philosopher and writer who was born there.[57] Both his father and grandfather had Greek names. He himself converted to Christianity and in the reign of Hadrian (133 CE) he emigrated to Asia Minor and taught philosophy in Ephesus. Later he moved to Rome. He continued his work until the reign of Marcus Aurelius and was eventually executed because of his Christian beliefs. He wrote two books: *Apologies*, on the Christian religion and *Dialogue with Trypho* (Trypho was a Jew). Interestingly enough, Justin knows nothing about Samaritan holy writ or religious law, despite his claim to be of "Samaritan stock." In Neapolis, he received a pagan rather than Samaritan education.

Two other prominent pagans born in Neapolis or Samaria in the fifth century CE became famous throughout the Roman world. These are Marinus, the philosopher who became head of the Athenian Academy (see Chapter Six), and Leontius, a mime actor.[58]

All of the above examples, as well as the numerous inscriptions found in Shechem, nearly all of which contain Greek and Latin names, indicate that Neapolis was a pagan city. Furthermore, the temple to Zeus remained in use until the beginning of the fifth century CE; the theater, and perhaps the amphitheater as well, were the entertainment centers for the people of Neapolis until the Byzantine period.

Until now, scholarly opinion has viewed Neapolis as a Samaritan town, whose character did not change until the Byzantine period. Evidence for this view,

according to its supporters, was provided by the city's early coins, from the reign of Domitian, in which no pagan images, only Samaritan symbols, were depicted. This was ascribed to the Roman rulers' desire not to offend the sensibilities of the Samaritans, as was also the case with respect to the coins of the Jewish towns of Sepphoris and Tiberias.

However, no historical facts exist to support the claim that Neapolis was a Samaritan city. Although in a tomb found at ʻAskar, the name Simon (belonging to the father-in-law of the tomb's owner) appears, this name, and perhaps also the name Sabbethai, which appears on a sarcophagus in the same tomb, are Samaritan (see Chapter Seven). But besides these, there are dozens of other names of the city's inhabitants from the beginning of the second century CE on, all Latin or Greek. It is highly unlikely that a predominantly Samaritan city would provide no evidence for at least a few Samaritan-sounding names, not to speak of the lack of any other kind of evidence. One possibility is that the Samaritans were already so thoroughly assimilated in the first century CE that neither their religion nor their culture left any trace in the everyday life of the city. Although this cannot be ruled out, as shown by the case of the Samaritan synagogue at El-Khirbe, in which most of the names on the inscriptions are Greek and Latin, it is highly unlikely in our opinion.[59] In fact, we believe that Maʻbarta was a Gentile town in the first century CE, or perhaps already in the Hellenistic period, that remained in the shadow of the Samaritan city on Mt. Gerizim until the latter's destruction. As for the later city of Neapolis, its populace consisted of different ethnic groups, including communities from Greece, Asia Minor, and perhaps from Tyre and Sidon.

These various ethnic groups came to Neapolis in the Hellenistic and especially in the Roman period, mainly because of military service.[60] Z. Safrai has shown that all the synagogues that Baba Rabbah built in Shechem were outside the city limits, except for one, the "Field Plot Synagogue," built by ʻAqbon the priest.[61] Furthermore, neither Malalas nor any other Byzantine writers who described the Samaritan uprisings make explicit mention of Samaritans residing in Shechem; in fact, in one case it is related that the rebels arrived from outside of Shechem. Thus, there is no clear evidence that a sizeable Samaritan population existed in Neapolis even in Byzantine times. On the contrary, all available evidence shows that Neapolis was a mainly pagan town, with a Samaritan population certainly no greater than in any other Roman city. This was the state of affairs until the Byzantine period, when it gradually became a Christian city.

NOTES

1 Magen 1987: 72–91; 1990a: 70–96; 1993a: 91–148; 2000a: 74–118.

2 Wright 1965: 170–184.

3 Magen 2000a: 118.

4 Wright 1957: 27–28; Toombs and Wright 1961: 46–47.

5 In surveys conducted in Samaria no distinction was made between pottery of the Hellenistic, Hasmonean, and Herodian periods, down to the destruction of the Second Temple. Because Hasmonean and Herodian pottery are virtually indistinguishable, we have no reliable data concerning developments in Samaria from the end of the second century BCE and after the Hasmonean conquest. In the 1968 survey of Judea and Samaria, Hasmonean and Early Roman pottery are grouped together; see M. Kochavi (ed.), *Judaea, Samaria and the Golan. Archaeological Survey 1967–1968*, Jerusalem 1972, p. 200 (Hebrew). Another survey found a decreased number of archaeological sites in the Hasmonean period compared to the preceding one; see Zertal 1992: 59–60. However, in his survey of western Samaria, S. Dar did not find a settlement gap after the Hasmonean conquest; indeed, the area appears to have flourished during the Hasmonean period. Dar identified western Samaria with Jannaeus' "King's Mountain," mentioned by historical sources; however, his claims must be treated with caution, since they are not supported by either pottery or numismatic finds; see Dar 1982. Excavations in Samaria present a markedly different picture from that found in the surveys: the Hasmoneans conquered Shechem and Mt. Gerizim, destroyed the towns and exiled their inhabitants; in a number of locations they also stationed

a garrison to prevent the Samaritans from rebuilding their temple. Rural Samaritan settlements also appear to have diminished. Thus a settlement gap occurs at the Samaritan site of Qedummim between the Hellenistic period and the first century CE; see Magen 1983: 76–83; 1993b: 167–172;1993g: 181–192. Two other Samaritan sites, Kh. Samara and El-Khirbe, are devoid of findings from the first century BCE. This is in all likelihood also a result of a settlement gap following the Hasmonean conquest; see Magen 1993f: 194–215; 2008b: 127–167.

6 On the conversion of the Idumeans in the Hasmonean period, see: *Ant.* XIII, 257–258; *Ant.* XV, 245; as well as A. Kasher, *Jews, Idumaeans, and Ancient Arabs*, Tübingen 1988, pp. 44–78.

7 Coins of John Hyrcanus I and Alexander Jannaeus were found in the excavations at the Hellenistic period city on Mt. Gerizim and in Neapolis; see the lists of coins found in the theater, the hippodrome and the amphitheater.

8 Montgomery 1907: 82–103; B. Hall, "From John Hyrcanus to Baba Rabbah," in Crown 1989: 32–54; Magen 2008e: 43–44.

9 Kasher 1988a: 164–173.

10 Schalit 1964: 97–100; Kasher 1988a: 177–178, 189–192.

11 The Samaritan written sources are not of one mind in their attitude towards Herod, although most view him unfavorably. Macdonald thought that Herod had helped the Samaritans rebuild their temple, but this hypothesis was refuted after many years of excavations at the site; see J. Macdonald, *The Theology of the Samaritans*, London 1964, pp. 147–152. See also: Montgomery 1907: 82–84; J.E.H. Thomson, *The Samaritans: Their Testimony to the Religion of Israel*, Edinburgh 1919, p. 37; S. Safrai, *Pilgrimage at the Time of the Second Temple*, Jerusalem 1965, pp. 236–237 (Hebrew).

12 Schalit 1964: 184–189.

13 Kasher 1988a: 204–205.

14 Safrai 1965: 100; M. Smith, "The Gentiles in Judaism 125 BCE–CE 66," in W. Horbury, W. Davies and J. Sturdy (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Judaism* III: *The Early Roman Period*, Cambridge 1999, p. 244.

15 E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.–A.D. 135)*, Edinburgh 1973, p. 459.

16 F. Deksinger, "Taheb," in A.D. Crown, R. Pummer and A. Tal (eds.), *A Companion to Samaritan Studies*, Tübingen 1993, pp. 224–226; F. Dexinger, "The Beliefs of the Samaritans in the Byzantine period," in E. Stern and H. Eshel (eds.), *The Samaritans*, Jerusalem 2002, pp. 514–516 (Hebrew).

17 M. Stern, "The Status of Provincia Judaea and Its Governors in the Roman Empire under the Julio-Claudian Dinasty," *EI* 10 (1971), pp. 274–282 (Hebrew; English summary, p. XX).

18 M. Stern, "Roman Rule in the Province of 'Judaea' from the Destruction of the Temple until the Bar-Kochba Rebellion," in Z. Baras et al. (eds.), *Eretz-Israel from the Destruction of the Second Temple until the Muslim Conquest*, Jerusalem 1982, pp. 1–17 (Hebrew); Y. Tsafrir, "The Provinces of Eretz-Israel – Names, Boundaries and Administrative Areas," in Z. Baras et al. (eds.), *Eretz-Israel from the Destruction of the Second Temple until the Muslim Conquest*, Jerusalem 1982, pp. 350–386 (Hebrew); M.D. Herr "Roman Government in Eretz-Israel from the Destruction of the Temple to the Bar-Kosba Rebellion," in M. Stern (ed.), *The History of Eretz Israel* 4: *The Roman Byzantine Period. The Roman Period from the Conquest to the Ben Kozba War (63 B.C.E.–135 C.E.)*, Jerusalem 1984, pp. 301–320 (Hebrew).

19 Schürer 1973: 512; B. Isaac, "Roman Administration and Urbanization," *Cathedra* 48 (1988), pp. 12–13, note 20 (Hebrew); B. Isaac, "Roman Colonies in Judaea: The Foundation of Aelia Capitolina," in B. Isaac. *The Near East under Roman Rule. Selected Papers*, Leiden 1998, pp. 95–96, note 36.

20 G.W. Bowersock, "Syria under Vespasian," *JRS* 63 (1973), pp. 133–140.

21 Isaac 1988: 11–12.

22 Plinius V: 69; M. Stern, "The Description of Palestine by Pliny the Elder and the Administrative Division of Judea at the End of the Period of the Second Temple," *Tarbiẓ* 37 (1968), pp. 215–229 (Hebrew; English summary, p. I), reprinted in: Y. Gafni, M.D. Herr and M. Amit (eds.), *Studies in the History of Israel during the Second Temple Period*, Jerusalem 1991, pp. 246–260 (Hebrew).

23 *BMC Pal.*: XXV–XXXIV, Pls. V–VII; Kindler 1971: 33–35; Meshorer 1985: 48.

24 A.H.M. Jones, *The Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces*, Oxford 1937, pp. 276–280, 282; Jones 1940: 81; Schürer 1973: 520–521.

25 Meshorer 1985: 34, 36, 48; Mor 2003: 165–169.

26 Y. Meshorer, *Jewish Coins of the Second Temple Period*, Tel Aviv 1967, no. 239.

27 See also Herr's opinion (1984: 308); Magen 1989: 294; 2008e: 49–51.

28 G. Alon, *History of the Jews in the Land of Israel during the Mishna and Talmud Period*, Tel Aviv 1953, p. 87 (Hebrew).

29 Z. Safrai, *Borders and Rule in Eretz-Israel in the Mishna and Talmud Period*, Tel Aviv 1980, pp. 147–148 (Hebrew); M. Avi-Yonah, *Historical Geography of Palestine from the End of the Babylonian Exile up to the Arab Conquest*, Jerusalem 1984, pp. 121–124 (Hebrew); Safrai 1986: 92–117.

30 B. Isaac, "Cassius Dio on the Revolt of Bar Kokhba," *SCI* 7 (1983–84), pp. 68–71.

31 Applebaum (1983: 239–240) is of the opinion that the Samaritan populace in the countryside participated in the revolt but that the Samaritans in the cities did not. According to Bichler (1980: 115–121), however, the Samaritans did not take part in the revolt at all. For an extended discussion see Chapter Six, note 48.

32 See Chapter Six, notes 33–35, 47.

33 Mor 2003: 172–183. Mor's explanation is implausible and has met with little support.

34 See Chapter Six, note 41.

35 *AÉ* 1972: 178–179, no. 577.

36 M. Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism* III, Jerusalem 1984, p. 23; Jones 1937: 136; Schürer 1973: 516–517.

37 Pliny the Younger 22: 1–3.

38 Safrai's conjecture is that during Falco's term of office in Judea he helped Neapolis develop roads and expand its contacts with the Orient; see Safrai 1986: 85–90. We find this hypothesis implausible.

39 Moretti 1951: no. 72.

40 Clermont-Ganneau 1896: 319–320.

41 Abel 1952: 135–144; Avi-Yonah 1976a: 76–79; Alon 1984: 682–687.

42 Aelius Spartianus IX: 5.

43 See above, notes 41–42.

44 Aelius Spartianus XVI: 7; see also Stern 1980: 623.

45 Avi-Yonah 1976a: 39–42; Alon 1984: 682–687.

46 See above, note 41.

47 Rostovtzeff 1957: 415–423; Levine 1982: 119–143; Bar 2002: 43–54.

48 Abel 1952: 199–203; Rostovtzeff 1957: 442; E. Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, New York 1960, pp. 90–91.

49 *BMC Pal.*: XXV–XXXIV, Pls. V–VII; Kindler 1971: 37–38; Meshorer 1985: 50.

50 Clermont-Ganneau (1896: 318–319) dates it to the fifth century CE, to the reign of Emperor Zeno and the Samaritan revolt. E. Renan dates it to the fourth century CE. See also discussion in Di Segni 1997: 575–577.

51 Ammianus Marcellinus I, XIV, 8:11. Neapolis is also mentioned in some additional sources. See *Expositio Totius Mundi*: 162; Stern 1980: 163, 490, 496; Tsafrir 1982: 372–378. Neapolis is occasionally mentioned as נפולין in the Talmud and the Midrashic literature (*Tabula*: 194–195).

52 A.N. Sherwin-White, *The Roman Citizenship*, Oxford 1939.

53 T. Mommsen, *The Provinces of the Roman Empire*, Chicago 1968, pp. 324–327.

54 *IGRRP* I, Inscr. 630.

55 *IGRRP* I, Inscr. 631.

56 *IGRRP* I, Inscr. 636. In Abdera, Spain, another Latin inscription was found of a man named Justus son of Menander, who apparently came from Flavia Neapolis. However, it is also possible that Flavius was the man's name and he came from another city called Neapolis; see *CIL* II, p. 64, no. 515.

57 L.W. Barnard, *Justin Martyr—His Life and Thought*, Cambridge 1967; E.R. Goodenough, *The Theology of Justin Martyr*, Amsterdam 1968; E.F. Osborn, *Justin Martyr*, Tübingen 1973.

58 Dan 1984: 205, note 26.

59 Magen 1993f: 200–203; 2008b: 137–141.

60 M. Stern, "Judaism and Hellenism in Eretz-Israel in the Third and Second Centuries BCE," in Y. Gafni, M.D. Herr and M. Amit (eds.), *Studies in the History of Israel. The Second Temple Period*, Jerusalem 1991, pp. 4–6 (Hebrew).

61 Safrai 1977: 107–108.