האגודה הישראלית ללימודים ביזאנטיים

The Israel Association for Byzantine Studies

What Happened in the Sixth Century?

The Research Workshop of the Israel Association for Byzantine Studies, 2021-22

The sixth century often is described as a period of prosperity in the Levant as a whole and in the Holy Land in particular. This prosperity is evident in the significant expansion of settlements in both arable and arid zones, followed by the flourishing of monumental building initiatives in villages and cities. Lavish churches, large monastic institutions, and impressive synagogues are evident in nearly every corner of the provinces of *Palaestina* and in the neighboring provinces of *Arabia* and *Phoenice*.

Archaeological surveys and excavations also shed light upon the economic infrastructure of the region by revealing the numerous and widespread presence of olive oil and wine presses -- evidence of a strong local economy, bolstered by the growth of pilgrimage to holy places. During the past two decades, however, studies of a higher resolution in different parts of the country have provided a more nuanced picture and have enabled to identify contrasting trends. The latter include: a decline of settlement in the Eastern Galilee as early as the fourth century; the rapid decline of settlement in the Negev in the mid-sixth century; the absence of rural communities in the countryside of Jerusalem, dating from the Byzantine period; and the decline of rural settlements in the northern Transjordan. The latter may be linked to rapid geomorphological processes, such as soil erosion and deposits. In contrast, the expansion and construction of churches and monasteries had a major impact on the on the landscape throughout the sixth century. Furthermore, recent discussions on the influence of environmental factors on the pattern of settlement during

this period have shown that the Justinianic plague and years of continuous drought may have changed the demographic balance and caused a decline in Mediterranean trade.

The workshop will explore these processes through a comparative survey of the different patterns of Urban and rural settlement and a thematic examination of subjects, such as the buildings of religious institutions and environmental processes. The workshop will take place monthly via Zoom, on Sundays, 18:00-20:00, Israel Standard Time.

Most sessions will be conducted in Hebrew; there will be three sessions in English.

We look forward to an enriching and instructive workshop.

The organizing Committee**:**

Joseph Patrich, Gideon Avni, Uzi Leibner, Jacob Ashkenazi

The Seminar Program

October 31, 2021: Session One: Opening Session: Sources for the Study of the Sixth Century (Hebrew)

Opening Remarks: Joseph Patrich

Historiography: Avshalom Laniado

Jewish Sources: Hillel Newman

Epigraphy: Leah Di Segni

Respondent: Oded Irshai

December 12, 2021: Session Two: Rural Settlement: Part One (English)

The Golan Heights: Michael Osband

The Western Galilee: Mordechai Aviam

The Transjordan: Basema Hamarneh (Austria)

Respondent, with emphasis on the Eastern Galilee: Uzi Leibner

January 6, 2022: Session Three: Rural Settlement: Part Two (Hebrew)

The Countryside of Jerusalem: Jon Seligman

The Judean Plain and the Mediterranean Coast: Itamar Taxel

The Negev: Yotam Tepper

Respondent: Gideon Avni

February 13, 2022: Session Four: Urban Settlement: Part One (English)

Beth-Shean/Scythopolis: Benjamin Arubas and Gabi Mazor

Gerasa: Achim Lichtenberger (Germany)

Sepphoris: Zeev Weiss

The discussion will be held at the following session.

March 6, 2022: Session Five: Urban Settlement: Part Two (English)

Jerusalem: Oren Gutfeld

Caesarea: Peter Gendelman

Gaza: Catherine Saliou (France)

Respondent: Joseph Patrich

April 3, 2022: Session Six: The Buildings of Religious Institutions (Hebrew)

Synagogues: Chaim Ben-David

Churches: Joseph Patrich

Monasteries: Tamar Backner

Respondent, with emphasis on mosaics: Rina Talgam

May 8, 2022: Session Seven: The Environmental Impact: Earthquakes; Climate Change; and Plagues (Hebrew)

New Finds from the Negev: Guy Bar-Oz

The Impact of the Justinianic Plague: Lee Mordechai

Evidence of the Plague in *Palaestina* and Arabia: Nancy Benovitz

Respondent, with emphasis on climate change: Rehav (Buni) Rubin

June 6, 2022: Optional Concluding Roundtable Discussion