

# TIDES OF CHANGE

## HOW ANCIENT HARBORS SHAPED THE MEDITERRANEAN WORLD

**T**he ancient Roman ports scattered across the Mediterranean were the lifelines of the Roman Empire, serving as the arteries through which flowed the lifeblood of commerce, military power, and cultural exchange that sustained and expanded one of history's greatest civilizations. These ports were marvels of engineering and planning, showcasing the Romans' unparalleled ability to dominate maritime logistics. They enabled the efficient movement of grain, wine, olive oil, and luxuries that fed and entertained the Roman populace, facilitated the rapid deployment of legions to quell uprisings, and acted as melting pots where Roman, Greek, Egyptian, and other cultures intermingled, spreading ideas and technologies. Through these ports, Rome exerted its influence across three continents, knitting together a vast and diverse empire into a cohesive unit, a testament to the enduring legacy of Roman innovation and ambition in shaping the Mediterranean world and beyond.

According to Prof. Emmanuel Nantet (Head, Laboratory for Nautical History and Archaeology), ancient harbors served as the pulsating core of a community's economic and social life. "Far more than just stone and wood, they formed a vast, interconnected system, the very lifeblood of ancient trade and industry."



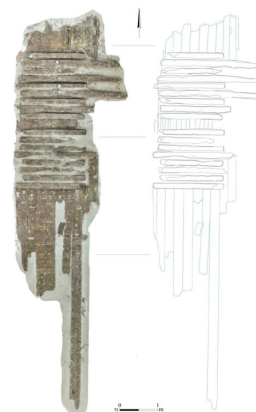
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Prof. Nantet, a historian and archaeologist proficient in Greek, Hebrew, and Latin, secured an ERC Consolidator Grant to explore ancient Roman ports. This funding will facilitate the identification of functional areas within harbors, their unified operation analysis, and the development of a standardized methodology for studying empire-wide harbors. The project will also address

specific needs of Roman ships, including vessel types and seasonal variations, providing a contextual framework for unearthing shipwrecks like the hull discovered in Caesarea during Prof. Nantet's 2017–2018 excavations. By

examining case studies from Caesarea (Israel), Terracina (Italy), and Port-Vendres (France), this approach aims to establish a transferable methodology for global Roman harbor analysis.

Utilizing modern archaeology tools and methods, Prof. Nantet and his team are peeling back layers of history to reveal the intricate anatomy of ancient Roman ports. "Our research isn't just revealing the surprising sophistication of these maritime gateways, it's also illuminating their critical role in shaping the Roman Empire's enduring legacy – a legacy that still echoes in today's world."



*The hull obtained during the 2018 excavation season: a photogrammetric model (left) and CAD orthomap (right).*





Emmanuel Nantet

Prof. Nantet is also leading a four-year project funded by the Israel Science Foundation to unearth the ancient harbor of Tiberias.



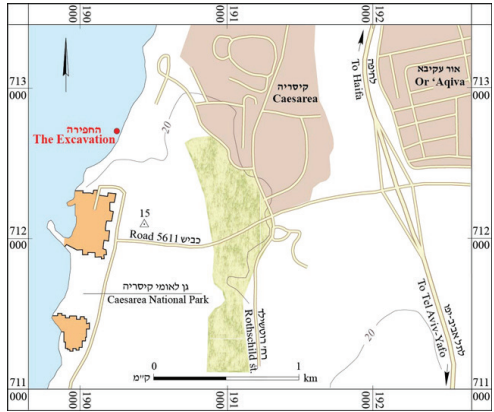
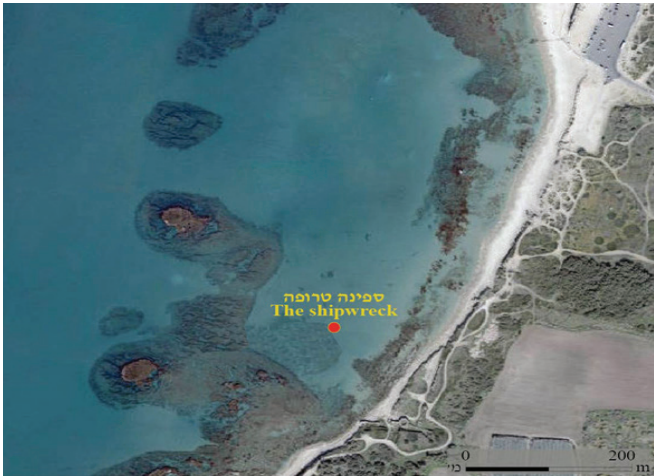
The dig uncovered a section of the city wall built on a concrete jetty base, built with wooden caissons. Another southward wall, possibly a quay wall, was also identified. Unfortunately, high water levels in the Sea of Galilee limited the digs.

However, the team wasn't discouraged. What was initially planned as a land-based project evolved into an excavation conducted in a humid environment with the aid of pumps and, in certain areas, underwater with the assistance of divers. To gain further insights, they conducted core samples along the long wall, revealing evidence of multiple rebuilds throughout history, suggesting a complex harbor structure. Drone photography also played a crucial role, capturing a comprehensive overview of the entire excavation site. The nearly twenty-person team, comprised mainly of students from the University of Perpignan Via Domitia in France, provided essential support throughout the initial dig. This first season offered a promising glimpse into Tiberias' harbor, and future excavations fueled by these findings are sure to shed more light on this hidden piece of history.



General view of the shipwreck during excavation in 2017.

Aerial photograph of the location of the shipwreck (from GovMap).



Location map