

Where Internationalisation and Research Meet: A Biblical, Historical, and Archaeological Trip to Israel and Jordan (February 24 to March 3, 2023).

With 38 we were: students from a variety of faculties, senior students, colleagues from other faculties and colleagues from interdepartmental and university services, and we went as a Roman phalanx, albeit a nice and happy one, through the South of Israel and Jordan!

Below: a day by day report with many pictures!

On the first day, the participants were introduced to an ancient oriental city at the excavated city of **Beer-Sheva**, with its 10th century BCE double and 8th century BCE kazematten gate, its round build-up, its circular main street and almost perpendicular streets leading to a centre, its temples, water-reservoir, pantries, and houses.



Then, we set off to experience the national park of **Ein-Avdat**, where we walked in a stunning canyon, enjoyed the water at the basis, and then, had to work our way up using very narrow steps carved out in the rock and climbing ladders.





We all made it up and, as soon as shabbat was over, enjoyed a shower and dinner in our hotel in Mitzpeh Ramon.

Next day, we were introduced to esp. the geological history of **Maktesh Ramon**—an immense crater of ca. 40 km long and 1 to 10 km wide—and drove with the bus through this part of the Negev, seeing Ibexes along the road.



By lunchtime we were at **Timna**, where we studied the copper mines, the different geological formations in the area, looked at the “mushroom” rock as eroded by wind, one student showing off her climbing skills, and walked up the mountain, and came down, and paid our respect at the 13-11th cent. BCE Egyptian Hathor Temple, listened to a student’s paper, realizing all that the Negev was in Egyptian hands at that time.









Later that day, still in Timna, we were introduced to a replica of the desert-tabernacle as depicted in Exodus 25-31 and 35-40. The papers presented by the students at that location were, in my humble opinion, better than the summary as given by the official guide.

We then hopped in the bus, drove in the direction of Eilat, stopped to get a coffee or a head covering, **crossed the border with Jordan at the Wadi Arava**, and continued our trip on the Jordanian side, driving to **Petra**.

Next day was completely devoted to Petra. Petra was absolutely stunning: we worked our way from the entrance to the very end of the park, stopped at every important rock, building, carving, tomb, inscription, and listened to wonderful papers as presented by different students.





















After having gone up to yet another section, cuddling with some camels, and taking a break opposite a large Nabatean temple complex, a group of absolute die-hards even climbed the 800 steps up (and then down) to a monastery, while some of us enjoyed Arabic coffee with loads of cardamon. Between 10 and 18 km were covered under a blazing hot sun.











After Petra, we headed for **Machaerus**, the place where John the Baptist lost his head. After a pitstop, where some students got excellent sun protection, we arrived at Machaerus where three students presented their work. The audience was either listening or simply baking in the sun and enjoying the view towards the Dead Sea.













After Machaerus we drove to **Mount Nebo**, enjoying the stunning driving skills of our Jordanian bus-driver, who took us up and down and left and right on really small roads, in between pointing to dromedaries or exceptional volcanic rocks. At Mount Nebo, more papers were presented, stunning Byzantine mosaics deciphered, and crucial baptism fonts admired.



Later in the day we crossed the King Hussein / Allenby bridge in the area of Jericho. Because of the unrest at Jericho, the travel agency sent us to **Bethlehem**, where we spent an evening in an Arabic restaurant, eating far too much, smoking shisha and enjoying the dancers. From a distance the President/Rektor of our university followed our trip, and he was very happy to hear that we had avoided Jericho.

Next morning, papers were presented at the square of the Nativity Church in Bethlehem, and then the church with its spectacular Byzantine mosaics, as well as the grotto of Jerome were visited.







We then made our way to **Jerusalem** and during the bus-drive listened to more papers.



We divided the time in Jerusalem into an East-West day and a South-North one, starting on the first day at the Lion's gate, in the East of the Old City, picknicking at the Franciscans, and walking the Via Dolorosa, listening to more papers as presented by students, and ending up at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and finally at the Jaffa gate in the Western part of the Old City.













The second day, we started at the Dung gate, got on the Temple-Mount, spend as much time as we could absorbing every single archaeological fact, exited via the Muslim quarter, walked back to the Jewish quarter, stared at the Western Wall, split up the group, men and women going each to their designated section where we enjoyed the company of many celebrating and/or praying women, and learned about Herodian, Persian and other stones, the lintel-stone of the gate, the remnant of the Barclay gate, Wilson gate, etc.













Then, we walked to the restaurant, crossing the Old City once more and smelling all the good stuff.



Dionisio Candido then managed to get us in the church of the **Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem**, with whom we had a short conversation and who sent his greetings to Archbishop Lackner.



The luncheon was served in the courtyard of a restaurant adjoining the Old city wall between the Jaffa-gate and the New Gate. Orange, lemon and pomello trees were standing next to our tables.



During the so-called free afternoon, the group split up, with one team going up to the Mount of Olives and coming down again the valley, and another team enjoying the Christian and Muslim quarter.





The last day a visit to the well-known Shrine of the Book was scheduled. There we enjoyed looking at and talking about the Dead Sea Scrolls and their impact on the field of text criticism of the Hebrew Bible.



After a last look at Jerusalem, we said our goodbyes, drove to Tell-Aviv, hopped on the plane and arrived safe and sound in Salzburg.

Many of the participants expressed their wish to participate in the next trip, which is foreseen for 2026, and which will take us (as in 2019) to the North of Israel.

If interested in joining, just send us an email!

Signing off on this fabulous trip:

Dr Rupert Breitwieser (Altertumswissenschaften)

DDr Dionisio Candido (Bibelwissenschaft und Kirchengeschichte).

Univ.-Prof.Dr. Kristin De Troyer (Bibelwissenschaft und Kirchengeschichte)



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