CLAS 3730 – The Roman to Medieval Near East: The Caesarea Excavations, Israel

Instructors: Joseph L. Rife (Classical and Mediterranean Studies) and Phillip Lieberman (Jewish Studies, Classical and Mediterranean Studies, History, and Law)

Location: Caesarea, Israel

Dates: May 6 – 28, 2020

This course introduces students to the history and archaeology of the Near East from Roman times to the Middle Ages (ca. 1st century B.C.E.-12th century C.E.) by working and living at the ancient city of Caesarea Maritima on the west coast of Israel during the month of May. Caesarea was the lavish port of Herod the Great, the Roman provincial capital, a thriving commercial center during the Roman and Byzantine eras, a leading marketplace and stronghold under the Islamic caliphates, and a Crusader fortress: a vibrant melting pot of cultures and religions throughout its history. Students participate in onsite archaeological research at Caesarea, attend practical seminars and lectures on the kibbutz where they lodge, and visit sites and museums in central to northern Israel.

The Caesarea Excavations, directed by Rife and Lieberman under exclusive license from the Israeli Antiquities Authority, furnish a unique opportunity for students at the introductory level to join in a major interdisciplinary research program at a spectacular Mediterranean site of prime importance. The course will involve intensive excavation of the north side of Temple Platform and the south-central district of the decumanus maximus, an area first occupied by Herod’s great Temple to Roma and Augustus and a dense adjacent neighborhood, then by the episcopal complex surrounding the Octagon, perhaps by the lost Great Mosque, and finally by an Abbasid to Fatimid souk. Through daily tasks students will learn the basic skills of archaeological fieldwork: techniques of digging, architectural and geospatial recording, and the collection, identification, conservation, and documentation of artifactual and biological remains.

An essential feature of this course is the experience of living and learning in situ. The schedule entails a daily routine of excavation and finds-processing punctuated by afternoon lectures or practica; occasional excursions to other regions; and the weekly day of rest. Apart from learning methodology, students will examine the religious, cultural, social, and economic history of the Roman to Medieval eras as it is reflected in the region’s archaeological record. Finally, the course introduces students to the customs, rhythms, and spaces of life in modern Israel while they stay on a kibbutz but travel to the nation’s other regions: Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, and the Galilee and Jordan Valley.

FEES: Cost is approx. $9,742.17