


BUY AN ISRAEL NATURE AND PARKS AUTHORITY SUBSCRIPTION FOR UNLIMITED FREE ENTRY TO 55 NATIONAL PARKS AND NATURE RESERVES.



Nearby Sites:



www.parks.org.il | *3639 | 
Zippori National Park, Tel: 04-6568272

Welcome to Zippori National Park

"Sixteen miles all around Zippori is a land flowing with milk and honey (Jerusalem Talmud, Bikkurim 71d)

Introduction

The hill of Zippori is located in the western Lower Galilee, at 289 m above sea level, among the limestone hills between the Zippori Stream in the south and the Beit Netofa Valley in the north. It is surrounded by fertile valleys that were easy to cultivate and to traverse. One of these valleys, through which the Zippori Stream flows, is enriched by the Zippori springs.

Remains of a magnificent city were discovered here. They include a system of streets, public buildings dwellings, a theater, a central market, bathhouses, a synagogue, and churches, mainly dating from the Roman and Byzantine periods, and a fortress and a church from the Crusader period. The system of aqueducts east of the city included channels, a gigantic water reservoir, a tunnel and a pool. Cemeteries are scattered around the ancient city, among them a tomb purported



The fortress

to be that of Rabbi Judah II, also known as Yudan Nesiah, the grandson of Rabbi Judah Hanasi (the Patriarch), the redactor of the Mishnah.

The Origin of the Name

"Why is it called Zippori? Because it is perched on top of the mountain like a bird" (Babylonian Talmud, Megillah, 6a)

The above Talmudic tradition notwithstanding, the source of the city's name is not clear. The Romans called it Diocæsarea – the city of

the god Zeus and of Caesar. During the Crusader period it was called Le Safourie, a name that was preserved in that of the Arab village established here, Saffuriyyeh. Moshav Zippori, founded in 1949, took the ancient Hebrew name.

The History of Zippori

"The Sanhedrin was exiled...from Jerusalem to Yavneh, and from Yavneh to Usha, and from Usha to Shefar'am, and from Shefar'am to Beit She'arim, and from Beit She'arim to Zippori, and from Zippori to Tiberias" (Babylonian Talmud, Rosh Hashanah, 31a-b).

Zippori is mentioned for the first time during the reign of Alexander Jannæus (103 BCE). However, some archaeological findings at the site date to the First Temple period, indicating the existence of an earlier settlement during this time. In 63 BCE, the country was conquered by the Roman army under Pompey, and in 55 BCE, Gabinius, governor of Syria, declared Zippori the capital of the Galilee. In 47 BCE, Herod the Great was appointed governor of Galilee; however, he could not take up his post due to the murder of his father Antipater, who had previously ruled the country. Herod had to take the city by force, and attacked it at the head of his army in a snowstorm. In Herod's time Zippori continued to be the capital of the Galilee. After his death in 4 BCE, the Jews revolted against the Romans and captured Zippori. But the Roman army, headed by Varus, quelled the rebellion and burned the city, selling its Jewish inhabitants into slavery. The Galilee subsequently came under the rule of Herod's son Antipas, who rebuilt and fortified Zippori.

In 66 CE, the first revolt of the Jews against the Romans broke out. However, the people of Zippori made a treaty with the Roman army, thus protecting their city from destruction. Late, in the Bar Kokhba Revolt (132-135 CE), the role played by Zippori is unclear. In any case, at this time the city's name was changed to Diocæsarea and its Jewish leadership was unseated in favor of pagan rulers. At the beginning of the third century CE, after the leadership of the town was restored to the Jews, Rabbi Judah Hanasi moved to Zippori, and with him the Sanhedrin (the high court of Jewish law). Rabbi Judah lived in Zippori for 17 years, until his death. It was here, in around the 200 CE, that he redacted the Mishnah.

Zippori is mentioned frequently in the Talmud as a Jewish city with 18 synagogues and a number of study houses, some of which are known by name. During the period of the Mishnah and the Talmud, many sages made their home in Zippori, among them Rabbi Halafta, Rabbi Elazar Ben-Azariya, and Rabbi Yosef Ben-Halafta. The Sanhedrin remained at Zippori until the second half of the third century CE, when it moved to Tiberias under the leadership of Rabbi Yohanan, the greatest of the Amoraim (the Talmudic sages of the third to the fifth centuries).

In 324 CE, Emperor Constantine declared Christianity the religion of the Roman Empire, which marks the opening of the Byzantine period.

Safety and Behavior Rules at the Site

- Caution – open pits and excavations. Walk only on marked paths and obey the instructions of the rangers.
- Entry to sites not open to the public is prohibited
- Do not pour liquid on the mosaics and do not walk on them. Do not touch the plaster of the reservoir, write on it or scratch it.
- Do not harm flora, fauna, or other elements.
- Eat only in designated picnic areas: the Jennifer picnic area east of the parking lot and the Elisha picnic area on the side of the road to the water reservoir.
- Keep the area clean.
- In case of accident or mishap, inform the site staff.

The Learning Center

The Learning Center is staffed by skilled and experienced guides who are at the service of visitors of all ages and in various languages. The center also hosts a variety of activities in addition to guided tours of the site and its surroundings: workshops for ancient crafts and costumed interpretation, Bar/Bat Mitzvah events and more.



A seven-branched candelabrum carved into the pavement of the cardo

Research and text: Prof. Ze'ev Weiss and Dr. Tsvika Tsuk
Editor: Dr. Tsvika Tsuk

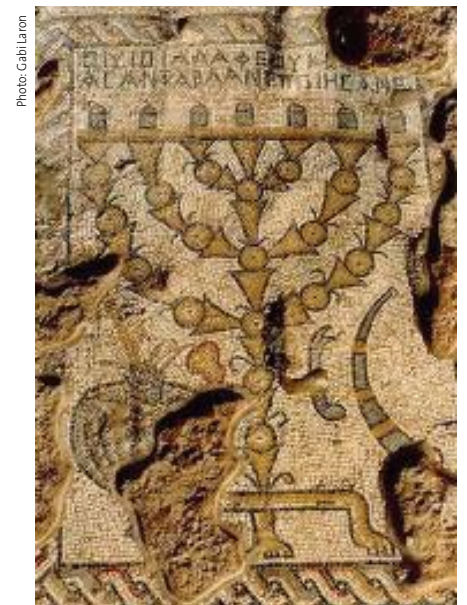
Translator: Miriam Feinberg Vamosh

Photos: INPA Archive, Gabi Laron. Cover photo: Gabi Laron

Production: Adi Greenbaum
© Israel Nature and Parks Authority



A basket of first fruits and cymbals – synagogue mosaic



A seven-branched candelabrum – synagogue mosaic

Constantine supported a converted Jew by the name of Joseph, bestowing on him the title of "friend of the emperor" – comes, and allowing him to build a church in Zippori. In 351 CE, a revolt broke out against Gallus Caesar, governor of the province. Aursecinus, his general, was sent to the town to repress the revolt, but he did not destroy the city.

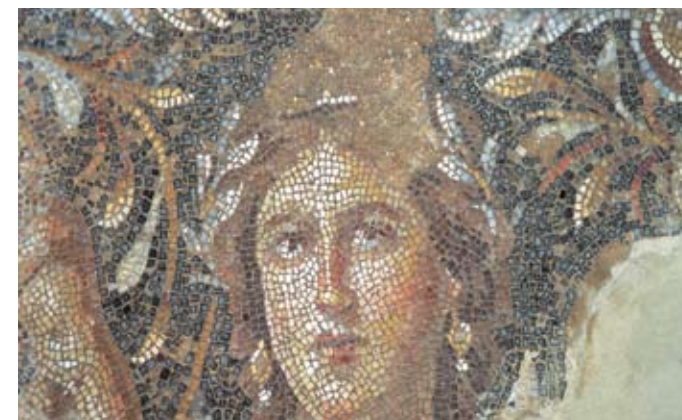
Zippori was completely demolished in an earthquake that struck the country in 363 CE, but was quickly rebuilt. During the Byzantine period the Christian community of Zippori grew, and the city became a bishopric. A number of churches were apparently built at this time. Still, the Jews remained the majority of the population. The city continued to flourish until the end of the Byzantine period, but it went into decline during the Arab period that followed.

During the Crusader period, Le Saphourie was a city and fortress in the principality of the Galilee. From here the Crusader army set out to the Battle of Hattin, in which it was defeated by the Ayyubid warrior Saladin in 1187.

In the 18th century, the Arab village of Saffuriyyeh was fortified by Daher el-Omar, the Bedouin ruler of the Galilee, who restored its fortress. During the Arab revolt (1936–1939) and the War of Independence in 1948, the village and its fortress housed Arab gangs that acted against the local Jewish population.

During Operation Dekel in the War of Independence, on the night of July 15, 1948, Saffuriyyeh was conquered and its residents abandoned the place. Moshav Zippori was subsequently established adjacent to it.

Zippori National Park, covering an area of 16 square kilometers, was opened to the public in 1992. The development of the park was implemented jointly by the Tourism Ministry, the Israel Government Tourist Corporation, the Israel Nature and Parks Authority, the Jewish National Fund, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and the Galilee Foundation.



The beautiful woman in the Dionysus House mosaic

The History of Archaeological Research

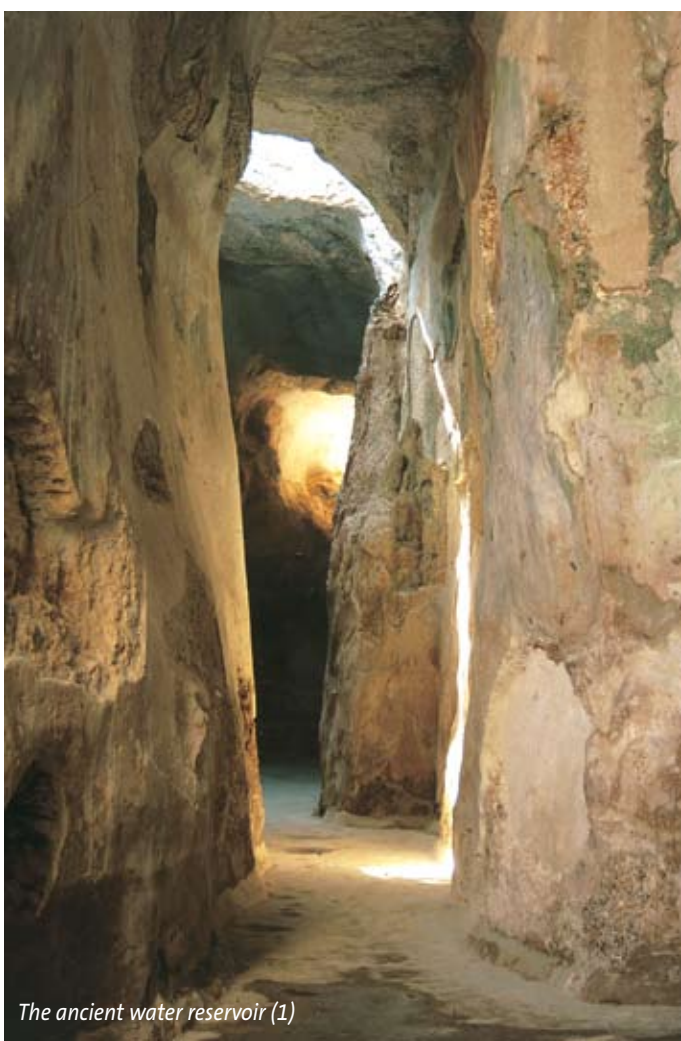
The first excavations at the site took place in 1931 by L. Waterman of the University of Michigan in the United States. A survey and study of the water system began in 1975 by an expedition from Tel Aviv University under the leadership of T. Tsuk. The expedition unearthed the ancient water reservoir (1) between 1993 and 1994. Research and excavation at Zippori was resumed in 1983 by Tampa University in Florida, led by J. Strange, and continued until 2003. This expedition worked in the theater (14) and uncovered a large public building (8).



A centaur in the Nile House mosaic

From 1985 to 1989 excavations were carried out by a joint expedition from Duke University in North Carolina in the United States and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, led by E. Meyers, E. Netzer and C. Meyers.

These excavations uncovered large portions of the theater (14), the Dionysus House (10) and more. In 1990 an expedition began work at the site, led by Z. Weiss and E. Netzer, and after 1995 by Z. Weiss. The expedition has worked in a number of sites at the top of the hill, and uncovered most of the lower city, the location of the Nile House (6), the synagogue (16), the bathhouse and street system (5) and more. An expedition from Duke University also excavated at the site, led by E. Meyers and C. Meyers, from 1993 to 2000.



The ancient water reservoir (1)



Touring Route (3–4 Hours)

The touring route begins at the entrance pavilion (4), but beforehand visitors should see the ancient water system (1), the Mashhad pool (2) and the carob reservoir (3).

The ancient water system (1) – Located at the entrance to the site on the left, 1.5 kilometers east of the city of Zippori. The reservoir is part of the city's water supply system, which begins at the springs in the Nazareth Mountains near the villages of Mashhad and Reineh. The discharge rate of the springs is approximately 40 cubic meters per hour. The water was channeled to the city via two aqueducts; the one at Mashhad was dug into the rock and the one at Reineh was constructed. The Reineh aqueduct led to the giant reservoir east of the city. The reservoir was dug at this point because it is the only high place near Zippori with chalk rock, which is easy to hew. The reservoir is 260 meters long, ranges from two to four meters in width, and is some 10 meters high. Its total capacity is 4,300 cubic meters of water, which could supply water for 18,000 people for two weeks. The water flowed to the reservoir through a sedimentation basin five meters deep. Support arches were constructed across the width of the reservoir at certain points.

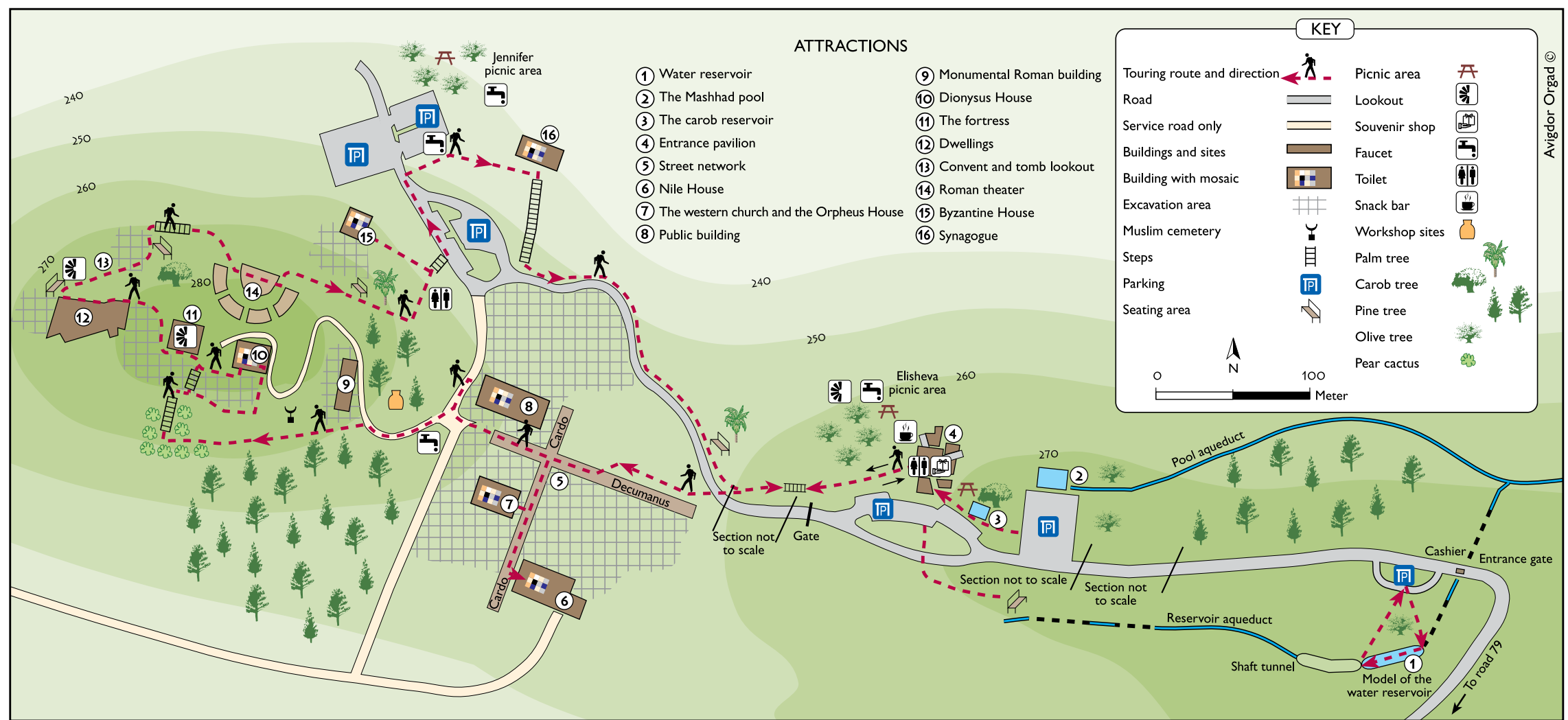
A valve at the reservoir's outlet regulated the flow of water to the city. From this point, the water flowed through a tunnel 235 meters long, dug into the rock by means of six vertical shafts. The aqueduct entered the city at 270 meters above sea level (20 meters lower than the fortress) and supplied water to most of the city. The reservoir reveals two periods of construction: the first is from the second century CE and the second from the fourth century CE. The reservoir continued in use until the seventh century. Numerous cisterns were discovered in dwellings in the higher part of the city, in which residents who did not receive their water supply from the reservoir could store rain water. The residents also utilized spring water which, although it flowed in the valley, had a stable discharge rate (about 110 cubic meters per hour).

The Mashhad pool (2) – The northern branch of the aqueduct, known as the "pool aqueduct" led water to the Mashhad pool, located at the edge of the city. This large pool, measuring 14 x 21 meters and at least 2.5 meters deep, was apparently a swimming pool. It was probably used only when the flow of spring water was abundant, in the spring and the beginning of summer. The pool is located on the north side of the parking lot.

The carob pool (3) – Located on the northern side of the path leading from the parking lot to the entrance pavilion. The name derives from the large nearby carob tree. The reservoir, about 5 x 9 meters in size, was originally covered by roof supported by five arches. It was connected to the aqueduct and apparently pre-dates the large reservoir. The reservoir served as a "water tower" for Zippori. Excavation here has not yet been completed.

The entry pavilion (4) – Visitors will find information, souvenirs and an explanatory film here, as well as a model of the site, toilets, an instruction center and the national park office. A path leads from the pavilion west to the decumanus and the street system that is part of the touring route of the Zippori antiquities.

The street system (5) – An impressive network of streets arranged in a grid, dating from the Roman period (apparently the early second century CE), was uncovered here. The street system indicates urban planning typical of important cities in the Roman Empire. Groups of buildings, or insulae, were found between the streets. At the heart of the street system were two colonnaded streets, which intersected to create a kind of a cross. The cardo ran north to south and its cross-street, the decumanus, ran east to west. The streets were paved with hard limestone, while the porticoes along both sides of the street were paved with mosaics.



The street was lined with small shops, which formed part of Zippori's "lower market," mentioned in the Talmud. Ruts can clearly be seen in the paving stones, created by wagon wheels that passed this way repeatedly over the years in antiquity. A seven-branched candelabrum was carved on one of the stones.

The Nile House (6): Located east of the cardo, and covering a large part of the insula. At the western entrance, on a pavement next to the cardo, a mosaic floor was discovered bearing an inscription mentioning the name of the mosaic artists. The building had three main wings connected by corridors. At the center of the western wing was a basilical hall bisected by two rows of columns. Additional rooms



The cardo, with the ruts left by wagon wheels

surrounded an open courtyard in the eastern wing of the building. Among the rooms of the southern wing, which was mostly destroyed, was a toilet.

The floors of the building were decorated with colorful mosaics, some with geometric patterns and some with human, animal and plant imagery. Among the designs: a pair of hunters, a centaur holding an object bearing a Greek inscription, Amazons and a male figure on a hunt, and Amazons participating in a celebration of an unknown type. The largest of all the floors was adorned with a spectacular mosaic depicting the celebrations held in Egypt when the Nile overflowed, alongside various hunting scenes – an unusual combination, attesting to the great artistic skill and imagination of its creator.

The western church and Orpheus House (7) (temporarily closed)

The western church was built at the end of the fifth or the beginning of the sixth century CE atop the remains of the Orpheus House, dating to the Roman period. A rectangular plaza adorned with a mosaic served as a grand entryway between the decumanus and the church, along the long side of the building. The church's foundations, made of fieldstones, were the main part of it to survive. The church was an elongated building about 18 meters wide, which faced east. The main hall was divided into a central space and two aisles. The apse (where mass was held) was at the eastern end, as usual in a church.

Orpheus House: At the heart of the building, measuring 17 x 28 meters, built in the second half of the third century CE, was a dining hall south of which was an open courtyard with two porticoes. Additional rooms of various sizes were grouped around the dining hall and the courtyard. The floors in these rooms were all decorated with mosaics with simple geometric patterns. In contrast, the mosaic in the dining hall features four colorful panels arranged in an inverted L. The central panel depicts Orpheus, the divine musician, and the others show scenes of daily life.

Orpheus House was apparently damaged in the earthquake of 363 CE. Shortly thereafter, the building was restored and a number of structural changes can be discerned. New mosaics were installed also using geometric and figurative designs; however, these were only partially preserved.

Public building (8) – In use from the first to the fourth centuries CE, and apparently containing Zippori's market (agora). It measured 40 x 60 meters, and the entrance was from the east via the colonnaded street. At its center was a courtyard surrounded by columns and rooms with colorful mosaic floors depicting geometric patterns and animals.

The monumental Roman building (9) – A building measuring 14.5 x 26.8 meters, containing a courtyard surrounded by columns. South of the courtyard were three rooms. Rectangular niches in the walls of the westernmost rooms probably contained shelves. Later, in the Roman period, the building was transformed for private use, and was destroyed during the fourth century CE. The location of the building, its plan, and especially the niches in the western room, indicate it might have been a library or an archive. On the slope to the north and outside of the building a number of large walls were discovered, built of field stones and connected to a large foundation. This may have been a monument, constructed during the Roman period to overlook the lower city.

Dwelling with a mosaic from the Roman period (the Dionysus House) (10) – At the top of the hill, near the theater, a mansion was discovered, built in the third century CE and apparently destroyed during the 363 CE earthquake. The house had an interior courtyard surrounded by columns on three sides. On the north side, rooms of a dwelling were discovered, among them a dining hall. Substructures were preserved to the south and under the courtyard, including a row of rooms that served as shops and faced the street. The rooms of this house were paved with colorful mosaics, preserved in the northern part of the structure. The most unusual of these adorned the dining hall. It depicts the life of Dionysus, the god of wine, and his worship.

A woman of rare beauty, depicted in medallions surrounding the central panel, has been dubbed "the Mona Lisa of Zippori." Interpretive signs have been installed that explain the scenes shown in the floor.

The fortress (11) – Built during the Crusader period on the remains of an earlier structure. The original two-story building was built out of large dressed stones taken from earlier structures. Roman sarcophagi, some decorated with reliefs, were inserted in the corners of the building. The doorway, with its decorative arch, and the ground-floor wall to its right were built in the eighteenth century by Daher el-Omar. At the end of the nineteenth century the building was refurbished and served as a school for the children of Saffuriyyeh until the War of Independence. The fortress houses an exhibit of archaeological finds from Zippori.

The spectacular view from the fortress roof illustrates the words of the ancient sages about the city which "perched on top of the mountain like a bird." From here the Byzantine-era storehouse uncovered to the south can be seen. The storehouse contained a central hall flanked by additional storage rooms. Toward the end of the Byzantine period, the structure was destroyed in a major fire. Between the fortress and the storehouse, a large cistern was discovered, which was part of the water supply system to the top of the hill.

Dwellings from the period of the Second Temple, the Mishnah and the Talmud (12) (first century BCE to sixth century CE) – On the western part of the hill a cluster of several structures were found near a paved street. During the Hasmonean period (second to first centuries BCE) stones were quarried in this area. A first-century CE building with massive walls and two ritual baths was unearthed on the easternmost edge of the area. Dwellings built later continued in use until the end of the Roman period and were rebuilt during the Byzantine period.

Cisterns and a number of other underground spaces were discovered in this area. The large number of ritual baths indicates an active Jewish life in this area.

Lookout of the convent and the tomb of Rabbi Yudan Nesiah (13) – The nearby structure is the convent of the Sisters of St. Anne, who run a school for Arab Christian girls. To the left is the roof of a Crusader-era church built over the traditional site of the house of Anne and Joachim, the parents of Mary. The church contains impressive remains

of the Crusader structure as well as a collection of finds unearthed in Zippori, including granite columns, capitals, Greek and Aramaic inscriptions from the synagogue, an ossuary and the stone door of a tomb. In the valley the tomb of Rabbi Yudan Nesiah (the grandson of Rabbi Judah Hanasi) can be seen. It is a grand structure from the third century CE. It contained 11 tombs, in the center of which Rabbi Yudan was apparently interred.

The theater (14) – Built at the end of the first century or the beginning of the second century CE, it seems to have continued in use until the Byzantine period. It was built on the steep northern slope in a semi-circle facing the stage. The theater is about 70 meters across and contained some 4,500 stone seats. Some of them were robbed in antiquity; those that remained were not found in their original location. In front of the orchestra (where the chorus stood in the Greek theater and where dignitaries sat in the Roman theater) a stone stage with a wooden floor was built. The front of the stage featured decorative niches along its entire length. The remains of the scaena frons (the wall behind the stage) were also discovered. This wall closed the structure and served as a backdrop of the actors. The theater had five entrances; three were among the seats (*vomitoria*) and two on either side of the stage (*pradoi*). All the entrances were connected by an arched corridor (*the ambulatorium*).



The theater

The plays performed in this theater expressed a clear-cut Roman way of life – hedonist and pagan – which was contrary to Jewish life and culture. The existence of a theater, symbol of paganism, in a Jewish city, raised concerns among the ancient sages: Rabbi Shimon Ben Pazi taught "Happy is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked...nor sits in the seat of the scornful... [Psalm 1:1]. Happy is the man who did not go to theaters, and to circuses of those who worship the stars" (Babylonian Talmud, Avoda Zara 18b).

The Byzantine House (15) – located near the short path leading to the Roman and Byzantine dwelling areas. A beautiful mosaic floor was discovered in this building, adorned with geometric and bird patterns. The central arch, which supported the ceiling, collapsed onto the floor of the room.

The synagogue (16) – According to the ancient sources, Zippori had numerous synagogues. but, this one, discovered in 1994 in the northern part of the site, is the only one found so far. It was built at the beginning of the fifth century CE next to other residential buildings dating back to the Roman period. It is a long, narrow building measuring 7 x 15 meters, with the direction of prayer facing away from Jerusalem. A rectangular entrance room led to the prayer hall, the floor of which was covered with a spectacular mosaic containing more than 20 inscriptions in Greek and Aramaic. The mosaic in the northern aisle contains geometric patterns of intersecting circles. The central space was richly decorated with Jewish motifs and depictions of Bible stories arranged in horizontal strips divided in some places into panels. Some depictions link to present a message of redemption and the rebuilding of the Temple in the future. Signs describe the details of the various scenes in the mosaic.