

A Note Concerning the Origin of the Name Ḥorvat Midras/Drousia

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Ḥorvat Midras/Drousia is one of the largest sites in the Judaeian foothills (*Shephelah*) that has recently merited a good deal of archaeological research. In a comprehensive article summarizing the data regarding this site, Zissu and Kloner include an in-depth geographical-historical discussion that surveys the various suggestions for the origin of the site's name (2010, 238-240).¹ Following Abel (1938, 30), they identify Ḥorvat Drousia with "Drousias" (Δρουσιάς) mentioned in Claudius Ptolemy's *Geographia* (5.16.5) and also suggest that King Herod gave it this name to commemorate Nero Claudius Drusus, Emperor Augustus's stepson who was killed in a battle against the Germanic tribes in Gaul in 9 BCE (see also: Lichtenberger 2009, 47 n. 19). In this context they mention the "Drouseion" (Δρούσιον), the highest and most majestic of the towers adorning the wall of the port of Caesarea that was named after Drusus (*BJ* 1.412).²

Naming a settlement or a building after those who the dedicator or funder of a project held dear was customary in the Classical period and an especially widespread practice in Herodian Palestine. However, upon examination of Flavius Josephus' writings, it emerges that besides cities and buildings named after Augustus and Marcus Agrippas, Herod gave the very same name to only two sites bearing his own name and that of his brother Phasael (*BJ* 1.419). Nor should one dismiss the *argumentum ex silentio*, whereby Josephus does not mention the name given to the settlement under discussion. This fact may allude to some difficulty in accepting the claim that, in addition to the tower in the port of Caesarea, the settlement called "Drousia" in the *Shephelah* was also named after Drusus. Moreover, we must also consider the absence of archaeological evidence for any construction by Herod at the site, unlike the case at other sites that have been renamed, although no comprehensive excavations have yet been conducted there. I should also note that the earlier sources are silent with regard to the actual *foundation* of a city at the site, which, as noted, is not mentioned (even under another name) either in Josephus's writings or in other sources. It seems that these claims at least inform us about the difficulties in Zissu and Kloner's above-suggested identification.

¹ An early version of this paper appeared in Hebrew: Stiebel 2013. For literature on the archaeology of the site, see also Ganor et al. 2011; Shatzman 2013.

² I should note that Alföldy (1999, 93-105) proposed identifying the *Tiberieum* mentioned in the famous inscription from Caesarea with a sister-tower of the "Drouseion", named after Drusus's brother Tiberius, and that its existence has been erased from the historical sources. Alföldy maintains that this tower was rebuilt under the procuratorial rule of Pontius Pilatus as, he believes, is documented in the Caesarea inscription. I would like to thank Joseph Geiger for this reference, and especially for his enlightening comments on the draft of this article. For a commentary that views the inscription as part of the evidence attesting to the existence of a (cultic?) building in Caesarea dedicated to Tiberius, see Taylor 2006.

Contrary to the above suggestion, an examination of the settlement's name against the background of its *surroundings* may offer a more plausible solution to the question of its origin. Toponymically, it seems that the name Drousius or Drousia comprises two elements derived from Greek: the root word δρῦς (= oak tree) and the suffix -ιάς, which appears in the names of settlements and regions³ since antiquity. Early settlements named after trees are well known in the historical literature, and sacred oak trees well known in the *Shephelah* and hilly areas are also mentioned several times in Josephus' writings. Noteworthy in this context is a place (or perhaps an area) called Drymos (Δρυμός), i.e., a woodland mentioned as part of Judaea during the battle waged between the forces of Antigonos and Herod en route to Jerusalem (*BJ* 1.250; *AJ* 14.334).⁴ This term is a translation of the word שרון ("Sharon") (Isa. 65:10)⁵ in the Septuagint and aptly describes the oak woodland in this region. I would like to propose, therefore, that, like Drymos, the root name of the settlement under discussion — Drousia — also refers to the oak tree. In light of the common toponymic use of the suffix -ιάς to convert a name of a person, a god/goddess, or even a noun, into a place-name, Δρουσιάς thus appears to be named after the oak tree, a name that over generations has become the modern variant "Hörvat Midras."

Bibliography

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³ Compare, for example, those areas named after animals: Σεπιάς — the city and promontory in Greece named after the Sepia, or cuttlefish; those areas named after leaders: Agrippas (= Anthedon; *BJ* 1.87, 118, 416); Julias (*BJ* 2.168; *AJ* 18.27); Neronias (= Caesarea Philippi; *AJ* 20.211); and, of course, those named after gods: Demetrias (on the island of Pharos and in the city Magnesia); Dionysias (the city Kasr Karoun in Egypt); Anoubias (Ἀνουβιάς in Egypt); Aphrodisias (Ἀφροδισιάς Κλήρος in Egypt); Dioscurias (the city Sukhumi, capital of Abkhazia, Georgia); Paneas (Πανειάς; *AJ* 18.28), also given to the area around the city; see Pliny, *HN* 5.74; *BJ* 2.169.

⁴ My thanks to Lisa Ullmann for bringing these passages to my attention.

⁵ Following the comment by Shatzman (2013) on the text of *BJ* 1.250; compare this to the settlement of Deir Ballut (دير بلوط) = "the Oak Monastery" in western Samaria, already known in the Mamluk era.

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