plant
Dr. Dafna Langgut (Tel Aviv University) while sampling archeological plaster
Dr. Dafna Langgut (Tel Aviv University) studies botanical remains at archeological sites in order to reconstruct ancient vegetation and climate. In this photograph she samples plaster that is thousands of years old, from which she will extricate fossilized grains of pollen.
Dr. Langgut has developed a chemical process for extracting fossil pollen from archeological plaster. Pollen grains are the male sex cells which are needed for plants reproduction. Each species produces its own unique pollen form. The liquid in the test tube contains hundreds and even thousands of pollen grains, remains of a wide variety of ancient plants. Using a pollen-identifying guide such as the one before you, it is possible to recognize plants that were growing thousands of years ago, and trace how humans have influenced the variety of plants in our region.
Dr. Langgut uses this process in order to identify the plants that grew in Herod’s royal gardens 2000 years ago. Herod’s grandiose palaces and fortresses featured spectacular gardens, as was customary in the Roman Empire. Inspired by the Roman elite, Herod adopted building and landscaping techniques intended to challenge Nature and to demonstrate that the king rules over his environment and can design it as he sees fit, even in challenging habitats. One technique for controlling plants was to sow them in pots buried in the ground.
In his garden at Caesarea, Herod planted exotic plants that were out of their natural environment and had to survive under challenging conditions. The local plants discovered: rose, olive, pine, and cypress. The cypress apparently served as a natural barrier from the sea salt and moisture. Besides local plants, several trees were found in the Caesarea gardens which were foreign to the area, such as cedar and ilsar (hazelnut). These trees were brought to the palace because they were common in the gardens of the Roman elite of that period.

Before us are several plants whose pollen grains were identified in Herod’s garden in Caesarea. Although the grains are microscopic, insects are capable of distinguishing their fascinating shape, which is intended to entice them to approach the plant and pollinate it.
Planting pots from Herod’s garden, End of 1st century BR

Israel Museum, Jerusalem, by Meidad Sokolovsky

Kathryn Gleason, Cornell University; the Department of Archeology and Ancient Near East Studies, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
The creation of the royal gardens in Kishon was undertaken near the sea and the cultivation of plants popular among the rich in Rome and Pompeii indicates that the gardens served as symbols of status and power of King Herod. The process of identifying the plants in Herod’s garden points to the political importance of the royal garden. Thus, we can learn about the close relationship between political relations and the movement of plants from one geographical area to another, as well as about the gardening practices of the period, such as pollinating trees through pollination by hand.

Establishing gardens in difficult conditions near the sea and cultivating popular plants among the Romans and among the people of Pompeii is an indication of the status and power of King Herod. The process of identifying plants in Herod’s garden points to the political importance of the royal garden. This allows us to understand the close relationship between political relations and the movement of plants from one geographical area to another, as well as to identify the gardening practices of that period, such as pollinating trees through pollination by hand.
Constructing the royal garden in Cesaria in a challenging seaside environment, as well as importing plants that were popular among the wealthy in Rome and Pompeii, both demonstrate that the gardens served as a status symbol of King Herod’s power. Identifying the plants in Herod’s garden teaches us about the political significance of the royal garden, and how political relationships are closely tied to the movement of plants from one geographical area to another. Moreover, we can learn about landscaping fashions of the period, such as the cultivation of miniature trees, which was achieved by growing them in pots.
שעות פתיחת הגלריה לקהל הרחב
בימיי א–י, 19:00-11:00
בימיי ט–ב, 21:00-11:00
ביום ש, 14:00-11:00

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