



Jaffa Nights

Jaffa's history goes back almost four thousand years, when Egyptian soldiers tricked their way inside its walls and left a papyrus to prove it // **Tamar Hayardeni**



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or the last few generations, Jaffa has been largely eclipsed by trendy Tel Aviv.

But there's much to be said for this sister city. For one thing, Old Jaffa exudes surprisingly young energy; for another, it boasts an ancient

aura plus legendary sea monsters and winged heroes – try finding that in Tel Aviv.

Rumor has it that Jaffa was named for Japhet, Noah's third son, whom he blessed with an aesthetic sensibility. If this intrepid survivor of the deluge did build a port on the Mediterranean, he was clearly confident that history was not about to repeat itself.

In any event, Jaffa is one of the world's oldest port cities, with structures built long before the Common Era: part of an 18th-century BCE city wall, complete with a glacis (the original slippery slope); the 17th-century BCE "Ramases Gate" fortifications; and remains of a 16th-century BCE settlement.

The biblical book of Joshua gives the place an honorable mention (19:46) when delineating the tribal borders of Dan. And don't forget the prophet Jonah, who embarked on his ill-fated voyage to the stomach of a whale from the quays of Jaffa.

Double Agent

If you're wondering about Jaffa's

connection to Ramases (that's Ramases II, of Exodus fame), remember that the land of Israel was Egypt's vassal for hundreds if not thousands of years – through dynasties of pharaohs – until three millennia ago. At its height, Egypt ruled over a vast, crescent-shaped region stretching from Sudan to the River Euphrates. Thutmose III, one of the best-known pharaohs, went down in local history for his wily conquest of Jaffa in 1457 BCE.

A papyrus inscribed in ancient hieratic script (a kind of Egyptian priestly shorthand), and preserved in London's British Museum, tells the tale. Egyptologists have discounted it as typical pharaonic hyperbole, but why ruin a good story?

According to legend, the governor of Jaffa once defied Thutmose, ruler of Canaan (as well as Upper and Lower Egypt and plenty else besides), by neglecting to send his regular tribute south. Thutmose consumed tax evaders for breakfast, so without batting an eyelid, he dispatched troops to quell the rebellion and dispose of the governor. On arrival, however,



the soldiers found themselves facing a city wall surrounded by an impassable moat.

Thutmose huffed and puffed, then sent out a second regiment, commanded by Djehuti, one of his most talented generals and an old hand at eliminating insubordination. Djehuti duly hotfooted it to Canaan, assessed the situation, and came up with a brilliant plan. All he needed was Thutmose's scepter.

Said staff, of course, was the ultimate symbol of kingship and the monarch's prize possession, even more important than his cell phone (if he'd had one). He wouldn't leave home without his big stick and certainly wouldn't entrust it to anyone else. But Thutmose eventually understood that it was either the scepter or Jaffa, and in any case the loan was extremely short-term.

So Djehuti marched up the

Mediterranean coast, waving Thutmose's scepter and claiming to have snatched it right out from under his nose. The general spread rumors that he was about to desert the despot and settle down in Jaffa – the one city whose ruler had made it truly independent, with all taxes benefitting its inhabitants instead of gilding the fountains adorning the court of the vile pharaoh.

Jaffa's governor believed he'd gained an ally, especially when Djehuti honored him at a sumptuous seaside banquet outside the city. Just to be sure, the governor asked to hold the scepter during the feast. The general agreed, wine flowed like water, and when it was time to hand over the scepter, Djehuti raised it on high and brought it crashing down on the governor's head. His panic-stricken courtiers were soon in chains.

An innocent-looking caravan laden with all the splendor of Egypt

The Jaffa Museum was originally the Turkish governor's residence, built circa 1700, and combines modern art with artifacts

Photo: Reuven Bar

As the tale of Troy took place some 250 years after the conquest of Jaffa, no one warned the locals to beware of Trojan horses



By the By

- ▶ Some connect the name Jaffa to *yafa*, Hebrew for “beautiful,” and in fact the town is known in Arabic as Ya’affa. The name might once have had a more complex ending, given that it appears in the book of Ezra (3:7) as Yaffo (as it’s called today in Hebrew).
- ▶ The Greeks went one step further and dubbed the city *lopeia*, naming it after Cassiopeia, the proud queen of Greek mythology who claimed to be more beautiful than the sea god’s daughters. Her own daughter, Andromeda, was chained to a rock just off Jaffa and saved from a sea monster by Perseus (thanks to his winged sandals). Hence Andromeda’s Rock, on view in the harbor.
- ▶ The Egyptian hieratic script appearing in the Papyrus Harris 500, which includes the story of Djehuti’s capture of Jaffa, is actually a kind of simplified hieroglyphics. It’s roughly the equivalent of handwriting as opposed to print. Much easier to write than the formal hieroglyphics used in stone inscriptions, hieratic figured in most official texts produced in ancient Egypt, including letters, government orders, and even literature.
- ▶ Bloomfield Stadium stands in a natural depression just east of Old Jaffa and once so marshy that local Arabs called it el-Bassa (The Swamp). Geological evidence suggests that the marshland was formed when a sandstone ridge solidified in today’s Abu Kabir neighborhood, blocking the flow of a stream. Trapped, the water saturated the soil. The stream in question was the Ayalon, which once coarsed straight through Jaffa to the sea. Today, the streambed lies along the Jerusalem–Tel Aviv highway. The sandstone plug diverted the stream northward, making it a tributary of the Yarkon River, which empties into the Mediterranean.



was soon organized for the return journey to Jaffa. The cargo included two hundred giant baskets, filled with fruit and sweetmeats. Leading the procession was the governor’s chariot driver, terrorized into compliance.

As the delegation approached the city’s main gate, the driver waved to the governor’s wife, who anxiously awaited her husband’s return. His Honor was still celebrating Djehuti’s victory over the Egyptian army, the charioteer told her. Pointing to the baskets in his train, he explained that they were the deserting general’s gifts to the inhabitants of Jaffa, their reward for withstanding the Egyptian attack. The defenders

applauded and threw open the town gates, eager to bring the presents to the market square.

Unfortunately, the siege of Troy was some 250 years away, so no one warned the poor Jaffans to beware of Trojan horses. We can only imagine the locals’ dismay when, instead of pistachios, two hundred Egyptian soldiers spilled out of the baskets and slaughtered everyone in sight.

Jaffa fell without battle, the guile of Egypt became a byword, and not a single ruler dared defy Thutmose again.

The papyrus ends with a somewhat pompous statement by Djehuti:

Empty posturing or actual history?
The Papyrus Harris 500 is named for its purchaser, Antony Charles Harris of Alexandria, a merchant and noted collector of ancient Egyptian papyri. After Harris' death, his daughter sold his collection to the British Museum

Photo: British Museum, London

"Horus, the strong bull, beloved of the goddess Amt, ruler of Upper and Lower Egypt" – this tribute to Ramases II appears in hieroglyphics on the lintel of the reconstructed Ramases Gate in Jaffa. The original stone inscription is on display in the Jaffa Museum

Be pleased, for Amen thy good father has given to thee the Foe in Joppa, together with all his people, likewise also his city. Send, therefore, people to take them as captives that thou mayest fill the house of thy father Amen Re, king of the gods, with men-servants and maidservants, and that they may be overthrown beneath thy feet for ever and ever. (W. M. Flinders Petrie, *Egyptian Tales*, *Translated from the Papyri*, 2nd series, p. 6)

Did It Really Happen?

Archaeologists excavating ancient Jaffa hoped to corroborate this story. They uncovered a destruction layer slightly postdating Thutmose III, including fortifications and a wealth of Egyptian potsherds. These finds dovetail with a well-documented incursion into the area by Amenhotep II, Thutmose's son, to put down another minor Canaanite rebellion. The theory was that these defenses were raised by Thutmose after Djehuti's conquest of Jaffa.

Other experts disagreed. If Thutmose had conquered Jaffa without a fight, he wouldn't have destroyed its fortifications and

needed to build new ones.

In short, the tale of Djehuti's ruse remains inconclusive.

A more thorough excavation might have yielded something more definitive. But you can see for yourself what's been discovered in Old Jaffa's Kedumim Square, a covered area connecting the scenic alleys of the Old City with Jaffa Hill. The hill encompasses the top of the tel and its lower slopes, which have been converted to parkland. The reconstructed Ramases Gate, some impressive Hasmonean remains, Philistine pottery, and walls from Jaffa's lengthy Egyptian period are all on display in the town visitors' center (the artifacts are housed in the Saraya – the governor's palace, built in the 18th century).

The parks are enjoyable, and the local buildings have been lovingly restored. Statues and artwork have been incorporated into the landscape, and cannons from Napoleon's conquest of Jaffa in the late 18th century also jut out here and there. ▣



Tamar Hayardeni

A licensed tour guide and research fellow at the Ben-Zvi Institute, Hayardeni has also authored several children's books

Handy Info



Where to Eat

Jaffa Café

11 Olei Zion Street
Kosher, dairy, (03) 518-1988

Guetta

6 Jerusalem Boulevard
Kosher, meat, (03) 681-3993

Coca Mamma

30 Ruslan Street
Kosher, meat, (03) 681-0488



Don't Miss

Jaffa Museum

10 Mifratz Shlomo Promenade
Open Sun-Wed (to groups)
Thursdays 11 am–4 pm,
Fridays 10 am–2 pm
Saturdays 11 am–5 pm
Entrance fee, (03) 681-3624

Clock Tower

Japhet Street

Ilana Goor Museum

Interdisciplinary art museum
4 Mazal Dagim Street
Open 10 am–4 pm
Entrance fee, (03) 683-7676