

**Setting Jesus Free from Postmodern Reconstructions:  
Was Jesus a Galilean Jew or a Jewish Hellenist?**

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**Introduction**

Popular culture is searching for the real Jesus. The success of Mel Gibson's movie *The Passion* and the book *The DaVinci Code* illustrate that Jesus is still important to Western Culture. The question is whether popular culture is meeting the real Jesus or a reconstructed Jesus who looks like a 21<sup>st</sup> century philosopher. The same question can be asked of today's church. Which Jesus are we introducing to people who come to our Church? Which Jesus are we preaching from our pulpits? Which Jesus are people seeing living through our lives? Today there is a tension between the authentic Jesus and the desire to deconstruct Jesus into our image.

This tension in the pulpit and pews correlates to trends among biblical scholars within academia. Perhaps one of the most influential movements in Historical Jesus Studies is the Jesus Seminar. The Jesus Seminar was founded in 1985 by Robert Funk. This is an assembled group of New Testament scholars whose goal is to examine every tradition associated with Jesus and determine what he actually said. This group of scholars assembled in order to ascertain via vote which of the statements attributed to Jesus in the Gospels (including the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas) were actually said by Jesus. These individuals concluded that only 26 of the over 1000 statements were actually said by Jesus. The rest can be attributed to later traditions of the early

church.<sup>1</sup> The group expanded their scope and next addressed questions concerning the life and work of Jesus. The result of this study was that only 16% of the events reported in the Gospels were deemed authentic.<sup>2</sup> Currently the Jesus Seminar is attempting to produce a description of who Jesus was and consequently—who Jesus is.

In his book *Honest to Jesus*, Funk states that the “aim of the quest is to set Jesus free,” to “liberate Jesus from the scriptural and creedal and experiential prisons in which we have incarcerated him.”<sup>3</sup> He proposes a Jesus who was a subversive sage—a secular sage. He then attempts to rediscover this Galilean sage as an historical figure. The initial aim to set Jesus free from centuries of theological and political overlay is a worthy goal. As with any liberating army, there is a fine line between liberation and occupation. I sense that the goal of the Jesus Seminar is not to examine the historical Jesus within his 1<sup>st</sup> century context, but to re-create him in the image of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Jesus thus becomes the postmodern sage (or post-Christian sage) of recent scholarship.

### Theological Implications of Recent Trends

Although contextualization is vogue within secular and Christian contexts, it is a dual-edged sword. Placing Jesus within his historical context is an important part of correct biblical interpretation and exegesis. Changing or adapting Jesus’ message to accommodate 21<sup>st</sup> century theologians produces a caricature of the incarnation and a deconstruction of truth. The basic premise behind most of the new “histories” of Jesus is that the real Jesus has been corrupted by

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<sup>1</sup>Robert W. Funk, Roy W. Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993).

<sup>2</sup>Robert W. Funk and the Jesus Seminar, *The Acts of Jesus: The Search for the Authentic Deeds of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998).

<sup>3</sup>Robert W. Funk, *Honest to Jesus: Jesus for a New Millenium* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 300.

his early followers and the early church. The early Christians took their beliefs and changed the sayings of Jesus. An example is the Jesus Seminar's seminal work that attributes only 18% of the words of Jesus in the Gospel accounts as originally belonging to Jesus. The only words that survive the Lord's Prayer are "Our Father."<sup>4</sup> Jesus is no longer a rabbi claiming to be the Messiah emerging from Galilee, but a Jewish Hellenist prophet whose message of peace and tolerance was corrupted by the church. Who is the authentic Jesus: the Jesus of orthodox Christianity or the Jesus of the Jesus Seminar? This question is easily solved with history and archaeology.

#### Archaeology of 1<sup>st</sup> Century A.D. Galilee

One of the issues in the search for the historical Jesus is to place Jesus within a Hellenistic context versus a first century Jewish context. This is needed in order to remove key concepts associated with orthodox Christology and the teachings of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels (e.g. Messiahship, atonement, torah, resurrection, etc.). In order to do this, Galilee needs to become a Hellenistic province so Jesus can be exposed to Hellenistic philosophy. Concurrent with a renewed quest in Historical Jesus studies, the archaeology of the Greco-Roman period has exploded in Israel, providing a more accurate assessment in the search for the historic Jesus. I propose that, based on the archaeology of Galilee, Jesus belongs in a 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. Galilean Jewish context and not the Hellenized morphed sage of vogue New Testament scholarship.

#### **History of New Testament Archaeological Research**

Before I present the archaeological data, I will first discuss the history of research, issues in interpretation and historical reconstruction, and the archaeology of social identification. I will

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<sup>4</sup>Funk, et. al., *The Five Gospels*.

provide an historical overview of New Testament archaeological research. This is a very cursory review; I do not want to be oversimplistic or childlike in using an alteration outline, but I desire to make the data available to the non-specialist. Basically, the history of New Testament archaeological research in the Holy Land can be defined by six domains of inquiry: Synagogues, Sects, Savior, Second Temple Judaism, Sepphoris, and Settlement Patterns.

### Synagogues

The origin of New Testament archaeology in the Holy Land is to be found in the pioneering period of the modern Jewish immigration and settlement into Palestine. The earliest exploration of synagogues was published in 1916 in *Antike Synagogen in Galilaea* by H. P. Stähli. This work reported the explorations and investigations of eleven ancient synagogues: nine in Galilee and two in Transjordan.<sup>5</sup> This is an excellent example of the early history of the archaeology of the Holy Land before the establishment of the state of Israel. In the period between the two world wars, several synagogues were excavated by the Department of Antiquities of the Mandatory Government, the Jewish Palestine Exploration Society, and the Department of Archaeology of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.<sup>6</sup> One of the important findings during this period was the discovery of mosaics of biblical scenes with humans—a discovery that ran contrary to the previous assumptions that synagogue art and decoration did not have any type of human representations because of the command against graven images. In addition to human forms, there is evidence of Hellenistic features, such as the Zodiac found at the Beth Alpha synagogue on the slopes of Mt Gilboa. This synagogue was excavated by E.L.

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<sup>5</sup>Eliezer Sukenik, *Bulletin I*. Louis M. Rabinowitz Fund for the Exploration of Ancient Synagogues (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1949), 9.

<sup>6</sup>Na'aran near Jericho (1917), Beth Alpha (1928), Beth Alpha at Jerash (1929), Hammath by Gadara (Sukenik 1932), Dura-Europos (1932, Northern Syria), Mt. Carmel at the Druse Village of 'Esfia (1933), Jericho (1934).

Sukenik and assisted by N. Avigad in 1929.<sup>7</sup> In the early period of archaeology of the Holy Land, archaeologists were discovering that Palestine was more cosmopolitan than originally assumed. The Beth Alpha Zodiac mosaic caused scholars to debate the impact of Hellenism on Judaism during the New Testament period.

### Sects: Dead Sea Scrolls

Perhaps the most important and influential of all archeological findings are the Dead Sea Scrolls. Discovered in the 1940s, they were immediately heralded as one of the greatest archaeological discoveries of our time. The scrolls were found in caves in the Qumran region, which led to the excavation of the site of Qumran and the subsequent association of the scrolls with the site. Ancient historians, particularly Josephus, recount for us the existence of a sect called the Essenes, located on the northwest shore of the Dead Sea. The connection between the scrolls, the site of Qumran, and the Essenes was immediately made and continues to be the dominant view among scholars. The Scrolls and the excavation of Qumran expanded our concept of 1<sup>st</sup> century Judaism into “multiple Judaisms.” The scrolls gave evidence of a community antagonistic toward the religious establishment of Jerusalem. Because of the emphasis upon Messianism, ritual purity, and separatism from the world—questions immediately arose of the relationship between this group, John the Baptist, and the teachings of Jesus. The association of Qumran and the scrolls with the Essenes led researchers to explore and define the various sects within 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine. Because of the discovery of the various depictions on synagogue mosaics, our understanding of first century Judaism became more complex. Suddenly, New

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<sup>7</sup>In the report by Nahaman Avigad in the *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* (Jerusalem: The Israel Exploration Society, 1993), I:190-192, the start of the excavations were in 1929, while in the report found in the *Bulletin II* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1951), the excavations were dated to 1950 by E.L. Sukenik.

Testament scholars were viewing a more complex and varied group of sects during the 1<sup>st</sup> century instead of the caricature of the Pharisees and Sadducees preached from the pulpit obtained from the Gospels.

### Savior

With the mission of the custody of the sacred sites in the Holy Land, the Franciscans added archaeological excavations to their mission to preserve and guard the sanctuaries. The archaeological activity of the Franciscans in the Holy Land began at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and today, the archaeological activity of the Franciscans is equal to their other activities.

The first excavations took place in Galilee with the acquisition of the land at Tell Hum in 1894 by Giuseppe Galdi. The ruins at Tell Hum were known to contain the remains of the synagogue of Capernaum. From 1906 to 1914, Brother Vandelino Hinter Kenser of Menden excavated in the area of the village to the west of the synagogue. The first excavations by the Franciscans took place in 1895, a year after acquiring Capernaum, at the grotto of the Annunciation at Nazareth. Father Prospero Viaud explored the area. He also explored the underground parts of the Church of St. Joseph (of the Nutrition) at Nazareth and published the results through the Custody press. These excavations became the basis on which the Franciscans inaugurated an aggressive campaign to excavate not only the churches, but to directly explore Christ's footprints.

Some of the well-known sites by the Franciscan fathers are: in Galilee—Capernaum, Magdala, Tabgha, Hill of the Beatitudes, Nazareth, and Mt Carmel; in Jerusalem and its environs—Gethsemane, Mt of Olives, Bethany, Bethpage, Ain Karem, Emmaus, Bethlehem and

the Holy Sepulcher.<sup>8</sup> Today, when Christian pilgrims go to the Holy Land, most are touring the sites excavated by the Franciscans. The desire of the Franciscans was to excavate sites that Jesus visited, thereby revolutionizing the nature of Christian pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Now, Christian tourists discover the world of Jesus by visiting the archaeological remains of the towns and villages of the New Testament instead of visiting churches for worship.

In summary, the Franciscan archaeological excavations both preserved the holy sites and contributed to the reconstruction of the world of Jesus. Indirectly, the archaeological work of the Franciscans provided the opportunity for Christian tourists of the Holy Land to be exposed to the archaeology of the New Testament. Research also focused on the early church, and the archaeological work supported the view of the early Christian community having its roots in 1<sup>st</sup> century Judaism. Christian pilgrims today are introduced to the dichotomy of the sites of a rural pastoral Galilee around the Sea of Galilee and the ancient Jerusalem, located in the heart of the modern city.

### Second Temple Judaism

After the 1967 War, Jerusalem was open for archaeological excavations. Three major excavations were immediately conducted by the Institute of Archaeology of Hebrew University: The Southern Wall excavations by Benjamin Mazar, the Jewish Quarter Excavations by Nahman Avigad, and the City of David Excavations by Yigael Shiloh. These excavations expanded our knowledge of Jerusalem during the Roman period and were foundational for the shift of

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<sup>8</sup>Some of the well-known sites by the fathers are: Capernaum (Fa. Gaudenzio Orfali, 1921-26, Bagatti 1944, Corbo and Loffreda 1968), Magdala and Tabgha (Fathers Sylvester Saller and Bellarmino Gagatti, 1935), Tabgha (Loffredo 1968), Hill of the Beatitudes (Bagatti, 1936), Nazareth (Bagatti 1954-60), Mt Carmel (Bagatti 1960); and in Jerusalem and its environs: Gethsemane (Fa. Gaudenzio Orfali, 1919-20, Corbo 1956), Mt of Olives (Corbo 1956), Bethany (Saller 1949), Bethpage (Saller 1954), Dominus Fleuit (Bagatti 1953, Paul Lemaire 1954), Ain Karem (Bagatti, 1938, Saller 1941-2), Emmaus (Bagatti 1940-41), Bethlehem (Bagatti 1948-51, Corbo-shepherds field 1951), Herodian (1962-67), Holy Sepulcher (Corbo 1961).

emphasis to Second Temple Judaism that occurred in the 1970s. Departments of Archaeology in major Israeli institutions started to employ archaeologists who specialized in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods. Concurrent with these trends, the archaeology of the Maccabean Period (especially in the Shephelah with Amos Kloner's excavations at Mareshah)<sup>9</sup> and the archaeology of Herod the Great (Ehud Netzer's work on Herod's building projects)<sup>10</sup> became prominent projects and greatly influenced research agendas.

New Testament archaeology, specifically the archaeology of the Hellenistic and Roman periods, was at its prime during the 1970s and 1980s. While most research designs were still driven by historical questions and persons (e.g. Cities of Jesus, Herod the Great, Maccabeans), the New Archaeology was taking hold in Galilee. Several projects associated with the American Schools of Oriental Research were addressing anthropological questions in their research designs and model building.<sup>11</sup>

### Sepphoris: Hellenistic Galilee

In the 1970s, American excavations in Upper Galilee at the sites of Meiron, Gush Halav, Khirbet Shema', and Nabratein marked the beginning of a new era of the archaeology of ancient Galilee. Eric Meyers proposed that Upper Galilee was significantly different than Lower Galilee. Large amounts of Tyrian coinage demonstrated that Upper Galilee was part of a trade network with pagan cities on the coast. Meyers' original model of Galilee concluded that Upper Galilee seemed isolated and culturally conservative in contrast to Lower Galilee, which was more open

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<sup>9</sup>Amos Kloner, *Maresha Excavations Final Report I: Subterranean Complexes 21, 44, 70*. Israel Antiquities Reports 17 (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 2003).

<sup>10</sup>Ehud Netzer, *The Palaces of The Hasmoneans and Herod the Great* (Jerusalem: The Israel Exploration Society, 2001).

<sup>11</sup>The New Archaeology refers to a paradigm shift in American archaeology that shifted to anthropological models for research agendas and adopted a positivist paradigm.



to Hellenistic cultural influence. In the mid-1980s, excavations began at Sepphoris, and it was soon discovered that Lower Galilee was cosmopolitan with a diverse population. Examples of the Greco-Roman influence were seen with the discovery of a triclinium mosaic that depicts a procession of Dionysos riding a donkey and a symposium [drinking contest] between Dionysos and Hercules. Other finds include the Nile mosaic, Roman roads, lamps decorated with Hellenistic motifs, and the theater.

The results of these excavations were foundational for a reevaluation of the world of Jesus. A book by Richard Batey, *Jesus and the Forgotten City: New Light on Sepphoris and the Urban World of Jesus*, illustrates the new trend in New Testament archaeology.<sup>12</sup> Jesus was no longer viewed as a young boy growing up in the small village of Nazareth, but as a frequent visitor to Sepphoris—a cosmopolitan Hellenistic city less than four miles from Nazareth.

#### Settlement Patterns

One of the latest trends in New Testament archaeology is the maturity of the discipline to address issues in the broader field of archaeology. The archaeology of Roman Palestine as a specialization within Syro-Palestinian archaeology has lagged behind the Bronze and Iron Ages. Archaeology has come of age as archaeologists working in later periods are developing models based on the material culture coalesced with the textual data.

The work of Adan-Bayewitz has expanded research by focusing on archaeological questions concerning the distribution of material culture versus historical or biblical questions.<sup>13</sup> He has demonstrated that the pottery of the village Kefar Hananyah (border between Upper and

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<sup>12</sup>Richard Batey, *Jesus and the Forgotten City: New Light on Sepphoris and the Urban World of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991).

<sup>13</sup>David Adan-Bayewitz, *Common Pottery in Roman Galilee: A Study of Local Trade* (Bar-Ilan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1993).

Lower Galilee) dominated the ceramics industry of Galilee and beyond the borders—to Acco/Ptolemais on the coast, Tel Anafa to the North, the Golan, and the Decapolis. Galilee was part of a well developed trade network and interaction in the northern Levant.

### **Current Trends—Jesus Was a Gnostic Sage**

One of the issues in Historical Jesus studies is the extent and nature of Hellenistic influence. This is a foundational question for recent trends in reconstructing the teaching of Jesus. One of the assumptions of recent deconstructionist paradigms of the message and life of Jesus, is that Jesus was greatly influenced by Hellenistic teaching—specifically Gnosticism. A Hellenistic Galilee provides the necessary framework to place Jesus within a Gnostic context rather than a 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish context.

New Testament scholarship has been influenced by theological trends in Historic Jesus studies. The history of New Testament scholarship and theology created some of the methodological problems with the separation of the Jesus of History from the Christ of Faith. This dichotomy was reinforced by the Jesus Seminar, which has had a tremendous impact on the archaeology of 1<sup>st</sup> century Galilee. Naturally, the search for the “true or authentic” teachings or message of Jesus is the attempt to place Jesus within his cultural context. Unfortunately, most approaches have been deductive, starting with a hypothesis or premise and then picking and choosing the archaeological and historical data that supports the premise. Archaeology is an inductive science, building historical reconstructions and theoretical paradigms based on the data. While I strongly encourage the integration of textual and archaeological inquiries, the search for the hypothetical “Q” in the archaeological record is not the best approach.

These recent trends in Jesus research that have taken deductive approaches usually start with a hypothesis and then gather the data that supports their position. Unfortunately, these

models overlook the patterning of the archaeological record. The geo-political history of Galilee in the context of the Hellenistic and Roman Empires along with Jewish Nationalism is important for reconstructing society in Galilee and crucial for the debate regarding the Hellenistic influence/exposure of Jesus. The question is whether or not we can differentiate ethnicity in the context of broad historical and economic models. We will now turn to issues of social identification in ancient Galilee.

### **Issues Regarding Galilean Ethnicity during the Time of Jesus**

Today, research in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods in Galilee is focused on issues for reconstructing the world of 1<sup>st</sup> century Galilee. These issues are the complexity of Judaism, the interactions of those in Galilee with Greek and Roman centers of power, the rise of the Jesus Movement, the varied role of women, the rise and fall of Herodian power, an increasing military presence, and the expansion of villages and urban areas. These trends have been highlighted in the recent publication of *Archaeology and the Galilee: Texts and Contexts in the Greco-Roman and Byzantine Periods* by D. Edwards and T. McCollough.<sup>14</sup>

Before we can discuss ethnicity and social identity in Roman Galilee, some methodological and theoretical concerns need to be discussed. The life and ministry of Jesus spanned a very short time period. Even if we expand the period to include 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple Judaism under Roman rule, we are looking at only 100 years. This makes it difficult to isolate archaeological remains of the world of Jesus. Another factor is that the later Roman period destroyed early Roman and Hellenistic remains. This has made it difficult for archaeologists to differentiate nuances in the stratigraphic record. Also, archaeologists working in classical periods

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<sup>14</sup>Douglas Edwards and C. Thomas McCollough, eds. *Archaeology and the Galilee: Texts and Contexts in the Graeco-Roman and Byzantine Periods*. South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism 143 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997).

have taken an architectural approach to excavations, focusing on exposing city-plans rather than differentiating stratigraphic levels.

One of the issues in social identification is that we now realize that people operate within many systems of identification: social strata, ethnic group, political affiliation, and religion. The main questions when it comes to social markers and identification of Jesus are: What was the ethnic origin of Galilee? What was the nature of the population of Galilee? What were the political affiliations? What were the relationships between center and periphery? Between rural villages and the cities? How Hellenized was Galilee? Would Jesus have been exposed to Hellenistic Culture? If he was, how extensive was this exposure and did it have an influence on his identification?

The crux of the issue is, what was the ethnic origin of the Galileans during the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.? Three major models have been proposed.<sup>15</sup> The first model has been the standard reconstruction of Galilee—Galileans were 1<sup>st</sup> century Jews. This model was first introduced in Samuel Klein's 1928 book *Galilae vor der Makkabäezeit* and articulated recently by Seán Freyne in *Galilee from Alexander the Great to Hadrian 323 BCE to 135 CE: A Study of Second Temple Judaism* (1980).<sup>16</sup> The second model proposes that the Galileans were a mixed-converted group of Itureans who were established during the Hasmonean period. Proponents of this second model are Emil Schurer, Walter Bauer, and Burton Mack.<sup>17</sup> The assumption of this second model

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<sup>15</sup>These models are summarized in the recent works of Reed and Chancey. Jonathan L. Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus: A Re-examination of the Evidence* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000); Mark A. Chancey, *The Myth of a Gentile Galilee* Society, New Testament Studies Monograph Series 118 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>16</sup>Seán Freyne, *Galilee from Alexander the Great to Hadrian 323 BCE to 135 CE: A Study of Second Temple Judaism* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1980).

<sup>17</sup>Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, rev. and ed. Geza Vermes and Fergus Miller, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1973-1987); Walter Bauer, "Jesus der Galiläer," in *Augsätze und*

is that Galilee was very cosmopolitan and syncretistic. A third view is that the Galileans were remnants of the Northern Kingdom. This view is espoused originally by A. Alt and recently by Richard Horsley.<sup>18</sup> Archaeological survey has demonstrated that there was an explosion of settlement after Hasmonean Rule (Late Hellenistic) period.<sup>19</sup> The economic and cultural relationship between Galilee and Jerusalem is also reflected in the Hasmonean coins found throughout Galilee. There is a clear demographic and historical connection between the Hasmonean Dynasty in Judea and Galilee to conclude that the best historical reconstruction of social identity is to associate Galilee with Judea.

The main question regarding the economic nature of Galilee is the relationship between urbanization and the Hellenistic Polae. During the early Hellenistic Period, Polae were founded on the periphery of Galilee (Ptolemais, in the Decapolis, Beth-Shan), while Galilee kept its peasant character. Hanson and Oakman have presented a model of first-century Palestine in light of Roman domination.<sup>20</sup> They posit an urban elite ruler and retainer model. "Rule was hierarchical, aristocratic, and extractive, with the peasants having virtually no say in the process."<sup>21</sup> Status was maintained by offering protection and patronage. While some will question a solely economic model, they do offer a perceptive window into the various layers of society. The importance of their work demonstrates that there were various levels of social

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*kleine Schriften*, ed. G. Strecker, 91-108 (Tubingen: JCB Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1967); Burton Mack, *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993).

<sup>18</sup>Reed, 25.

<sup>19</sup>Andrea Berlin, "Between Large Forces: Palestine in the Hellenistic Period," in *Biblical Archaeologist* 60:2-51 (1997); Chancey, *Myth of Galilee* (2002); Jonathan L. Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus* (2000).

<sup>20</sup>K. C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998).

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 95.

relationships and boundary maintenance. This is an important distinction when reconstructing ancient society. The presence of a Hellenistic institution does not mean that all levels of society were exposed or influenced by that structure. This is a major problem of interpretation when associating archaeological finds with reconstruction of a society.

### Archaeology of Religion and Ethnicity

Leaving aside social elites, the question regarding the popular culture was, how Hellenized and/or Jewish was Galilee? The issues of the archaeology of ethnicity and the archaeology of religion are vexing problems. At this point, archaeologists and social scientists are realizing that ethnic and religious markers are more complex and fluid than originally thought. Several recent publications highlight the interest and advances made in these topics. Although ethnic and religious identification are very complex, most acknowledge that it is possible to define these patterns. Several conclusions have been reached: 1) Religion and ethnicity leave their mark on the material culture; 2) they are more complex, have multiple meanings and can serve many functions (e.g. as communication, social conformity, and group identification); 3) ethnic and religious markers are fluid, they change constantly; and 4) recent trends have focused on boundary maintenance, especially for ethnicity.

When we consider the archaeology of 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. Galilee and reconstructing social identification, we need to develop a more complex approach. Previous models that focus solely on the presence or absence of a single trait are not accurate reflections of the social world of Jesus. A theater at Sepphoris or a pagan temple in the region of Nazareth does not imply that Jews from the villages were Hellenized. When the archaeological record is viewed in its entirety, archaeologists conclude that, contrary to recent popular reconstructions, Jesus fits in a Galilean Jewish Context.

## Archaeological Evidence for the Jewishness of Galilee

### Settlement Patterns

Two major studies addressing settlement patterns have demonstrated that Galilee in the 1<sup>st</sup> century was Jewish. The first by Reed addresses demographic shifts in Galilee.<sup>22</sup> Reed notes that, during the Hellenistic Period, there was an explosion of settlement in Galilee, which he associates with the accounts of the Maccabeans settling Jews in the north. A second study by Chancey provides a site by site evaluation. Both of these studies conclude that Galilee's settlement patterns do not demonstrate that early Roman Galilee had a mixed population.<sup>23</sup> It appears that in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. the inhabitants of Galilee were primarily Jewish with only a few pagans. A large influx of Gentiles into the area occurs after the destruction of Jerusalem and its change to Aelia Capitolina in the second century A.D. Several Hasmonean coins attest to strong relationships between Judea and Galilee. Archaeological surveys and excavations have confirmed that 1<sup>st</sup> century settlement patterns in Galilee are to be associated with the expansion of the Hasmoneans and increases in Jewish settlements in the Hellenistic Period.

### Stone Vessels

The next two features are material culture items that are directly linked to Jewish religious practice: stoneware and mik'vaot. Hand or lathe-made chalk or soft limestone vessels (Herodian stoneware) are associated with Jewish ritual purity because they are deemed impervious to ritual impurity.<sup>24</sup> These stone vessels went out of use in the late 1<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Jonathan L. Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus: A Re-examination of the Evidence* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000).

<sup>23</sup>Mark A. Chancey, *The Myth of a Gentile Galilee*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 118 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>24</sup>The Mishnah, tractate *Kelim* 2:1; 10:1.

Excavations at Sepphoris in the western domestic quarters from about 100 B.C. to 70 A.D. have found more than 100 hundred stone vessels.<sup>26</sup> Stone fragments have also been found at Tiberias and at Hammath Tiberias. At the ancient site of Nazareth, 4 stone vessels were found. Zvi Gal found a stone vessel manufacturing site at a calcite outcroppin at Reina, (a few kilometers from Nazareth and Sepphoris).<sup>27</sup> Jotapata has approximately 80 fragments of limestone vessels that were found in excavations.<sup>28</sup> In Capernaum's Late Hellenistic and Early Roman strata, approximately 150 stone vessel fragments have been uncovered and are present in each domestic unit on the Franciscan side.<sup>29</sup> Across the Jordan Valley from Galilee, Guttman has excavated many stone vessels from Gamla.<sup>30</sup> Other Galilean sites with stone vessel fragments include: Bethlehem, Gush Halav, Ibelin, Kefar Hananya, Kafr Kanna, Khirbet Shema', Meiron, Migdal aHa-Emeq, and Nabratein.<sup>31</sup>

#### Mikva'ot (Jewish Ritual Baths)

Over 300 stepped mikvaot (stepped immersion pools) have been excavated in Palestine.<sup>32</sup> They are most frequent in Judea, Galilee, and the Golan, but are very sparse along the coast and

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<sup>25</sup>Reed 2000:51.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Zvi Gal, "A Stone-Vessel Manufacturing Site in the Lower Galilee." ('Atiqot 20:179-180, 1991) (Hebrew).

<sup>28</sup>Chancey 2000:88.

<sup>29</sup>Reed 2000:50.

<sup>30</sup>Schmuel Gutman, "Gamla," *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Holy Land*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1993), 463.

<sup>31</sup>An excellent resource is Yizhak Magen, "Purity Broke out in Israel," *Stone Vessels in the Late Second Temple Period* (Catgalogue No. 9, The Reuben and Edith Hecht Museum; Haifa: University of Haifa, 1994).

<sup>32</sup>Reed 2000:45; see the work of Ronny Reich in footnote 33.



almost absent in Samaria.<sup>33</sup> The evidence for 1<sup>st</sup> century mikva'ot in Galilee is sparse, although there are several for post-Bar Kochbah strata such as Sepphoris, Chorazin, Arbel, Khirbet Shema' and Meiron.<sup>34</sup> Sepphoris contains more than 20 mikva'ot.<sup>35</sup> Jotapata contains stepped pools, some of which are probably mikva'ot. Nazareth has a mikveh.<sup>36</sup> Gamla has 2 or possibly 3 mikva'ot (one connected with the synagogue, one with an olive press, and one in a house).<sup>37</sup>

The miqva'ot are water installations from the Second Temple period that are cut or built into the ground allowing rainwater, spring waters, or runoff to collect. They have a staircase and are usually plastered. Rabbinic literature associates these with a concern for ritual purity (an entire tractate of the Mishnah, *Miqva'ot*, is devoted to the specifications of the construction and use of *Miqva'ot*). While there are debates concerning whether or not all of these stepped installations are ritual baths (because some do not meet the Rabbinic criteria), it is apparent that, based on the Essene's criticism of the practice of other Jews, there was a wide variation and

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<sup>33</sup>Ronny Reich is the foremost expert on miqvaot. For references see: Ronny reich, "Miqwaot (Jewish Ritual Baths) in the Second Temple Period and the Period of the Misnah and Talmud," Ph.D. diss. (Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1990) [Hebrew with English Abstract]; "The Hot Bath-House (balneum), the Miqveh, and the Jewish Community in the Second Temple Period," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 39 (1988)102-107; "The Great Mikveh Debate," *BAR* 19(1993) 52-53; and "Ritual Baths," *OEANE* 4:430-31. See E.P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief* 63 B.c.E.-66C.E. (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992) 222-229, Reed (2000:45-47). Benjamin Wright III, "Jewish Ritual Baths—Interpreting the Digs and the Texts: Some Issues in the Social History of Second Temple Judaism," in *The Archaeology of Israel: Constructing the Past, Interpreting the Present* (eds. Neil A. Silberman and David Small; JSOTSS 237; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 190-214.

<sup>34</sup>Chancey 2000:118.

<sup>35</sup>Reed 2000:49.

<sup>36</sup>Bagatti 1969: 237-244, 318.

<sup>37</sup>Reed 2000:50, Gutman and Wagner, "Gamla—1984/1985/1986." *Excavations and Surveys in Israel* 5 1986:38-41.

standard regarding their use. Reich's analysis and survey of the data clearly demonstrates that these installations are uniquely Jewish and should therefore correspond with Jewish presence.<sup>38</sup>

### Burial Practices

While all groups used burial caves and *kochim*, the custom of secondary burial is another religious practice that is evident in the archaeological record.<sup>39</sup> The use of ossuaries inside *kochim* or loculi (horizontally-shafted underground family tombs) was a distinctly Jewish phenomenon at the end of the Second Temple Period. At Nazareth, several tombs outside the ancient village are *kochim* style with many ossuary fragments strewn about.<sup>40</sup> At the ancient site of Kefar Kanna (Cana in the New Testament), tombs from the Late Hellenistic to the Middle Roman Period have been found. One of these tombs dates to the late 1<sup>st</sup> century or early 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. and contains fragments of ossuaries.

### Osteological Data (Animal Bones)

By the Late Hellenistic period, the absence of pig in the diet was a clear ethnic marker. Only recently have excavations started to systematically collect zooarchaeological data. The work of several zooarchaeologists working in Hellenistic and Roman sites is starting to come to fruition. They are starting to collect enough data to present a bone profile of the Galilean region.<sup>41</sup> When zooarchaeological data is analyzed, the absence of pig bones corresponds to sites

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<sup>38</sup>One apparent anomaly is that no mikva'ot were found at Capernaum. This is probably due either to the close proximity to the lake (Reed 2000:50) or that mikva'ot are found among the upper class of society and the absence reflects a socio-economic pattern rather than the lack of use (Chauncey 2002).

<sup>39</sup>Kochim are burial niches common in Second Temple burials.

<sup>40</sup>Bellarmino Bagatti, *Excavations in Nazareth*. Trans. E. Hoade (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1969).

<sup>41</sup>Bill J. Grantham, '*Sepphoris: Ethnic Complexity at an Ancient Galilean City*' (PhD dissertation, Northwestern University, 1996). Brian Hesse, 'Pig Lovers and Pig Haters: Patterns of Palestinian Pork Production', *Journal of Ethnobiology* 10.2: 195-225. Brian Hesse and Paula Wapnish, "Can Pig Remains Be Used for Ethnic

that are considered Jewish in texts or have other ethnic markers associated solely with Jews. Perhaps the best case-study is the western domestic quarter at Sepphoris, where archaeologists are able to identify Jewish households based on the presence or absence of pig bones.

Hesse and Wapnish conclude that in the “Hellenistic/Roman period pork consumption was high in urban settings.”<sup>42</sup> This is a similar pattern to the urban utilization in the early part of the Iron I period at sites with Philistine material culture.<sup>43</sup> They conclude that pig bones can be used in ethnic identification, but that the zooarchaeological data must be seen in its larger context of social boundary maintenance versus the simple formula of presence or absence.<sup>44</sup>

### Synagogues

The origin of the synagogue is still disputed. Safrai states that the synagogue developed from public Torah-reading assemblies during the time of Ezra (5<sup>th</sup> c. BCE).<sup>45</sup> Some scholars claim that the synagogue started in Ptolemaic Egypt.<sup>46</sup> Guttman maintains that the emergence of the synagogue occurred during the Hasmonaean revolution in the Hellenistic Period (2<sup>nd</sup> c. BCE).<sup>47</sup> Hachili believes that synagogues did not develop until after the destruction of the Second Temple.<sup>48</sup> She postulates that “Jewish aspirations in the Diaspora for a separate identity

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Diagnosis in the Ancient Near East? In *The Archaeology of Israel. Constructing the Past, Interpreting the Present*, edited by Neil Siberman and David Small, 238-270 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

<sup>42</sup>Hesse and Wapnish 1997:250.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 251.

<sup>44</sup>Hesse 1990, Hesse and Wapnish 1997.

<sup>45</sup>Shmuel Safrai, “Temple.” In *Jewish People in the First Century. Historical Geography, Political History, Social, Cultural and Religious Life and Institutions* Vol. 2, edited by S. Safrai and M. Stern, 1976):912-3, 918.

<sup>46</sup>Rachel Hachili 2001:98.

<sup>47</sup>Guttman 1981:3-4.

<sup>48</sup>Hachili 1997.

and community life resulted in the construction of assembly structures in Egypt and Babylon during the Second Temple period.”<sup>49</sup> She concludes that these local centers existed as community assembly halls where services would be conducted on Sabbaths and feast days.<sup>50</sup> After the destruction of the temple they were adapted as places of local worship in addition to their original function of community center.

There are structures that date to the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. that scholars claim are synagogues. These buildings are found at Jericho,<sup>51</sup> Kiryat Sefer,<sup>52</sup> and Gamla.<sup>53</sup> Other synagogues that might also date to the time of Jesus are Capernaum, Masada, and Herodium. The Theodotus inscription from Jerusalem refers to a synagogue existing in Jerusalem in the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. Despite the limited evidence for first century synagogues, textual evidence (New Testament, Acts, Josephus, and Philo) indicates the institution was well established and developed during the time of Jesus.

In addition, in the later Roman and Byzantine periods over 100 synagogues have been excavated or surveyed, over half of them in Galilee and the Golan. It is clear in the distribution of synagogues that Galilee became a center of Jewish religious and cultural practice in the late Roman period. It is circumstantial, but along with the later settlement patterns, textual evidence, and the limited 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. evidence, the synagogue demonstrates that Galilee was a center of Jewish life and activity.

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<sup>49</sup>Hachili 2001:98

<sup>50</sup>Hachili 1988:138-4.

<sup>51</sup>Netzer et al. 1999.

<sup>52</sup>Mage et al. 1999:27-30

<sup>53</sup>Guttman.

### **Roman Occupation: Archaeology of Hellenistic Culture**

There is evidence that there was Hellenistic influence in Galilee during the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. The problem is how to reconstruct Roman Galilee. Recent trends to suggest that Galilee was dominated by imperial power are based on the presence of Roman cities. I will not address the evidence for Hellenistic culture. This issue was addressed at the Southwestern Regional Meeting of SBL by Mark Chancey in 2002. To sum up his paper, he noted that archaeologists need to first isolate those features of the material culture that date to the Hellenistic or Early Roman period. Most evidence of Hellenism in Galilee occurs from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century to the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE: such as theaters, hippodromes, amphitheaters, inscriptions, figurines, gymnasium, bathhouses, pagan temples, coins, figurines, iconography, etc. He concluded that there are very few remains that date to the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D., and those sites that do have Hellenistic pagan remains are outside of Galilee (e.g. Scythopolis, Ptolemais, etc.) with the exception of Sepphoris.

### **Conclusion**

Was Jesus a Galilean Jew or Jewish Hellenist? Based on the data—the world of Jesus was Galilean Judaism. Meyers notes that Galilee was a pluralistic society with a strong Jewish identity. While there is no support to place Jesus within a Hellenistic world, Jesus and his disciples would have been exposed to Hellenistic culture. The Gospels record that Jesus interacted with a wide spectrum of people, such as the Syro-Phoenician women and Samaritans (women at the well, 10 lepers).

Those who start with the archaeological data can only arrive at the conclusion that Jesus belongs in a 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish context. Sean Freyne hypothesizes that, not only was Jesus a Galilean Jew, but he was a Galilean Messiah. Jesus' messianic claims fit the messianic

expectations that were fervent in Galilee.<sup>54</sup> It appears that if you really are honest with the archaeological data, Jesus does not need to be liberated from the theology of the early church, but from the theological and political overlay of vogue New Testament scholars.

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<sup>54</sup>Sean Freyne, *Galilee* 2000:205.