

INTRODUCTION TO GALILEE: VOLUMES 1 AND 2

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Galilee has fascinated historians for the last 150 years. Ernest Renan, the nineteenth-century biographer of Jesus, thought that ancient Galilee must have been a paradise. He referred to the area around Nazareth as “This enchanted circle. . . .” Galilee was “charming and idyllic” and was characterized by green, shade, beautiful flowers and small, gentle animals. “In no country in the world do the mountains spread themselves out with more harmony. . . . Galilee, he thought, “spiritualised itself in ethereal dreams—in a kind of poetic mysticism, blending heaven and earth.”¹ It was here in Renan’s dreamlike never-never-land that he pictured Jesus’ youth.

What we need is a more sober appraisal of ancient Galilee. The research in the last thirty years has sought to do that, but, nevertheless, the current study of Galilee is fraught with conflicting conclusions. If the Sermon on the Mount is known for its six Antitheses (Matt. 5:21-48), scholars may look back on this period of research as the Antitheses of Galilee: (1) Some look at Galilee through the lenses of cultural anthropology and macro-sociology;² others look at Galilee through the lenses of archaeology and reject the use of social theories.³ (2) Some

1. Ernest Renan, *The Life of Jesus* (London: Trübner, 1867) 51, 74–76.

2. See the analyses of Richard A. Horsley, “The Historical Jesus and Archaeology of the Galilee: Questions from Historical Jesus Research to Archaeologists,” *SBL 1994 Seminar Papers* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 91–135; Douglas E. Oakman, “The Archaeology of First-Century Galilee and the Social Interpretation of the Historical Jesus” in *ibid.*, 220–51; and S. V. Freyne, “Archaeology and the Historical Jesus” in *Archaeology and Biblical Interpretation* (ed. John R. Bartlett; London: Routledge, 1997), 129.

3. J. A. Overman, “Jesus of Galilee and the Historical Peasant” in *Archaeology and the Galilee: Texts and Contexts in the Graeco-Roman and Byzantine Periods* (ed. Douglas R. Edwards and C. Thomas McCollough; Atlanta:

maintain that the relations between rural villages and the cities were hostile;⁴ others propose that the relationship was one of economic reciprocity and good will.⁵ (3) Some suggest that Galilee was typical of other agrarian societies, with poor peasants who lived in the rural areas and exploitative wealthy people who lived mostly in the cities;⁶ others respond that life was pretty good for everyone in Galilee and that it was an egalitarian society.⁷ (4) Some regard Galilee as so hellenized (Greek-like) that there were Cynic philosophers running around;⁸ others retort that Galilee was thoroughly Jewish.⁹ (5) Some think Sepphoris, one of the cities of Lower Galilee, was rather large for an ancient city (up to 30,000 persons); others think it was a small “city” (around 7,500).¹⁰ (6) Some think that the theater ruins in Sepphoris

Scholars Press, 1997), 67–73; and, in the same volume, Dennis E. Groh, “The Clash between Literary and Archaeological Models of Provincial Palestine,” 29–37.

4. Oakman, “Archaeology of First-Century Galilee”; Richard A. Horsley, *Archaeology, History, and Society in Galilee: The Social Context of Jesus and the Rabbis* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1996), 70–83; Gerhard E. Lenski, *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 206.

5. See David Adan-Bayewitz, *Common Pottery in Roman Galilee: A Study of Local Trade* (Bar-Ilan Studies in Near Eastern Languages and Culture; Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1993), 23–41, 216–36; Adan-Bayewitz, “Kefar Hananya, 1986” *IEJ* 37 (1987): 178–79; Adan-Bayewitz and Isadore Perlman, “The Local Trade of Sepphoris in the Roman Period” *IEJ* 40 (1990) 153–72; James F. Strange, “First Century Galilee from Archaeology and from the Texts,” in Edwards and McCollough, *Archaeology and the Galilee*, 41; Douglas R. Edwards, “First-Century Urban/Rural Relations in Lower Galilee: Exploring the Archaeological and Literary Evidence,” in *SBL 1988 Seminar Papers* (ed. David J. Lull; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 169–82; Edwards, “The Socio-Economic and Cultural Ethos of the Lower Galilee in the First Century: Implications for the Nascent Jesus Movement,” in *The Galilee in Late Antiquity* (ed. Lee I. Levine; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992), 53–73; Eric M. Meyers, “Jesus and His Galilean Context,” in Edwards and McCollough, *Archaeology and the Galilee*, 57–66.

6. John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed, *Excavating Jesus: Beneath the Stones, Behind the Texts* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001) 70; Richard A. Horsley, “Jesus and Galilee: The Contingencies of a Renewal Movement,” in *Galilee through the Centuries: Confluence of Cultures* (ed. Eric M. Meyers; Duke Judaic Studies Series 1; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 65.

7. Groh, “Clash between Literary and Archaeological Models,” 29–37.

8. Howard Clark Kee, “Early Christianity in the Galilee: Reassessing the Evidence from the Gospels,” in Levine, *Galilee in Late Antiquity*, 3–22, esp. 15; Robert W. Funk, *Honest to Jesus: Jesus for a New Millennium* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 58; Burton L. Mack, *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 64, 66.

9. See Jonathan L. Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus: A Re-Examination of the Evidence* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2000), 49–51; Mark A. Chancey and Eric M. Meyers, “How Jewish Was Sepphoris in Jesus’ Time?” *BAR* 26, no. 4 (2000): 18–41, 61; Eric M. Meyers, “Jesus and His World: Sepphoris and the Quest for the Historical Jesus,” in *Saxa loquentur: Studien zur Archäologie Palästinas/Israels: Festschrift für Volkmar Fritz zum 65. Geburtstag* (ed. Cornelis G. den Hertog; Ulrich Hübner, and Stefan Münger; AOAT 302; Münster: Ugarit, 2003), 191–95; Mark A. Chancey, *The Myth of a Gentile Galilee* (SNTSMS 118; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 79–90.

10. Compare the figures in Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus*, 117. Meyers suggests 18,000 for Sepphoris and 24,000 for Tiberias (“Jesus and His Galilean Context,” 59). J. Andrew Overman offered 30,000 to 40,000 for Tiberias and 30,000 for Sepphoris (“Who Were The First Urban Christians?” in *SBL Seminar 1988 Seminar Papers*, 160–68); Horsley maintained that both cities together had a population of 15,000 (*Archaeology, History and Society in Galilee*, 45).

of Galilee (only five kilometers or four miles from Nazareth) indicate that Jesus could have attended theatrical performances; others maintain that the theater was not constructed until after Jesus' time.¹¹

These contradictory viewpoints have made it cliché that the quest for the historical Jesus is at the same time a quest for the historical Galilee.¹² The geographical and cultural location of Jesus' youth, it is surmised, may help us understand his later message and/or his pattern of ministry. Certainly scholars of the past have thought as much; the current group seems to have the same opinion.¹³

Today Galilee studies are having an influence on several areas of New Testament studies. In addition to the study of the historical Jesus, mentioned above, many today see Galilee as the context for the composition of the sayings source commonly called Q.¹⁴ Others add that the Gospel of Mark was also composed in Galilee.¹⁵ Research in the New Testament Gospels mandates that we have an up-to-date assessment of ancient Galilee.

Students of ancient Judaism also have an interest in Galilee. As archaeological surveys are demonstrating, Judeans began to immigrate into Galilee during the Hasmonean period (early first century BCE) and, consequently, Galilee became a very Jewish territory.¹⁶ When the great Jewish War erupted in 66 CE, Galilee was the focal point. It was there that the Roman army first attacked, defeating Josephus's army and laying waste to several cities (*J. W.* 2.566–3.203). After the war, Judaism eventually reorganized there. The Sanhedrin moved at first to Yavneh (Jamnia) on the coast, then to Usha, to Beth She'arim, to Sepphoris, and finally to Tiberias (all in Galilee).¹⁷ It was in Galilee, in Sepphoris, that Rabbi Yehudah ha-Nasi lived and redacted

11. For a date in the early first century (thus the time of Antipas and Jesus), see James F. Strange, "Six Campaigns at Sepphoris" in Levine, *Galilee in Late Antiquity*, 342; and Richard A. Batey, *Jesus and the Forgotten City: New Light on Sepphoris and the Urban World of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 83–103. For a date of late first century or early second century for the theater, see Ze'ev Weiss and Ehud Netzer, "Hellenistic and Roman Sepphoris: The Archaeological Evidence," in *Sepphoris in Galilee: Crosscurrents of Culture* (ed. Rebecca Martin Nagy, Carol L. Meyers, Eric M. Meyers, and Ze'ev Weiss; Raleigh: North Carolina Museum of Art, 1996; distributed by Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, Ind.), 32; Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, "Sepphoris," *OEANE* 4:533; and Meyers, "Jesus and His World," 188–190.

12. Seán Freyne, "The Geography, Politics, and Economics of Galilee and the Quest for the Historical Jesus," in *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research* (ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans; NTTS 19; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 76; and Halvor Moxnes, "Construction of Galilee," *BTB* 31 (2001): 26–37, 64–77.

13. See the surveys in Moxnes, "Construction of Galilee"; and M. Rapinchuk, "The Galilee and Jesus in Recent Research," *Currents in Biblical Research* 2 (2004): 197–222.

14. Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus*, 170–96; John Kloppenborg Verbin, *Excavating Q: The History and Setting of the Sayings Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 170–75, 214–61.

15. Joel Marcus, "The Jewish War and the *Sitz im Leben* of Mark," *JBL* 111 (1992): 441–62; Werner H. Kelber, *Mark's Story of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 13.

16. See the chapters by Jensen and Chancey in this volume.

17. See *b. Roš Haš.* 31b and E. Mary Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule: From Pompey to Diocletian. A Study in Political Relations* (SJLA 20; Leiden: Brill, 1976), 474.

the Mishnah.¹⁸ Several other important rabbis also lived in Galilee.¹⁹ Galilee, therefore, has played an important role in both the formation of early Christianity and the reformulation of the Judaism that arose after the destruction of the temple to become the ancestor of the Judaisms we know today.

The Galilee at the time of Jesus and the Mishnah has received intense scrutiny in the past thirty years. Scholars have combed through the texts (especially Josephus) and the material remains to form an increasingly complete and complex picture. Archaeologists have reopened sites already dug and have sunk their spades into previously unexcavated sites. During this time, several useful collections of articles have appeared.²⁰ These collections are certainly full of very helpful information, and they have expanded the knowledge of the region during our period of interest. The authors of the present volume owe a great debt to these previous contributions to the field. Yet some of the conclusions and hypotheses may now need reevaluation, and the information can certainly always be updated. What we propose in these two volumes is to offer the general reader a somewhat full report of the status of Galilean studies.

These two volumes consolidate a great deal of information that has been brought to light in various journals, field reports, and essays over the past thirty years. Our goal has been to make this information easily accessible to New Testament scholars and Mishnah scholars not familiar with these materials and also usable to the average intelligent reader. The volumes will integrate the various excavations (for example, the three excavations at Sepphoris) and will also integrate the archaeological and textual data where possible.

We have sought to hear all voices: archaeologists, historians, biblical scholars, and social-science interpreters; Christians, Jews, and secular scholars; North Americans, Europeans, and Israelis; those who have devoted a significant amount of time and energy in this research (especially those who have excavated in Galilee for many years), a few newcomers, and even “outsiders” who offer a new look at the data. As noted above, there is—hardly surprising—no unanimity with respect to several issues. It has not been the editors’ goal to harmonize opinions or reduce disagreements. We present them as they exist and let the reader make decisions.

Volume 1 has collected chapters on the life and culture of ancient Galilee. After surveys of the modern study of Galilee and of Galilean history, there are specialized studies on ethnicity, on religious practices of Galilee (including synagogues), on notable personalities, and on important social movements. Village life is featured in one essay on the village, followed by one

18. Smallwood, *Jews under Roman Rule*, 499. See the chapter by Caulley in this volume.

19. For example, Rabbi Hanina lived in Sepphoris (*y. Ta’an.* 3:4; *y. Pe’ah* 7:1). See also Shaye J. D. Cohen, “The Place of the Rabbi in Jewish Society,” in Levine, *Galilee in late Antiquity*, 157–73.

20. See Levine, *Galilee in late Antiquity*; Nagy et al., *Sepphoris in Galilee*; Edwards and McCollough, *Archaeology and the Galilee*; E. M. Meyers, *Galilee through the Centuries*; and Jürgen Zangenberg, Harold W. Attridge, and Dale B. Martin, eds., *Religion, Ethnicity, and Identity in Ancient Galilee: A Region in Transition* (WUNT 210; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007).

on household Judaism, and then one on the village houses. This section of the volume ends with essays on education and diseases and health. There follow offerings on the road system, trade and markets, the urban–rural divide, and the economic life of the village. In relation to these chapters is the chapter—consisting of two companion essays—that forms a debate on the standard of living of the average villager during our time period. Were they destitute, living modestly, or prosperous? A chapter on taxation rounds out part four of volume 1.

Volume 2 collects reports on all of the archaeological excavations of Galilee at which significant remains from our period of time have been found. Among the sites we discuss, some have seen significant excavation (Capernaum, Sepphoris); in some the excavators focused on synagogues (Meiron, Khirbet Shema‘, Gush Halav); others have seen limited excavation either because of modern construction (Nazareth, Tiberias) or because the dig began recently (Shikhin). Those sites with remains only before or after our time period (100 BCE–200 CE) find no discussion here.²¹ Also, generally speaking, those sites only surveyed but not excavated will not be covered, even though there may be strong evidence of occupation during our time period. The editors thought it important to include chapters on both cities (such as Sepphoris and Tiberias) and villages, because it is the social, economic, religious, and cultural interactions between village and city that provide the basis for so much of the discussion in volume 1.

In both volumes, the reader has the opportunity to watch both textual scholars and archaeologists attempt to make sense of the ancient texts that talk about, and the material culture used and left by the inhabitants of, the Galilee. This is no light task, for it requires making inferences about human institutions and values. Those more ephemeral realities do leave their imprints in material culture and texts, but usually in an oblique way, and scholars are forced to interpret.

That observation provides one of the most valuable offerings of these two volumes: the chance to see how scholars make arguments, while assessing the arguments of others. In this way we take our readers seriously as conversation partners, for we offer up the strengths and weaknesses of our conclusions for their assessment as well. The other value of the volumes is to be found in the bibliographies at the end of each chapter: they are gold mines for people who want to do further reading on their own.

The editors invite readers into the ongoing conversations captured, in part, in these volumes. If you have read this far, it is clear that you are interested in the subject. It is our hope that the curious will find some answers here, and that others will learn how important the questions are. After all, we are looking at the birth of two of the world’s great religions: Christianity and the Judaism of the Sages of Blessed Memory.

21. Therefore, towns and villages such as Philoteria, Horvat Kur, Bethlehem of Galilee, Kefar Reina, Chorazin, and Gabara will not be treated in volume 2.