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**The Significance of Archaeological Excavations in Galilee  
for the Interpretation of the Gospels**

Master's Thesis

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I hereby declare and confirm that this thesis is entirely the result of my own work and that I have listed all the sources used and quoted in this thesis in my bibliography. Furthermore, this thesis is not used as part of any other examination and has not yet been published

**In Prague 27.04.2009**

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

The last century, especially the latter half of it, has been marked by major breakthroughs in what is referred to as Biblical Archaeology. Numerous finds have been made from throughout the biblical period. Special attention has been given to the time of Jesus and so several sites connected to his life, his public ministry and the Gospel events have been identified and excavated. The identification of some sites have not yet reached common acceptance and so there are several sites “competing” to be acknowledged as “the biblical site”. Thus, at present, there are several sites claiming to be “the biblical Bethsaida”.

Of all the sites excavated, one stands out in particular and that is Capharnaum. There is no doubt, at present, concerning its identification and it is the most significant Galilean site with regard to Jesus. The Gospels inform us that Capharnaum was where Peter and his brother Andrew resided with their families and that this was the hub of Jesus’s ministry. In fact, the Evangelist Matthew refers to it as Jesus’ “own town”. Thus, what better place could there be to center our attention than the “town of Jesus”.

What can the excavations conducted to date tell us about the life in Capharnaum at the time of Jesus? How many remains have come down from that period and what do they reveal of the settlements’ socioeconomic standard? Has any of the buildings referred to in the Gospels actually been brought to light? What was the physiognomy of the domestic structures and would they be considered poor in comparison with contemporaneous Palestinian dwellings? Is the Gospels’ portrayal of Capharnaum in keeping with the results of the Capharnean excavations? What are the extra biblical references to Capharnaum and what do they have to report? Are they of any import to the excavators? Was there really a Roman centurion stationed at Capharnaum? Was Capharnaum a large and important city or was it just an unpretentious Galilean hamlet? These are some of the questions we will seek answer in this thesis. The aim of this work is to furnish the reader with insight into the excavations at Capharnaum which in turn should allow him or her to envision Capharnaum while reading the Gospels. The results of the excavations at Capharnaum will be presented and evaluated comparatively with both the biblical and the extra biblical sources as well as with the results of excavations from contemporaneous sites in the Levant. In order to facilitate the visualization of Capharnaum a presentation of the Galilean topography, climate and biota with a special focus on the Gennesar region to which Capharnaum

belongs, seems to be appropriate. We will then proceed to a very elaborate examination of the pilgrim reports on Capharnaum which is an absolute necessity considering the archaeologists' frequent references to these vital sources. The history of Capharnaum as it emerged from the archaeological findings will then be presented. We will omit the period of Jesus in this historical presentation since that period will be dealt with elaborately later in the main part of this thesis. Before proceeding to the results of the excavations and their examination we will acquaint the reader with an overview of the surveys and excavations conducted to date at Capharnaum.

## **2 GALILEE**

### **2.1 Topography and Climate**

Galilee is divided into northern Upper Galilee which attains elevations of up to about 1,200 meters above sea level and southern Lower Galilee with peaks rising not higher than 600 meters above sea level.<sup>1</sup> Lower Galilee is the most level of the hill regions consisting of low mountain ranges stretching from east to west interspersed with fertile valleys while Upper Galilee, on the other hand, is made up of rugged mountain blocks and merely a few valleys.

The most common types of rock of which Galilee is composed are chalk, limestone and dolomite.<sup>2</sup> Basalt, which is a volcanic rock created by the action of extinct volcanoes, is the prevalent rock in the eastern parts of Galilee including Capharnaum.

The average precipitation is about 600 millimeters in Lower Galilee and 800 millimeters in Upper Galilee. Thus the climate in Lower Galilee is warmer in general than in Upper Galilee.<sup>3</sup> Capharnaum is situated in Lower Galilee at the northwestern shore of the Lake of Gennesaret<sup>4</sup> known today as the Sea of Galilee<sup>5</sup> about 5 kilometers from the

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. AHARONI, Y.: *The Land of the Bible. A historical geography*, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1979, 27.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. AVIAM AVIAM, M.: Galilee, in: STERN, E., LEWINSON-GILBOA, A., AVIRAM, J. (ed.): *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, Vol. 2, Jerusalem: Carta, 1993, 449.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 449.

<sup>4</sup> See fig 1.

<sup>5</sup> "The name "Sea of Galilee" appears for the first time in the New Testament, but it is also called the Sea of Tiberias and the Sea, or Lake, of Gennesar or Gennesaret. (Tiberias is a city on the western shore of the lake; Gennesar or Gennesaret was a city and a plain on the western shore. Galilee is the region of the country in which the lake is situated). In the Hebrew Bible, the lake is called by an older name: Yam Konneret, or Sea of Kinneret. Kinneret (the name of an early pagan deity) is the name by which it is known in Israel today. In the Hebrew Bible, it is mentioned only four times, all in connection with the borders of the tribal allotments in the Promised Land (Nm 34,11; Jos 12,3; 13,27; Dt 3,17)." NUN, M.:

estuary of the Jordan River in the fertile valley of Gennesar (see fig. 1) The valley of Gennesar and the Lake of Gennesaret are both part of what is known as the Jordan Rift.<sup>6</sup>

The Jordan Rift is a great fissure extending from the base of Mount Hermon to the Gulf of 'Aqaba. The average width of this long and deep depression is approximately 16 kilometers. The Jordan River flows around 322 kilometers in the centre of this rift from the Anti-Lebanon Mountains through the Lake of Gennesaret before emptying into the Dead Sea. Below the now drained lake Huleh, the shore of which is 64 meters above Mediterranean Sea level, the valley makes a sharp descent through a rocky basaltic area in which the Jordan River has cut a deep bed. The Lake of Gennesaret is only 16 kilometers distant from Lake Huleh but its shore is as many as 209 meters below sea level. The Jordan Rift is flanked by mountains on both sides that, in some places, rise up to about 914 meters above the fissure. The steep mountain-sides and the fact that the Gennesar valley lies more than 200 meters below sea level constitute the main climate regulating factors in this region.

In the Gennesar region, in which Capharnaum is situated, there is an average annual precipitation that varies between 350 and 500 millimeters.<sup>7</sup> The number of rainy days is limited, never exceeding fifty days per year. Thus, the rain comes in short and intense downpours. The rainy season is short in contrast to the summer which is long, almost rainless and hot.

The summer temperatures in this region reach a mean high of 31°C on account of the precipitous descent of air masses from the Galilean hilltops to the Gennesar Valley which, by compressing the air at ground level, creates high barometric pressure and friction that warms up the air. The winter season and the springtime, in particular, are very pleasant and mild as result of the high rate of evaporation from the lake, mitigating the temperatures to a mean low of 14°C. Because of its proximity to the lake, the humidity is quite high in this region with an annual mean of 65%. On the other hand, the dew is quite scanty in this region with an annual amount not exceeding 30 millimeters during approximately eighty dewy nights.<sup>8</sup>

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Cast Your Net upon the Waters - Fish and Fishermen in Jesus' Time, in: *Biblical Archaeology Review* 19/6 (1993), 48.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. AHARONI 1979, *The Land.*, 31–32.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. SAPIR, B., NE'EMAN, D.: *Capernaum*, vol. 9. (*The Historical Sites Library*), Tel Aviv: [s.e.], 1967, 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

### 2.1.1 *Wind conditions*

During the summertime the winds in this area are fairly stable; during the night there is a light wind blowing from the east which is replaced at the break of dawn by a light breeze coming in from the west. The morning breeze is followed by a fresh sea-breeze from the Mediterranean coast that reaches the shores of the Lake around noon and blows for some two hours. This sea-breeze defines the whole wind-pattern over the Lake and in its vicinity; and thus, has a considerable impact on the regional climate of the Gennesar Valley.

During the wintertime, seasonal cyclones and anti-cyclones are raging over the Mediterranean Sea and; as a consequence, the winds blowing in the Gennesar Valley become unsteady, changing from minute to minute. Another phenomenon, which is quite common in this region during the wintertime, is the violent westerly wind causing sudden and deadly dangerous storms which disappear as suddenly as they start. Fishermen through history who were very familiar with these squalls and their lives were often endangered when caught by them. The apostles, of whom several were fishermen, were no strangers to these storms. Neither was Jesus a stranger to them considering how often he crossed the lake by boat. One of their encounters with such a violent and life-threatening storm is described in the Synoptic Gospels: “Suddenly a violent storm came up on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by waves; but he was asleep. They came and woke him, saying, ‘Lord, save us! We are perishing!’”.<sup>9</sup>

The Lake of Gennesaret is highly dangerous when transformed into a boiling cauldron, but otherwise life-giving and of the utmost importance for the inhabitants of this region and for the whole of Israel. With a length of 22 kilometers and a maximum width of 13 kilometers, it is the largest fresh-water reservoir in Israel containing approximately 4 billion cubic meters of water.<sup>10</sup> Its importance is not only due to the water itself but also due to the whole lake teeming with various species of fish that mankind has been exploiting from time immemorial. Josephus Flavius, who is well known for having a tendency to exaggerate, relates that in the first century A. D. the Galilean fisheries supported more than thirty fishing villages with an estimated population of 100.000 people. Although the numbers he calculates cannot be taken at face value, they may still serve as an indicator of the immense importance of the fishing industry to the local economy.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Mt 8,24–25. Cf. Mt 8,23–27; Mk 4,35–40; Lk 8,22–25.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. AHARONI 1979, *The Land.*,33; SAPIR - NE'EMAN 1967, *Capernaum*, 9.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. SAPIR, NE'EMAN 1967, *Capernaum*, 6.



## 2.2 Fish species

The indigenous fish population consists of eighteen species, ten of which are of commercial importance. Nearly all of them are either endemic to the lake or to the Jordan water system. The Mouthbreeders (Cichlidae), the Barbels (Cyprinidae) and the Sardines are the three main groups of edible fish in the Lake of Gennesaret. *Tilapia galilea* (St. Peter's Fish), *Barbus longiceps* (the Long Headed Barbel), *Barbus canis*, *Variorhinus damascinus* and *Acanthobrama terrae sanstae* (the Kinneret Sardine) are the most well-known and economically important fish species belonging to the three previously mentioned groups. The lake is also home to a large population of waterfowls, thousands of which can be seen on the lake, skimming the surface in search of a catch.

St. Peter's Fish received its name from the early Christian tradition that it was this species that St. Peter caught on a hook and in whose mouth he found a shekel as foretold by Jesus. It acquired this highly marketable name with the influx of pilgrims to Galilee. St. Peter's Fish is delicious, easily prepared and therefore immensely popular. However, it is a well-known fact that the *Tilapia galilea* could not have been the fish St. Peter caught with a hook and line simply because this fish is an herbivore and feeds exclusively on plankton and can only be caught with nets. Barbel, on the other hand, is a predator and bottom feeder, that Galilean fishermen have, since time immemorial, been catching with hooks baited with sardines. Thus it seems almost certain that the fish St. Peter caught was a Barbel. The only explanation for the misnomer is that, as previously mentioned, it was good for tourism.

However, the only large fish swimming in schools, the *Tilapia galilea* were, without doubt, the fish St. Peter caught together with some of the other apostles in what is known as the Miraculous Catch.<sup>12</sup> According to Mendel Nun, who is the foremost expert on the Lake of Gennesaret and its fishing, both the time of the catch, the net used, and the distance from the shore leave little doubt that the fish caught were indeed the *Tilapia galilea*.<sup>13</sup>

The Catfish (*Clarias lazera*) mentioned by Josephus Flavius<sup>14</sup> is one of the largest fish in the lake but it is of no economic importance, at least locally, since it cannot be eaten

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Jn 21,11; Lk 5,4–9.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. NUN 1993, "Cast your.," in: BAR (6), 49, 51, 56, 70. NUN, M.: *The Sea of Galilee and Its Fishermen in the New Testament*, Ein Gev: [s.e.], 1989, 38.

<sup>14</sup> For his mention of the Catfish see p. 12.

by Jews whose law prohibits the consumption of fish that lack scales.<sup>15</sup> Jesus probably alluded to the catfish when comparing the kingdom of heaven to a net which is cast into the sea and when hauled up, the catch from the net is sorted into good and bad, the bad being the catfish because they are scaleless.<sup>16</sup>

### 2.3 Agriculture and Vegetation

The rich black alluvial soil in this region has originated from the erosion and decomposition of basaltic rocks. It is a heavy soil which is rich in organic nutrients and it retains its water well. It may form tough clods in the summer and muddy swamps in the winter; but it is very fertile when properly drained, irrigated and cultivated.<sup>17</sup> The agricultural conditions, however, are quite arduous due to the ubiquitous basalt stones and boulders making plowing difficult and cumbersome.<sup>18</sup> Wheat is most the commonly raised agricultural plant in the Gennesar region, but other field crops are grown here also, though not in to the same extent as wheat.

Olive trees and grapevines seem to thrive in this rocky terrain, but many other kinds of trees appear to have difficulty taking root.<sup>19</sup> This region was in antiquity renowned for its large stands of the Tabor oak (*Quercus ithaburensis*) but the pressing need of grazing and farming land eventuated in a practically complete depletion of these once so thriving and dense oak-forests.<sup>20</sup> The deforestation in the Holy Land has been going on for thousand of years as documented by the book of Joshua: “Joshua answered them [the descendants of Joseph]: ‘go up to the forest, and clear out a place for yourselves there’”<sup>21</sup>

On the Gennesar plain, which is situated to the west of Capernaum just over the ridge at Tel Chinnereth, lies some of the finest agricultural land in Palestine. This strip of alluvial soil is described by Josephus Flavius in glowing terms as highly fertile. What is important to keep in mind when reading this description is that it was written down less than fifty years after the death of Christ and it should enable us to visualize the Gennesar plain as it was around the time of Jesus:

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Lv 11, 9–12. NUN 1993, “Cast your.,” in: BAR (6), 48.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Mt 13, 47–48. NUN 1989, *The Sea.*, 22.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. SAPIR, NE’EMAN 1967, *Capernaum*, 4; AHARONI 1979, *The Land.*, 13.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. REED, J. L.: *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus a Re-examination of the Evidence*, Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2002, 144.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. SAPIR, NE’EMAN 1967, *Capernaum*, 5.

<sup>21</sup> Jos 17,15.

“The country also that lies over against this lake hath the same name of Gennesareth; its nature is wonderful as well as its beauty; its soil is so fruitful that all sorts of trees can grow upon it, and the inhabitants accordingly plant all sorts of trees there; for the temper of the air is so well mixed, that it agrees very well with those several sorts, particularly walnuts, which require the coldest air, flourish there in vast plenty; there are palm trees also, which grow best in hot air; fig trees also and olives grown near them, which yet require an air that is more temperate. One may call this place the ambition of nature, where it forces those plants that are naturally enemies to one another to agree together; it is a happy contention of the seasons as if every one of them laid calm to this country; for it not only nourishes different sorts of autumnal fruit beyond men’s expectation, but preserves them a great while; it supplies men with the principal fruits, with grapes and figs continually during ten months of the year, and the rest of fruit as they become ripe together, through the whole year.”<sup>22</sup>

### 3 THE PILGRIM REPORTS

#### 3.1 From the Early Roman to the Late Byzantine period

The only extant extra-biblical references to Capharnaum dating back to the first century A.D. are those of **Josephus Flavius**, the Jewish Commander in Chief in Galilee during the first Jewish Revolt and subsequently the court historian of the Flavius dynasty in Rome.

In his oldest work *De Bello Judaico* (*The Jewish war*) written in the years 75 – 79 A.D.,<sup>23</sup> Josephus provides us with a detailed description of the fertile plain of Gennesar on the western side of the Galilee Sea, and he does not fail to mention a spring which has been named *Καφαρναούμ* by the natives: “it (the plain of Gennesar) is also watered from a most fertile fountain. The people of the country call it Capharnaum. Some have thought it to be a vein of the Nile, because it produces the Coracin fish as well as that lake does which is near to Alexandria.”<sup>24</sup> The spring he refers to, according to modern scholars, is, without a

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<sup>22</sup> FLAVIUS, J., *The Jewish war*, III 10, 8 par. 519–520, FLAVIUS, J.: *The Jewish War; Josephus in Nine Volumes*, (The original Greek with an English translation by THACKERAY, H. St. J.), <sup>2</sup>London: Heinemann, 1976, 720–723.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. KROLL, G.: *Po stopách Ježíšových*, Kostelní Vydří, Karmelitánské Nakladatelství, 2002, 427–428, fotnote 7.

<sup>24</sup> FLAVIUS, J., *The Jewish war*, III 10, 8 par. 519–520, FLAVIUS, J.: *The Jewish War; Josephus in Nine Volumes*, (The original Greek with an English translation by THACKERAY, H. St. J.), <sup>2</sup>London: Heinemann, 1976, 720–723. In Josephus’s opinion, the fact that the catfish (*Clarias lazera*), which he calls by its Greek name “Korakinos”, is found in the Nile supports the popular belief at that time that

doubt, the largest of the seven springs at Tabgha.<sup>25</sup> Tabgha is an Arab corruption of the Greek name *Ἐπτάπηγον*<sup>26</sup> meaning “The place of the Seven Springs”<sup>27</sup>, and it is situated less than three kilometers south-west of Capharnaum. Some assume that it was named Capharnaum after the nearby settlement and that it might have been used by its inhabitants.<sup>28</sup>

At the close of his life, several decades later, Josephus recounts in his autobiography *Vita (Life)* that he sustained an injury during a battle near Julias (Bethsaida?) when:

“The horse on which I rode, and upon whose back I fought, fell into a quagmire, and threw me on the ground; and I was bruised on my wrist, and carried into a village called Cepharnome (εις κόμην Κεφαρνωκόν). When my soldiers heard of this, they were afraid I had been worse hurt than I was; and so they did not go on with their pursuit any further, but returned in very great concern for me. I therefore sent for the physicians, and while I was under their hands, I continued feverish that day; and as the physicians directed, I was that night removed to Taricheae (Magdala).”<sup>29</sup>

Despite Flavius’s unusual spelling, it is doubtlessly Capharnaum to which he refers in this instance. The site where he fell off his horse was situated east of the mouth of the Jordan, and Capharnaum was consequently only a few kilometers distant to the west. This geographical description fits in well with the location of present-day Tell Hum whose extensive ruins are today unanimously accepted as the remnants of ancient Capharnaum.<sup>30</sup>

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there was an underground connection between the Nile and the lake, and that it emerged from below the ground at the largest spring at Tabgha.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. TZAFERIS, V. et al.: *Excavations at Capernaum 1978–1982*, Vol. 1, Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1989, 202–203. BLENKINSOPP, J.: The identification of the site, in: TZAFERIS 1989, *Excavations.*, 193. NUN 1989, *The Sea.*, 10–15. In 1938 The American scholar Edward Robinson, who undertook a three months long journey in the Holy Land in 1838, wrongly identified the spring mentioned by Josephus with ‘Ain et-Tin located at the southern foot of Tell ‘Oreimeh approximately 14 kilometers from Tiberias. ‘Ain et-Tin has as opposed to et-Tabgha been found as unsuitable for irrigation on account of being too low and thus not the spring described by Josephus.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. KOPP, C.: *The Holy Places of the Gospels*, New York: Herder and Herder, 1963, 173.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. NUN 1989, *The Sea.*, 12.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. THOMSON, M.: *The Land and the Book*, London: [s.e.], 1905, 355. KOPP 1963, *The Holy Places.*, 176. TZAFERIS 1989, *Excavations.*, 203.

<sup>29</sup> FLAVIUS, J.: *The Works of Josephus Flavius* (English Translation by WHISTON, W.), Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003, 24.

<sup>30</sup> In the nineteenth century, however, the location was subject to a great dispute among the topographers when, rather than Tell Hum, a site at present called Khan Minyeh (Khirbet Minyeh) was proposed as the location of Capharnaum. One of the main defenders of this theory was Edward Robinson. “Robinson’s contention that Tell Hum could not be the location of Capernaum is based solely upon speculation – on his assumption that the town of Capernaum had to be immediately adjacent to the fountain bearing the same name.” LAUGHLIN, J. C. H.: The identification of the site, in: TZAFERIS 1989, *Excavations.*, 193. For more on the identification of ancient Capharnaum see LOFFREDA, S.: *Recovering Capharnaum*, <sup>2</sup>Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1997, 17.

It might be of interest, to note, that **Pliny the Elder** (23 – 79 A.D.) fails to mention Capharnaum in his *Historia Naturalis* when naming *pleasant towns* around the Sea of Galilee.<sup>31</sup>

The literary sources from the second and third centuries A.D. mentioning Capharnaum are very scant. None of the Christian writers such as **Melito of Sardis**<sup>32</sup> († around 180 A.D.) or **Origen** (183 – 254 A.D.), who either visited or resided in Palestine, paid much, if any, attention to Capharnaum in their writings. The prevailing opinion at that time that the most significant sites related to the life of Jesus were the sites of his birth and his crucifixion might have been one of the reasons why so little is written about the places of Jesus' public ministry. Another important reason is that only a small number of the Christian writings have survived through the course of the centuries.

In fact, the only source of any help to us is of Jewish, not Christian, origin, namely, the *Midrash Rabbah*, in which two passages deal with the situation in Capharnaum. The first passage refers to an event taking place in Capharnaum in the second century A.D. A certain Hanina the nephew of Rabbi Joshua “came to Capernaum, and the Minim worked a spell on him and made him ride on an ass on the Sabbath. He went to his uncle Joshua, who anointed him with oil and he recovered from the spell. Joshua said to him: Since the ass of that wicked person has roused itself against you, you are no longer able to reside in the land of Israel. So he went from there to Babylon where he died in peace.”<sup>33</sup> The term *minim* was used by the Jews as a denotation for everyone who opposed and questioned traditional Judaism; but it was, according to a majority of the scholars, used for Christians in particular.<sup>34</sup> This would mean, provided that this theory is correct, that Capharnaum, although predominantly Jewish, had at least a small Jewish-Christian community living in its midst. This contention is further strengthened by another passage in the *Midrash*

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<sup>31</sup> Pliny mentions by name only Julias, Hippos, Taricheae (Magdala) and Tiberias. Cf. PLINY THE ELDER: *Historia Naturalis* I.V.12–14.

<sup>32</sup> The pilgrimages of Bishop Melito of Sardis and Bishop Alexander of Cappadocia to Palestine are mentioned by Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea in his “Ecclesiastical History” making them the first Christian pilgrims to the Holy Land that we know of. Cf. KROLL 2002, *Po stopách.*, 431, footnote 32.

<sup>33</sup> MIDRASH RABBAH: *Ecclesiastes*, Ch.1,8. Par.4, (FREEDMAN, H., SIMON, M. (ed.), translated by COHEN, A.), London: Soncino Press, 1939, 29.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA, S.: Capernaum - Jesus' Own City, in: *Bible and Spade (A Quarterly Digest of Biblical Archaeology)* 10/1 (1981), 10. LOFFREDA, S.: *A Visit to Capharnaum*, Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1982, 39–40. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering.*, 29–30. BLENKINSOPP, J.: “The literary evidence,” in: TZAFERIS 1989, *Excavations.*, 203–204. SAPIR - NE'EMAN 1967, *Capernaum*, 20. NORTH, R.: Discoveries at Capernaum, in: *Biblica* 58 (1977), 426. LOFFREDA 1974, *Capernaum II*, 98–99, 148, 183. BAGATTI, B.: *The Church from the Circumcision*, Jerusalem: Franciscan printing press, 1971, 21–22, 128–32. Joan Taylor does not share the opinion of the above-mentioned scholars that the *minims* in the *Midrash Rabbah* are necessarily Christians. She claims, as opposed to Loffreda, that it is quite clear “the wicked” does not refer to Jesus but to “the ass of Balaam” which was a standard epithet in rabbinic Judaism.

*Rabbah*. Rabbi Issi of Caesarea, who lived in the late-third century A.D., “commented on a biblical verse comparing goodness and sin by referring to the opinion of Minim: Good refers to Rabbi Hanina, the nephew of Rabbi Yehoshua; Sinner to the inhabitants of Kfar Nachum”.<sup>35</sup> It seems that Rabbi Issi hardly would have condemned all the inhabitants of Capharnaum, if it was not for the fact that the *minims* had grown numerous.

**Eusebius** (264 – 340 A.D), Bishop of Caesarea, mentions Capharnaum as still existing at his time in his *Onomasticon (circa 330 A.D.)*: “Capharnaum, alongside Lake Gennesareth, still exists today as a town situated in Galilee of the Gentiles, in the territory (finibus) of Zabulon and Neftali.”<sup>36</sup>

**Epiphanius of Salamis** (315 – 403 A.D.) tells us the story of a certain Josephus of Tyberias a high-ranked convert from Judaism whom he met when the latter, as a septuagenarian, was living in retirement in Scythopolis. Epiphanius describes in his *Panarion* (374 – 377 A.D.) a treatise on heresies, how Josephus, after being baptized, went to court and made friends with Emperor Constantine the Great, who conferred on him the title of count. On this occasion the Emperor told Josephus to ask him of any favor he wanted. “Josephus asked only this very great favor from the emperor – permission by imperial rescript to build Christ’s churches in the Jewish towns and villages where no one had been able to found churches, since there are no Greeks, Samaritans or Christians among the population. This rule of having no Gentiles among them is observed especially at Tiberias, Diocaesarea, Sepphoris, Nazareth and Capernaum.”<sup>37</sup> Unfortunately, Epiphanius is not that specific when reporting on the results of Josephus’s building efforts at least where Capharnaum is concerned. He only states that, although Josephus several times was harmed by his opponents, he succeeded in restoring parts of the temple in Tiberias and converting it into a church. He managed, after he had settled down in Scythopolis, to complete buildings in Diocaesarea and “*certain other towns*”.<sup>38</sup> Although Capharnaum is not mentioned by name, it is generally assumed that it was one of the

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<sup>35</sup> MIDRASH RABBAH: *Ecclesiastes* ch.7,26, par.3., Vol. 8, (FREEDMAN, H., SIMON, M., (ed.) translated by COHEN, A.), London: Soncino Press, 1939, 210. Cf. LOFFREDA 1981, “Capernaum - Jesus’,” in: BS (1), 10.

<sup>36</sup> BLENKINSOPP, J.: “The literary evidence,” in: TZAFERIS 1989, *Excavations.*, 204.

Cf. BALDI D.: *Enchiridion Locorum Sanctorum*, Jerusalem: Franciscan printing press, 1935, 372.

<sup>37</sup> EPIPHANIUS: The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis Liber 1 (ROBINSON, J. M.(ed.), translated by WILLIAMS, F., BRILL, E. J.), in: *Nag Hammadi Studies* 35 (1987). Cfr. St. EPIPHANIUS: *Adversus Hæreses* Lib. 1. Tom. II. 135–137 (XXX,XI–XII) in: MIGNE, J.P.(ed.): *Patrologiæ græcæ* Tom. 41, Paris: [s.e.], 1863, 423–426.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

“other towns”.<sup>39</sup> Capharnaum was, according to St. Epiphanius, inhabited only by Jews, who would not stand having Gentiles, Samaritans or Christians living with them. St. Epiphanius’s account, however, contains several self-contradictions,<sup>40</sup> either attributable to the author or to his aged informant, or to both of them. These contradictions decrease the account’s credibility, and thus it is advisable to search for confirmation from other sources before drawing any conclusions.

Beginning with the reign of Constantine the Great, there was an influx of tourists and pilgrims coming to visit the Holy Land. One of the first and most famous pilgrims was **St. Aetheria** who was apparently a nun from Spain, maybe even the mother superior of her convent and probable a relative of Emperor Theodosius I (379 – 395 A.D.). She spent about three years in the Holy Land from the spring of 381 A.D. to the spring of 384 A.D. In the extant account of her pilgrimage there is no mention of Capharnaum but it is believed that some of the lost sections of her narrative were used by **Petrus Diaconus** in his guidebook *De Locis Sanctis*. Petrus Diaconus was a Benedictine monk and librarian at Monte Cassino who never visited the Holy Land himself and was therefore dependent on the pilgrim reports written prior to the year 1137 A.D. It is generally assumed that when giving his description of Capharnaum he was drawing on a section of Aetheria’s narrative which was extant at his time but which has not been preserved to our days:

“In Capharnaum autem ex domo apostolorum principis ecclesia facta est, cuius parietes usque hodie ita stant, sicut fuerunt. Ibi paraclitum Dominus curavit. Illuc est et synagoga, in qua Dominus daemonicum curavit, ad quam per gradus multos ascenditur; quae synagoga ex lapidibus quadratis est facta. Non longe autem inde cernuntur gradus lapidei, supes quos Dominus stetit.”<sup>41</sup>

Moreover, in Capernaum the house of the prince of apostles has been made into a church, which original walls are still standing. It is where the Lord healed the paralytic. There also is the synagogue where the Lord cured a man possessed by the devil. The way in is up many stairs, and is made in dressed stone.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. REED 2002, *Archaeology*, 141. CORBO, V.C.: Capernaum, in: *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 1, New York: Doubleday, 1992, 867.

<sup>40</sup> E.g., “Joseph is presented as a surreptitious eyewitness of the deathbed conversion of the patriarch Hillel II by the bishop of Tiberias at a time when, as Epiphanius elsewhere notes, there were none but Jews in the city”. BLENKINSOPP, J.: “The literary evidence,” in: TZAFERIS 1989, *Excavations*, 204.

<sup>41</sup> GEYER, P.: *Itinera Hierosolymitana Saeculi III–VIII*, Vol. 39, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, Vienna: Temsky, 1898, 112. Cfr. BALDI 1935, *Enchiridion*, 376.

<sup>42</sup> WILKINSON, J.: *Egeria’s Travels to the Holy Land*, (newly translated with supporting documents and notes), Jerusalem–Warminster: Ariel, Aris & Phillips, 1981, 194–196.

It might be of interest to note that several authors ascribe this report to Aetheria without bothering to mention the fact that one only assumes she was the author and that it presumably contains several editorial embellishments. This report is, nevertheless, of the utmost importance since it mentions the house of the prince of apostles (St. Peter) which was converted into a church and also the fact that the walls are, despite the transformation, those of the house of St. Peter.<sup>43</sup> The author of this passage must have visited Capharnaum prior to the year 450 A.D. when the house-church already was obliterated by the octagonal church.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, at the time of Petrus Diaconus, Capharnaum was just a heap of ruins and pilgrims were shown a “House of St. Peter” in Tiberias rather than Capharnaum; and thus it seems more than certain that Petrus could not have used a contemporary source.<sup>45</sup>

Less than two years after St. Aetheria’s visit another high-ranked matron, **St. Paula of Rome**, passed through Capharnaum when undertaking a pilgrimage in the Holy Land, as reported by her dear friend St. Hieronymus. In a letter written after St. Paula’s death to her daughter St. Eustochium, Hieronymus, who was her guide on this journey, recalls that “Cito itinere percurrit Nazareth, nutriculum Domini, Cana et Capharnaum, signorum eius familiares”.<sup>46</sup> (She proceeded, by a swift journey, to Nazareth, the nurse of the Lord; Cana and Capharnaum, the witnesses of His miracles.)<sup>47</sup>

St. Paula was never to see Rome again. After finishing her pilgrimage, she settled down in Bethlehem and founded a convent which she entered together with her daughter St. Eustochium. She lived there as a nun until her death in 404 A.D. and the above-mentioned letter was her obituary, written in the year of her death.<sup>48</sup> From then there is a gap of more than one hundred years without any pilgrim reports or Holy Land guidebooks mentioning Capharnaum.

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1981, “Capernaum - Jesus’,” in: BS (1) 10. NORTH 1977, “Discoveries,,” in: B (58), 426. CORBO, V. C.: *Cafarnaon I - Gli edifici della citta*, (=Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Collectio Maior 19), Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1975, 72.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. WILKINSON 1981, *Egeria’s Travels*, 194. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering*, 64.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. WILKINSON 1981, *Egeria’s Travels*, 194.

<sup>46</sup> HIERONYMUS: *Epistola CVIII*, in: MIGNE, J.P.: *Patrologia Latina* vol. 22 col. 690–724, Paris: [s.e.], 1854, 889. Cf. HIERONYMUS: *Peregrinatio Sanctae Paulae in Itinera Hierosolymitana et Descriptions Terrae Sanctae Bellis Sacris Anteriora et Latina Lingua Exarata*, in: TOBLER, T., MOLNIER, A, FICK, J.G. (ed.): *Publications de la Société de l’Orient latin*, Genève: [s.e.], 1879, 38. BALDI 1935, *Enchiridion*, 346, 373.

<sup>47</sup> HIERONYMUS: *The Pilgrimage of the Holy Paula* (translated by STEWART, A. and annotated by WILSON, C.W.), in: *Palestine Pilgrims’ Text Society* 1 (1885), 14.

<sup>48</sup> WILKINSON, J.: *Jerusalem Pilgrims before the Crusades*, (newly translated with supporting documents and notes by WILKINSON, J.), Warminster: Aris & Phillips Ltd, 2002, 2–3.



The only mention of Capharnaum prior to the reign of Justinian (527 – 565 A.D.) is an Aramaic inscription on the floor of the Synagogue in Hammat Gader commemorating a donor named Yoseh son of Dositheus of Capharnaum.<sup>49</sup> This Synagogue is dated to the early decades of the sixth century A.D. shortly before the reign of Justinian. Based on this inscription it seems that there must have been an affluent Jewish population in Capharnaum at the turn of the fifth century A.D.<sup>50</sup>

Around the year 530 A.D. a guidebook called *De situ Terrae Sanctae* was written by a certain **Theodosius** about whom nothing is known apart from his name. Theodosius gives an accurate description of Capharnaum's location:

“De Tyberiada usque Magdale, ubi Marta nata est, milia II. De Magdale usque ad septem fontes, ubi dominus Christus baptizavit apostolos, milia II, ubi et saturavit populum de quinque panibus et duobus piscibus. De septem fontibus usque in Capernaum milia II. De Capharnaum usque Betsaida milia VI, ubi nati sunt apostolic Petrus, Andreas, Philippus et filii Zebedæi.”<sup>51</sup>

(“From Tiberias to Magdala, where Saint Mary was born, is 2 miles. From Magdala to the Seven Fountains, where the Lord Christ baptized the apostles, and where also He fed the people with five loaves and two fishes, is two miles. From the Seven Fountains to Capernaum is 2 miles. From Capernaum it is 6 miles to Bethsaida, where were born the apostles Peter, Andrew, Philips and the sons of Zebedee.”)<sup>52</sup>

His account unfortunately does not say anything about the famous edifices at this site, namely the synagogue and the octagonal church, nor does it comment on the political and demographical situation in Capharnaum.

The account of the so-called **Anonymus Placentinus** (the anonymous pilgrim from Piacenza) who visited Capharnaum around the year 570 A.D. is of much more help to us. He is the first pilgrim who recalls seeing a basilica in Capharnaum:

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. AVI-YONAH, M.: Hammat Gader in: H AVI-YONAH, M., STERN, E. (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, Vol. 2, Jerusalem: Carta, 1976, 472–473. LOFFREDA, S.: Capernaum, in: STERN, E., LEWINSON-GILBOA, A., AVIRAM, J. (ed.), *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, Vol. 1, Jerusalem: Carta, 1993, 292.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. BLENKINSOPP, J.: The literary evidence, in: TZAFERIS 1989, *Excavations*., 206.

<sup>51</sup> GEYER 1898, *Itinera*, 137–138. Cf. BALDI 1935, *Enchiridion*., 373.

<sup>52</sup> THEODOSIUS: *Theodosius on the Topography of the Holy Land*, (translated by BERNARD, J. H.), in: *Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society 2* (1893), 8. GEYER 1898, *Itinera*, 137–138. BALDI 1935, *Enchiridion*., 373.

“Item venimus in Capharnaum in domo beati Petri, quæ est modo basilica. Exinde transeuntes per vastra vel vicos aut civitates venimus ad duos fontes, hoc est Ior et Dan, quæ in una iunctæ sunt, et vocatur Iordanis.”<sup>53</sup>

(“We came to Capernaum, to the house of the blessed Peter, which is now a basilica. Thence passing through hamlets or villages or cities we came to the two sources, that is Jor and Dan, which join together and are called the Jordan.”)<sup>54</sup>

The anonymous pilgrim from Piacenza’s account is of the greatest importance since it no longer speaks of a *domus-ecclesia* but of a basilica standing on the spot of St. Peter’s house.<sup>55</sup> It can also serve as a confirmation that St. Peter was venerated in Capharnaum in the Byzantine period.<sup>56</sup>

### 3.2 The Early Arab period

Around the year 670 A.D. a French bishop named **Arculfus** conducted a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. When returning back to France, the ship he embarked in Rome was caught by a violent storm and driven totally out off course so that it instead of reaching the intended port in France he was cast on of the western points of Scotland. Subsequently, after facing “*many dangers*”, Arculfus stayed for some time as a guest of Adamnanus, the Abbot of Iona. Adamnanus committed himself to write down whatever Arculfus thought was worthy of mention of all that he had seen when visiting the Holy Places. Adamnanus in his work, *De Locis Sanctis*, wrote down the account of Arculfus’s pilgrimage based on the latter’s recollections. Although Arculfus never visited Capharnaum, he did gain a view of it from a nearby vantage point:

“Qui ab Hierierosolymis discendentes Capharnaum adire cupiunt, ut Arculfus refert, per Tiberiadem via vadunt recta, deinde secus lacum Kinnereth, quod est mare Tiberiadis et Mare Galileæ, locumque superius memoratæ benedictionis pervivum habent, a quo per marginem eiusdem supra commemorati stagni non longo circuitu Capharnaum perveniunt maritimam in finibus Zabulon et Neptalim. Quæ, ut Arculfus refert, qui eam de monte vicino prospexit, murum non habens angusto inter montem et stagnum coartata spatio per illam martimam oram longo tramite protenditur, montem

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<sup>53</sup> GEYER 1898, *Itinera*, 163. Cf. BALDI 1935, *Enchiridion.*, 373.

<sup>54</sup> WILKINSON 2002, *Jerusalem pilgrims*, 133.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1981, Capernaum - Jesus’, in: BS (1), 11. CORBO 1975, *Cafarnao I.*, 54, 71, 221. NORTH 1977, “Discoveries,” in: B (58) 426. CORBO 1992, “Capernaum,” in: ABD, 868.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. BLENKINSOPP, J.: The literary evidence, in: TZAFERIS 1989, *Excavations.*, 206.

ab aquiloni plaga, lacum vero ab australi habens ab occasu in ortum extensa dirigitur.”

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(“Those who, coming down from Jerusalem, wish to reach Capharnaum, proceed, as Arculfus relates, through Tiberias in a straight course, and thence along the Lake of Kinnereth, which is also the sea of Tiberias and the sea of Galilee; they pass the site of the above-mentioned Blessing, at a point where two ways meet, and proceeding along the margin of the above mentioned lake, at no great distance they come to Capharnaum, on the sea coast, upon the boarders of Zabulon and Neftalim. Arculfus, who observed it from a neighboring mountain, relates that it has no wall and is confined into a narrow space between the mountain and the lake, extending along the sea coast for a long distance; having the mountain on the north and the lake on the south, it stretches from west to east.”)<sup>58</sup>

The report by Arculfus raises several questions. One of them is why he did not visit Capharnaum when taking into account how close he was to it. Peter, a Burgundian monk serving as his guide, might have been the reason why they did not visit Capharnaum since he apparently was constantly hurrying Arculfus along, not allowing him to spend as much time at each place as he required.

Capharnaum was, from what Arculfus could see from the nearby viewpoint, unwallled at that time. This notice is of special importance, especially when we consider the next pilgrim report that has come down to us which is the one of St. Boniface’s nephew, **St. Willibaldus** who visited the Holy Land in 723 – 726 A.D. There are two extant accounts of Willibaldus’s pilgrimage. One is the *Itinerarium Sancti Willibaldi* whose anonymous author is supposed to have been one of the deacons or travel companions of the Bishop. It appears to have been written from memory, and it was not finished most likely until after the death of Willibaldus (785 A.D.) The other account bears the name *Hodoeporicon*, whose authoress, Hugeburc, was a nun of the Abbey of Heidenheim, and it is generally assumed that she was a relation of Willibaldus. She had, at the close of his life, carefully listened to his narratives of the journey to the Holy Land and she had, with his approval, taken them down on paper and incorporated them into her biography of the prelate. The *Hodoeporicon* is unanimously considered as being more accurate and thus of a

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<sup>57</sup> GEYER 1898, *Itinera*, 273–274. Cf. BALDI 1935, *Enchiridion.*, 374.

<sup>58</sup> ADAMNANUS: The pilgrimage of Arculfus in the Holy Land (translated to English and annotated by MACPHERSON, J.R.), in: *Palestine Pilgrims’ Text Society* 3 (1889), 44.

greater historical value than the *Itinerarium Sancti Willibaldi*. Hugelburc states in her *Hodoeporicon* that Willibaldus, after he had visited Tiberias and Magdala:

“veniebant [de Magdala] ad illum vicum Capharnaum, ubi Dominus principis filiam suscitabit, ubi domus et murus magnus. Et sic dixerunt illi homines quod Zebedeus cum filiis suis Iohanne et Iacobo ibi fuerint collocati. Et inde pergebant ad Bethsaidam.”<sup>59</sup>

(And from Magdala they came to that village, Capharnaum, where our Lord raised to life the ruler’s daughter; and there is a house and a thick wall. And the men there said that Zebedee, with his sons John and James had lodged therein. And thence they proceeded to Bethsaida.)<sup>60</sup>

One has to bear in mind that more than fifty years had elapsed between the pilgrimage and the time when Willibaldus was dictating his account. It is more than reasonable that there is a high chance of forgetting or even misplacing some details after the passage of more than half a decade. It seems that this must have been the case when he describes Capharnaum as a village with a strong wall within which the house of Zebedee and his sons is to be found. No other reports written prior to or after the report by Willibaldus mention a wall in Capharnaum. On the contrary, accounts such as the above-mentioned one by Arculfus explicitly state that Capharnaum “*murum non habens*”.<sup>61</sup>

Willibaldus’s allusion to a church built on the site of the house of St. Peter in Bethsaida instead of Capharnaum has led some scholars such as Harold Weiss to the opinion that Willibaldus must have been confusing Capharnaum with Bethsaida. According to Weiss, Willibald “*seems either not to have been familiar with what to look for or trusted too much his own faulty memory.*”<sup>62</sup> It is noticeable that there is an absence of references to the House of Peter in Capharnaum after the Arab conquest (638 A.D.) and that the only two extant literary sources from the eighth to the eleventh century A.D. mention a house of St. John being shown to the visitors coming to the site. **A guidebook attributed to Epiphanius Monachus** from the ninth – eleventh century containing a short notice on Capharnaum states that:

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<sup>59</sup> BALDI 1935, *Enchiridion.*, 374.

<sup>60</sup> WILLIBALDUS EICHSTADTENSIS: *The Hodoeporicon of Saint Willibald*, (Translated to English and Annotated by BROWNLOW, C.), in: *Palestine Pilgrims’ Text Society* 3 (1889), 16.

<sup>61</sup> GEYER 1898, *Itinera*, 273–274.

<sup>62</sup> WEISS, H.: Recent work at Capernaum, in: *Bible and Spade, a Quarterly Digest of Biblical Archaeology* 10/1 (1981), 22.

“Ex ea parte est oppidum Capernaum, ubi habitabat Christus et Deus noster. Ad hanc domus Theologi ibidem fuit, et centurionis miraculum; ibidemque laxarunt paralytium cum grabato a tecto.”<sup>63</sup>

(“Going on from there one comes to the place Capernaum, in which lived our Christ and God. There too is the house of the Theologian, and there also the miracle of the Centurion took place, and they also let down the paralytic from the roof on a stretcher.”)<sup>64</sup>

This guidebook inspired another work the *Sancti Helenae et Constantini Vitae* (tenth – eleventh century) where the account of Capharnaum is reproduced with certain embellishments.<sup>65</sup> The house of the Theologian is considered to be identical to the house of Zebedee mentioned by Willibaldus. However Willibaldus’s and Epiphanius’s mention of the house of Zebedee as standing in Capharnaum cannot be taken at face value since two other pilgrims, namely Aetheria (384 A.D.) and Theodosius (530 A.D.), locate the house of Zebedee in Tiberias<sup>66</sup> and in Bethsaida.<sup>67</sup> Only future discoveries can help us to solve this matter; and thus, it seems premature to draw any conclusions at present regarding the location of the house of Zebedee.

### 3.3 The Crusader period

The two centuries that have gone down in history as the Crusader period (1099 – 1291) witnessed a considerable increase of pilgrimages to the Holy Land. Around twenty of the extant accounts from the period of the Crusades, averaging roughly one a decade, mention Capharnaum. What seems to be characteristic for the pilgrim accounts from this period is that there is much confusion regarding the location of Capharnaum. It appears as if the location of Capharnaum shifted according to the dispositions or the needs of the pilgrims’ guides. Typical for most of these reports is that, rather than referring to observable buildings on the site, they refer to the literary occurrences of Capharnaum in the Gospels.

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<sup>63</sup> BALDI 1935, *Enchiridion.*, 375.

<sup>64</sup> WILKINSON 2002, *Jerusalem pilgrims*, 214.

<sup>65</sup> The anonymous author of this pre-crusader biography of Constantine and Helena situates the Last Supper in the house of the Theologian in Capharnaum. Another addition to the original account is that Helena ordered the building of churches in Capharnaum and in its vicinity. Cf. BALDI 1935, *Enchiridion.*, 375–376.

<sup>66</sup> WILKINSON, J.: *Egeria’s Travels to the Holy Land*, (Newly Translated with Supporting Documents and Notes), Jerusalem–Warminster: Ariel, Aris & Phillips, 1981, 194.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. BALDI 1935, *Enchiridion.*, 374.

**Saewulfus**, who was one of the first pilgrims to visit the Levant after the crusades had commenced, reports that about two miles distant from the lake of Gennesareth at the foot of the mountain, on which Jesus multiplied the five loaves and the two fishes, “*est ecclesia Sancti-Petri perpulchra quamvis deserta.*”<sup>68</sup> (*is a beautiful but deserted church dedicated to Saint Peter*). Although Saewulfus apparently is not too clear about the region’s topography, he does distinguish the location of this church from Capharnaum, which he mentions elsewhere in his account.<sup>69</sup>

Merely three or four years after Saewulfus, **Daniel the Russian Abbot**, visited the Holy Land in 1106 – 1108 A.D. He was shown a Capharnaum on the Mediterranean coast about which he reports that it “*was formerly a very important and populous town, but at present it is deserted.*”<sup>70</sup> Daniel was perhaps the first one to be shown a Capharnaum near the Mediterranean coast, but he was not the last one. **Benjamin of Tudela** (1163 A.D.), **William of Tyre** (1182 A.D.) and **Vinisauf** (1192 A.D.) were others who made the same mistake in locating Capharnaum on the Mediterranean coast. One gets the impression that the local guides eased their own labor and those of their visitors by moving certain pilgrim spots to more convenient locations. The fact that he refers to the Capharnaum situated on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea does not hinder him in mentioning the Capharnaum of the Gospels as being situated “a short distance from the village of Zebedee”.<sup>71</sup> He is, however, so confused in his topography that no certain conclusions can be based on it. In order to illustrate our point it suffice to note that he finds the house of Peter’s mother in law in Tiberias and claims that all the associated miracles took place there. Notwithstanding, his pilgrim account written down immediately after his return home is the first and certainly the best of its kind in Old Russian literature both from a literary and historical perspective.

It seems that Abbot Daniel’s work, judged from the number of transcriptions and synopses must have served as a practical guidebook for pilgrims visiting the Holy Land. In fact, a great number of the later accounts are drawing on pilgrim guidebooks which achieved wide dissemination. This unfortunately led to a somewhat tedious repetition of standard phrases to describe the different Holy Places. Hence also, the ease with which new and sometimes strange traditions were able to take root. The collections of these stock

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<sup>68</sup> BALDI 1935, *Enchiridion.*, 352.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. BALDI 1935, *Enchiridion.*, 352.

<sup>70</sup> DANIEL THE RUSSIAN ABBOT: Pilgrimage of the Russian Abbot Daniel (annotated by WILSON, C.W.), in: *Palestine Pilgrims’ Text Society* 14 (1897), 54.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

phrases are called *catenae*; and it seems obvious that one them must have been in operation in a work written by the archdeacon of Antioch, whose name was **Fetellus**<sup>72</sup>. Fetellus visited Palestine around the year 1147 A.D., and he states that “*Capharnaum in dextera parte maris sita est, civitas centurionis In Capharnaum multa alia signa fecit Jesus, docens in Synagoga.*”<sup>73</sup> (Capharnaum is situated on the right hand side of the sea, the village of the centurion. In Capharnaum Jesus did many other miracles, and preached in the synagogue.)

**Johannes Wirzburgensis** (John of Würzburg) paid the Holy Land a visit in 1165, and he was followed seven years later by his fellow citizen **Theodericus**. It seems that, both of them, when writing down their accounts, must have employed the same *catena* as Fetellus resulting in the usage of almost verbatim formulations: “*Capharnaum in dexta maris, civitas centurionis, in qua sanavit Jesus filium centurionis, de quo et ipse ait: Non inveni tantam fidem in Israel. In Capharnaum multa signa fecit Jesus, docens in Synagoga.*”<sup>74</sup> Johannes adds to this traditional account an allegorical interpretation of the name Capharnaum, partly based on St. Hieronymus’s commentary on Mt 11, 24,<sup>75</sup> as *villa pulcherrima* (most beautiful town) or *filia pulchritudinis* (daughter of beauty).<sup>76</sup>

Most of the later pilgrim reports fail to provide any new information. John Phocas, who visited the vicinity of Capharnaum in 1177 A.D., does not furnish us with any information on the contemporary state of Capharnaum, as he does when referring to Nazareth and Cana.<sup>77</sup> What, however, might be of some significance is the omission of Capharnaum by an **anonymous pilgrim from the end of twelfth century** A.D. from his list of the Holy Places “which men worship beyond all others with peculiar reverence.”<sup>78</sup> It seems that Capharnaum was not considered worth visiting at the time when it was nearing the end of its days.

The account of the **Dominican Burchardus de Monte Sion** (Burchard of Mount Zion), the last pilgrim from the crusader period mentioning Capharnaum, may serve as an

<sup>72</sup> A common variant of his name, employed for instance by Baldi in his *Enchiridion Locorum Sanctorum*, is Fretellus. Cf. BALDI 444.

<sup>73</sup> BALDI 1935, *Enchiridion.*, 352. Cf. FETELLUS: Description of the Holy Land (translated and annotated by MACPHERSON, J. R.), in: *Palestine Pilgrims’ Text Society* 5 (1892), 5 (London 1892) 28.

<sup>74</sup> Johannes Wirzburgensis in: BALDI 1935, *Enchiridion.*, 377. For Theodericus’s slightly different account see *ibidem*.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. HIERONYMUS: *Commentarium in Evangelium Matthæi*, ch.12 par. 23–24, in: MIGNE, J.P.: *Patrologia Latina* vol. 26, col. 015–218D, Paris: [s.e.] 1884, 77.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. BLENKINSOPP, J.: The literary evidence, in: TZAFERIS 1989, *Excavations.*, 209.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. BALDI 1935, *Enchiridion.*, 355–356.

<sup>78</sup> ANONYMOUS PILGRIM: Anonymous Pilgrim V/2 (translated by STEWART, A.), in: *Palestine Pilgrims’ Text Society* 6 (1897), 32–32.

explanation why the anonymous pilgrim omits Capharnaum. Burchardus, a native German, of whom is said that he passed ten years at the monastery of Mount Zion in Jerusalem and who spent much time traveling all over the Holy Land, visited Capharnaum in 1283 A.D. Burchardus is the first to list Capharnaum among the cities of the Decapolis, an error perpetuated by later pilgrims such as Marino Sanuto (fourteenth century A.D.) and Johannes Poloner (1422 A.D.).<sup>79</sup> Much more commendable is that he rendered us the following description of Capharnaum in his work *Descriptio Terrae Sanctae*:

“Capharnaum civitas, quondam gloriosa, sed nunc est valde vilis, vix habens septem domos pauperum piscatorum. Et est vere in ea impletum illud verbum Domini Iesu: ‘Et tu, Capharnaum, si in celum ascenderis, usque ad infernum mergeris.’<sup>80</sup> De isto loco [Tabula] ad duas leucas Iorani fluvius mare Galilee ingreditur, in cuius littore ulteriori videntur adhuc civitatis Corrozaym supra mare Galilee.”<sup>81</sup> (“Capernaum, once a noble city, but now is an exceeding mean one, scarce containing seven houses of poor fishermen. Truly therein is the word of the Lord Jesus fulfilled, ‘and thou Capernaum, which are exalted unto heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell.’ Two leagues from that place [The Table of the Lord] the river Jordan enters the Sea of Galilee, on the further shore of which may still be seen the ruins of the city of Chorazin, on the Sea of Galilee.”)<sup>82</sup>

Finally, we have in our hands an account providing us with some information on the condition of the place; but the picture it brings us is a deplorable one.

### **3.4 From the Mamluk period to the Ottoman period**

The travel accounts that have come down to us from the fourteenth century A.D. and onwards confirm the miserable state of Capharnaum as depicted by Burchardus. The reports coming from the pen of Jewish authors and travelers, apart from describing the ruins of Capharnaum, seem to focus on the name of Capharnaum. Instead of Kefar Nahum, which means the village of Nahum some medieval Jewish sources tend to call it Tanhum. The tradition of the tomb of Nahum, one of the so-called “minor” prophets, was already well established at two sites in Kurdistan, namely at Al-Qosh and ‘Ain-Sifna. On account of this, medieval

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<sup>79</sup> Cf. BURCHARDUS DE MONTE SION: *A Description of the Holy Land* (Translated by STEWART, A. and annotated by CONDER, C.R.), in: *Palestine Pilgrims’ Text Society* 12 (1897), 6.

<sup>80</sup> Mt 11,23; Lk 10,15.

<sup>81</sup> BALDI 1935, *Enchiridion.*, 378.

<sup>82</sup> BURCHARDUS DE MONTE SION 1897, “A Description.,” in: *PPTS* (12), 29.



Jewry strived to introduce a new tradition at this site by associating it with the tomb of Rabbi Tanhum or Rabbi Tanhuma who were other venerated sages in rabbinical literature and whose names are similar to that of Nahum. The first to do so was **Menachem ben Perez Ha-Chevroni** (Menachem son of Perez from Hebron) a Jewish traveler who reports “that about eighteen kilometers from Tiberias the grave of Rabbi Tanhuma may be found in a town called Tanhum. In this town there is a courtyard with many big graves, built of large hollow stones about five feet long. In each stone lay buried one of the Zadikim (righteous) disciples of the sages but their names were unknown.”<sup>83</sup>

**Eshthorti Ben-Moshe Ha-Parchi**, was a renowned geographer and physician, originally from Southern France, who had settled down in Beth-Shean. In the year 1322 A.D. he completed his work “*Kaphtor Va-Perach*” containing one of the earliest Hebrew exploration surveys of the Holy Land. In his book he states that Kefar Nahum which is also called Kefar Tanhum “is situated about a half-hour to the east of [the northern shore of] Gennesareth”.<sup>84</sup> Henceforward there is no doubt that Tanhum is identical to Capharnaum. The old tradition of Capharnaum as the place of the prophet Nahum’s grave did not cease immediately with the introduction of the new tradition and coexisted side by side with the new one over some centuries before being superseded by it. **Rabbi Isaac Chelo** from Arragon, who visited the site in 1333 A.D., sticks to the old tradition when he relates that: “D’Arbel on arrive à Kefar Nachum, qui est le Kefar Nachum, cité dans les écrits de nos sages (dont la mémoire soit en bénédiction!). C’est un village en ruine, où il y a un ancien tombeau qu’on dit être celui de Nachum le Virus. Autrefois il y avait dans ce village beaucoup de Minim, tous les grands sorciers, comme on sait, de l’histoire de Hanina, neveu de Rabbi Iehosua.”<sup>85</sup>

The report of the Italian **Giacomo (Jacobo) da Verona** is different from all the other contemporary reports, and its credibility is highly doubtful. Giacomo da Verona conducted his pilgrimage in 1335 A.D., and his account on Capharnaum is surprising, to say the least, since he speaks of Capharnaum as “nunc est casale seu villa pulchra et magna”<sup>86</sup>, (*now a large and beautiful village without a defence wall*). One has to question whether he actually visited it when taking into consideration the prevalent coeval

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<sup>83</sup> SAPIR - NE’EMAN 1967, *Capernaum*, 30.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>85</sup> CARMOLY, E.: *Itinéraires de la Terre Sainte des XIIIe, XIVe, XVIe et XVIIe Siècle* (translated from Hebrew to French), Brussel: Vandale, 1847, 259, 385, 448.

<sup>86</sup> BALDI 1935, *Enchiridion.*, 379. Cf. CORBO 1975, *Cafarnaon I*, 21, 214. NORTH 1977, “Discoveries.,” in: B (58) 425.

references to Capharnaum as a village in ruins. The reason discouraging him from visiting Capharnaum and ascertaining its real condition could have been the local Saracens, described by himself as inhospitable and not well disposed to Christians. Another Italian, **Niccolò da Poggibonsi**, provides us with a more credible account from his visit in 1345 A.D. He recalls that he found it “*quasi tutta disfatta, e per terra abatutta*”<sup>87</sup>, (*completely undone and knocked down to the ground*).<sup>88</sup>

In the middle of the fourteenth century the German pastor **Ludolph von Suchem** mentions Capharnaum together with Cana, Bethsaida and Nain as “now deserted, or all but deserted, and they do not look as if they had ever been of much account.”<sup>89</sup> The “*bad people*” of the region already referred to by Jacobo de Verona keep on cropping up in medieval pilgrim accounts such as in the one by **Fransesco Suriano** who although stating that “*tuta è ruinata*” goes on saying, somewhat inconsistently, that it is “inabitata, per la mala gente de quel paese.”<sup>90</sup> By *bad people* are meant the Muslims who often were the reason why pilgrims who originally had included Capharnaum in their itineraries were forced to leave it out. This was the case of Felix Fabri and his party in 1480 A.D. who, when discussing whether to visit Capharnaum and other Holy Places in that region, were dissuaded from doing so due to the hostility of the Muslims living there.<sup>91</sup> The aforementioned tradition of venerating the grave of Rabbi Tanchum in Capharnaum is attested by several Jewish sources that have come down to us from the sixteenth century. A book called “**Jichus Ha-Tsadikim**” (Sépulchres des Justes), which was completed in 1523 A.D. but published only in 1561 A.D., states that: “A Tanchum sont les tombeaux de Nachum le Prophète et de Rabbi Tanchuma.”<sup>92</sup> It seems that the older and newer tradition had merged together at this time. “**Jichus Ha-Abot**” (“Tombeaux des Patriarches”), which was published in 1537 A.D., is another work corroborating the same information: “Tanchum. Là est enseveli Rabbi Tanchum.”<sup>93</sup>

According to **Bonifacius de Stephanis**, it was difficult to find Capharnaum in the mid-sixteenth century since the ruins were covered by earth and only could be identified by

<sup>87</sup> BALDI 1935, *Enchiridion.*, 380.

<sup>88</sup> BLENKINSOPP, J., “The literary evidence,” in: TZAFERIS 1989, *Excavations.*, 210.

<sup>89</sup> LUDOLPH VON SUCHEM: Description of the Holy Land (Translated by STEWART, A.), in: *Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society* 12.

<sup>90</sup> BALDI 1935, *Enchiridion.*, 380.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. BLENKINSOPP, J.: The literary evidence, in: TZAFERIS 1989, *Excavations*, 210.

<sup>92</sup> CARMOLY 1847, *Itinéraires.*, 259, 385, 448. Cf. SAPIR - NE'EMAN 1967, *Capernaum*, 32; LAUGHLIN, J. C. H., “The identification of the site,” in: TZAFERIS 1989, *Excavations.*, 197.

<sup>93</sup> CARMOLY 1847, *Itinéraires.*, 259, 385, 448. Cf. SAPIR - NE'EMAN 1967, *Capernaum*, 32.

the two palm trees growing there. The identification of Capharnaum with Khan Mineyeh is first documented in the report by **Fransiscus Quaresmus** from 1626 A.D., and it gained a large number of advocates over the ensuing centuries. The last report worth mentioning is that of **Michel Nau**. He was, in 1666 A.D., able to find the real Capharnaum when seeking advice from the local Bedouins as he recalls in his well-written account in which he renders us a detailed and authentic description of the state in which Capharnaum was in the mid-seventeenth century:

“Nous marchions toûjours dans les desir de découvrir où pouvoit estre Capharnaum, lorsqu’enfin arrivant sur le bord de la mer de Galilée, dans un Khan nommé Elmenié, nous trouvâmes des Arabes qui nous donnerent satisfaction, et qui nous firent connoître que nous estions descendus trop bas, et que nous l’avions laissé à main gauche à trois grands quarts de lieuë. La grosse pluye qui tomboit, ne nous empescha pas d’y aller; nous passâmes sur un chemin assez longe, taillé dans le roc à force de pics, et puis dans des terres fortes et grasses. Nous eûmes peine à reconnaître la place de cette malheureuse ville, tant elle est ruinée. Tout y est rez pied, rez terre. On y soit plusieurs morceaux des colomnes, renversées, et des frises, et des chapiteaux bien travaillez. Le plan d’une Eglise qui y estoit, est encore fort visible. Le tout en est bien marqué, et la base de colomnes qui formoient la nef, qui a ses aîles, de part et d’autre, y parsoit bien. Pour ce qui est du reste, vous n’y voyez que des pierres, à la reserve d’une voute et une espece de je ne sçay quel bastiment quarré, qui sont encore assez entiere.

Capharnaum se nomme aujourd’huy Telhoum<sup>94</sup>, il n’est pas situé à l’endroit où le Jourdain commence à former la mere de Galilée, comme le mettent toutes les cartes que j’ay veuës, il est pus bas d’une bonne lieuë vers L’Occident.”<sup>95</sup>

Michel Nau is the first author who mentions Capharnaum by its Arabic toponym Telhoum<sup>96</sup> or Tel Hum which leading scholars believe has been corrupted from Tanhum.<sup>97</sup> Tel Hum, meaning *the mound of Hum* (although it obviously is not a mound), is the

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<sup>94</sup> Id est Tell Hum. Hoc nomen videtur corruptum esse ex Tanhum; etenim Kefar Tanhum vel Tanhum in itinerariis Iudaeorum legitur pro Kephrah Nahum. Cf. CARMOLY 1847, *Itinéraires.*, 259, 260, 385, 478. Fotnote from Baldi p. 382.

<sup>95</sup> NAU, M.: *Voyage Nouveau de la Terre-Sainte*, Paris: André Pralard, 1679, 570–572.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering.*, 15.

<sup>97</sup> “Id est Tell Hûm. Hoc nomen videtur corruptum esse ex Tanhum; etenim Kefar Nahum vel Tanhum in itinerariis Iudaeorum legitur pro Kephrah Nahum.” BALDI 1935, *Enchiridion.*, footnote on page 382; Cf. BLENKINSOPP, J., “The literary evidence,” in: TZAFERIS 1989, *Excavations.*, 210; LAUGHLIN, J. C. H., “The identification of the site,” in: TZAFERIS 1989, *Excavations.*, 197; SAPIR - NE’EMAN 1967, *Capernaum*, 29; LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering.*, 15; SKOVGAARD - PETERSEN, C.: *Landet hvor kilderne sprang*, Kjøbenhavn: O. Lohse, 1923, 202.

modern Arabic name for the site once known as Capharnaum. The Hebrew name employed for this site at present is Kefar Nahum.

## 4 THE HISTORY OF CAPHARNAUM

### 4.1 From the Early Bronze Age to the Early Hellenistic period

Capharnaum is not mentioned at all in the Old Testament nor in any other literary sources prior to the first century A.D. The oldest literary evidence of ancient Capharnaum that has come down to us are the Gospels and the works of Josephus Flavius, namely the Jewish War and his Vita. Thus little was known about the earliest history of Capharnaum before the Franciscan excavations conducted by Virgilio Corbo and Stanislao Loffreda in nineteen seasons from 1968 to 1986. These excavations have shed some light on the early history of Capharnaum pushing back the settlement's origins by almost three thousand years. Sporadic sherds, so-called band-slip ware dating back to the early third millennium B.C., show that this site was subject to occasional visits by humans in the Early Bronze Age at a time when urban life developed in the Holy Land.<sup>98</sup>

Moreover, Palaeolithic flints found at this locality date back several thousand years B.C.<sup>99</sup> Some remnants in the form of massive basalt walls, pavements and a considerable amount of pottery from the early second millennium B.C. were found, indicating some form of occupation of this site in the Middle and Late Bronze Age.<sup>100</sup>

It seems that the site was uninhabited during the long Israelite period (1200 – 587 B.C.) since no occupational evidence has been found from this period. According to Jonathan L. Reed, “the absence of any occupation during the periods explains Capharnaum's omission in the Hebrew Bible and invalidates attempts to connect the site's name with the seventh century prophet Nahum.”<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Dr. Vassilios Tzaferis who was in charge of the excavations at the Greek Orthodox property in Capharnaum reports a find of traces of an Early Bronze Age habitation in one of the rooms excavated in Area A, stratum TZAFERIS, V.: Capernaum: Excavations in the Area of the Greek Orthodox Church, in: STERN, E., LEWINSON-GILBOA, A., AVIRAM, J. (ed.): *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, Vol. 1, Jerusalem: Carta, 1993, 295. The remains of an Early Bronze Age wall (third millennium B.C.) were also found under a first century floor of a building adjacent to a Roman-style bathhouse. Cf. LAUGHLIN, C.H.: Capernaum from Jesus' Time and After, in: *Biblical Archaeology Review* 19/5 (1993), 57.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering.*, 27.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA, S.: Capernaum, in: MEYERS, E. M. (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archeology in the Near East*, Vol. 1, New York–Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, 417. CORBO 1992, “Capernaum,” in: ABD, 867–868.

<sup>101</sup> REED 2002, *Archaeology*, 145.

Several remains from the Persian Period bear witness that the site was resettled in the fifth century B.C. The excavators have uncovered what they believe is the nucleus of this settlement<sup>102</sup> from which Capharnaum expanded in all directions in the ensuing centuries. Old houses were either completely replaced by new ones or just reinforced and repaved with new stone slabs, providing the archaeologists with a good sequence of levels. The fifth century B.C. marks the beginning of a long and continuous period of occupation during which Capharnaum grew from being just a small settlement to becoming a full-fledged village in the Late Roman and Byzantine periods. Note that the dating of the early settlements is based on the results of the most recent excavations in Capharnaum conducted from 1983 to 1985<sup>103</sup> and thus not in accordance with reports based on the result of excavations being conducted before the year 1983. Earlier reports usually place the foundation of the settlement to the second century B.C.,<sup>104</sup> which in the light of the newest archaeological finds, is considered as being the period when Capharnaum emerged as a village and experienced an increase in its material culture.<sup>105</sup>

#### 4.2 From the Late Hellenistic period to the Late Byzantine period

Capharnaum's growth in the second century B.C. corresponds to the increased establishment of settlements in this region in connection with the Maccabean<sup>106</sup> colonization of Galilee. Under the reign of Aristobulus I (104 – 103 B.C.) and his successor on the throne, Alexander Jannaeus (103 – 76 B.C.), many Jewish settlements were founded not only all over Galilee but also in the east of Jordan where Jewish enclaves sprung up<sup>107</sup> following the Hasmonean conquest of the Eastern Decapolis cities such as Hippos and Gadara. Some of the small sites, probably pagan, were abandoned in the

<sup>102</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering*, 27.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA, S.: Kefar Nahum–Excavations of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, in: *Excavations and Surveys in Israel* 4 (1985), 58.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1982, *A visit to*, 18.

<sup>105</sup> Imported vessels from the Hellenistic period found on the Franciscan side, indicating that Capharnaum traded with the outside world, seem to support that the village's economical situation had improved. Cf. LOFFREDA 1985, "Kefar," in: *ESI* (4), 59.

<sup>106</sup> Hasmoneans and Maccabees are two terms used for the same family. The term Hasmonean is derived from Mattathias's great-grandfather whose name is mentioned by Josephus Flavius in the Jewish Antiquities XII, 6, 1. Cf. KROLL 2002, *Po stopách*, 56. 1 Mc 2, 1–4. Maccabees are derived from the attribute of Judas, one of Mattathias's five sons and his successor in command of the rebellion, who was called "the Maccabee" probably derived from the word "Maccaba" meaning "the hammer". Cf. HORSLEY, R. A.: *Galilee–History, Politics, People*, Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1995, 35. Both these terms are employed by historians usually calling the family Maccabeans from the time of Judas until the rule of Simeon. From Simeon's rule, which is considered as the beginning of the Hasmonean Dynasty (1 Mc 14, 41), the term Hasmonean is most commonly employed and that's how these two terms will be employed in this paper. Cf. KROLL 2002, *Po stopách*, 56–57.

<sup>107</sup> The most notable settlements were Gamla and Horvat Kanaf.

Hellenistic period; and others, in which Hasmonean coins were found, were settled continuously and became Jewish villages.<sup>108</sup> This is similar to the case of Capharnaum where a considerable number of Jannaean coins were found.<sup>109</sup> Capharnaum became, together with the other villages, situated at the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee, a part of a bridge of Jewish settlements stretching itself from Upper and Lower Galilee across the Jordan River into the Golan Heights, surrounded on all sides by Gentile settlements and cities.

The village continued to grow considerably, and new quarters were added in the following centuries. According to Loffreda, Capharnaum did not undergo a drastic destruction neither during the First Jewish Revolt (66 – 73 A.D.) nor during the Second Revolt (132 – 135 A.D.)<sup>110</sup> since no evidence of such destruction has been found.<sup>111</sup> Both the stratigraphy<sup>112</sup> and the coins, which aren't showing any break during this period, seem to support this theory. That Capharnaum was an insignificant village lacking any form of natural defense and most likely fully unfortified<sup>113</sup>, not only in the first and second century, but throughout all the phases of its existence, is put forth as a possible explanation for its absence in the war against the Romans. “The absence of economical and social causes for unrest, lack of local leadership and military tradition as well as the presence of the Roman legionaries”<sup>114</sup> are other possible factors that may have contributed. That they did not take

<sup>108</sup> Cf. AVIAM 1993, “Galilee,” 453.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. CORBO 1975, *Cafarnao I.*, 215.

<sup>110</sup> The Second Jewish Revolt is also known as the Bar Kokhba revolt named after its leader.

<sup>111</sup> LOFFREDA 1982, *A visit to.*, 18. **However in Cafarnao V the same author claims that the settlement probably suffered a violent destruction during the first Jewish war based on large lump of raw glass found in room 669 in insula 9:** “Va sottolineata la presenza di un blocco di vetro no soffiato. Probabilmente Cafarnao subì una violenta distruzione durante la prima guerra giudaica.” LOFFREDA, S.: *Cafarnao V–Documentazione fotografica degli scavi (1968–2003)*, (=Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Collectio Maior 44), Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 2005, 21.

<sup>112</sup> Since Stratigraphy is a term which will be frequently used in this paper and is a specific archaeological term, an explanation of this word might be in order. “Stratigraphy is the branch of archaeology which treats of formation, composition, sequence and correlation of stratified materials as parts of the archaeological record. Stray finds aside, virtually every archaeological context is stratified. Even a one-period site may have foundation trenches sealed under, and therefore earlier than, multilaminated floor and street deposits; those deposits may, in turn, lie under a wall and roof collapse, with water- and/or windborne deposits; those deposits accumulating in low-lying parts of the site, other parts being deflated, eroded, pitted or bulldozed out. Casual rubbish accumulation, also stratified over the centuries, is a certainty, and the bioturbation (disturbance by plants and/or animals) of shallow deposits is virtually assured. Each of these and other processes has made an important contribution to the archaeological record the excavator encounters. To the degree that one or all are ignored, the resulting archaeological interpretation is compromised.” HOLLADAY, J.S.: *Stratigraphy and Stratum*, in: MEYERS, E. M. (ed.): *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, Vol. 5, New York - Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, 82.

<sup>113</sup> At the time of the First Jewish Revolt, Josephus Flavius fortified several settlements in Galilee among which were for instance Jotapata, Beersheba, Meroth, Gischala and Tarichae (Magdala). Cf. War II, 572–576; Life 187–188.

<sup>114</sup> SAPIR - NE'EMAN 1967, *Capernaum*, 13.

an active part in the revolts does not mean they were not sympathizing with the Jewish rebels since they themselves were Jews. Josephus Flavius relates in his *Life* (Vita) how he injured his wrist during a cavalry engagement near Julias (Bethsaida?) when his horse fell into a quagmire causing him to fall of its back and how he was taken to a village called *Κεφαρνωκόν*<sup>115</sup> where he received medical treatment. The Jewish commander in chief Josephus Flavius would hardly have been taken to Capharnaum in order to receive medical aid if the village's inhabitants were not well-disposed towards the rebels.

An influx of Jews from Judea who migrated to Galilee following the Roman suppression of both the First and the Second Revolt<sup>116</sup> seems to have been an important factor in Capharnaum's expansion and economic growth.<sup>117</sup> According to Loffreda there is no clear evidence up to now (1993) that during the subsequent periods, namely the Late Roman and the Byzantine period, Capharnaum "underwent a wholesale and drastic destruction due to wars or physical calamities."<sup>118</sup> Reports from the excavations at the Greek-Orthodox side, however, state that traces of a mid-fourth century A.D. earthquake have been found in form of rooms filled with rocks probably fallen from the hillside above and with stones from collapsed house-walls. It seems that the earthquake triggered a rockslide from the hill situated above the village causing rocks to tumble down to the settlement. Large parts of the settlement were leveled with the ground, and it was apparently temporarily abandoned<sup>119</sup> before being resettled and rebuilt shortly after. New buildings were erected, and the old buildings that survived the catastrophe were reorganized and refurbished. The rebuilt settlement was the Capharnaum of the Byzantine period, the term Byzantine here used as a chronological, not necessarily an archaeological marker.<sup>120</sup>

Constantine the Great died in 337 A.D. and the Roman Empire was divided between his three sons Constantine II, Constantius II and Constans. Constantius, who received the Eastern Part of the Empire as his inheritance, appointed his cousin Gallus as Caesar. Constantine's death was followed by a struggle for control of the empire leading to

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<sup>115</sup> No village of this name is known to have existed in the vicinity of the mouth of Jordan, thus everything points to the fact that Josephus must have meant Capharnaum. Cf. KOPP 1963, *The Holy Places.*, 173.

<sup>116</sup> "The archaeological data suggest that this area was chosen because of an earlier well-established Jewish presence, at least in Upper Galilee". FREYNE, S.V.: *Galilee in the Hellenistic through Byzantine Periods*, in: MEYERS, E. M. (ed.): *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, Vol. 2, New York–Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, 371.

<sup>117</sup> Cf. LAUGHLIN 1993, "Capernaum.," in: BAR (5), 59.

<sup>118</sup> LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering.*, 27–28.

<sup>119</sup> Cf. LAUGHLIN 1993, "Capernaum.," in: BAR (5), 59.

<sup>120</sup> 324 A.D. is the year the emperor Constantine the Great reunited the Roman Empire under a Christian Ruler marks the beginning of the Byzantine period.

several civil wars and uprisings. The Roman Empire's general instability at this point seems to have encouraged the Jews in Galilee to revolt under the reign of Gallus in 354 A.D. Gallus, although inept at ruling, was very prompt and effective in quelling the rebellion within only a year. Several Jewish towns and villages, among them Beth Shearim, Sepphoris, Tiberias and Lydda, were destroyed in the suppression of the revolt. Capharnaum, however, was yet again unaffected by another revolt. Capharnaum escaped Gallus's wrath, perhaps because of its associations with the life of Jesus and Peter. This revolt went down in history as the Gallus revolt named after its suppressor. The history was repeating itself in more ways than one. Not only did not Capharnaum suffer any damage, but the Byzantine village's growth seems to have been fueled by an influx of Jews from towns that were destroyed during the revolt. Another significant factor to its expansion, although probably not as important as the post-revolt influx, was that Capharnaum, once the Empire became Christian, grew into a major tourist attraction. This is known not only from the pilgrim reports themselves but also from the numismatic finds showing that an overwhelming majority of the coins originate from the fourth century.<sup>121</sup> Tourism must have contributed to the local economy, at least to some extent, since services such as accommodation and board most likely were required.

There seems to be a broad consensus among scholars that Jews and Jewish Christians were living together in Capharnaum side by side for almost six centuries. It preserved its predominantly Jewish character until at least the fourth century A.D., while it can be assumed that, during the late fifth and sixth century A.D., it was subject to a massive influx of Christians in accordance with the contemporaneous demographic changes in Palestine in general, and in Galilee in particular. This is fully supported by the archaeological finds in the form of imported bowls with stamped crosses which were found in nearly all of the houses from this period in all the sectors of the village that were excavated.<sup>122</sup> Loffreda states there is no reasonable doubt that the Byzantine octagonal church was built by Gentile-Christians in the second half of the fifth century A.D. and that the Gentile-Christians at some time supplanted the Jewish-Christians in Capharnaum, at

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<sup>121</sup> Cf. LAUGHLIN 1993, "Capernaum," in: BAR (5), 54–61. SPIJKERMAN, A.: *Cafarnaon III. Catalogo delle Monete della Città*, (=Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Collectio Maior 19), Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1975, 103–118.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering*, 31.



least to some extent.<sup>123</sup> Life continued undisturbed in Capharnaum almost until the end of the Byzantine period, that of its maximal expansion and prosperity.<sup>124</sup>

The destructive Persian invasion in 614 A.D. and the subsequent fifteen years of occupation put an end to its peaceful existence. The Persian army, which was led by the Sassanid<sup>125</sup> King Chosroes II, advanced from Damascus through the Golan Heights to Tiberias. As a consequence, Capharnaum, located on the main invasion route, was probably one of the first sites to be affected. “It was probably at this time the Jewish population of Capernaum, under the protection of the Persian troops, demolished the church and other Christian places. These buildings were never rebuilt and the small Judeo-Christian community may have also been extirpated during the course of devastation.”<sup>126</sup> The Persian invasion was viewed by the Jews as a welcome occasion to put an end to nearly three hundred years of Byzantine oppression. For the orthodox Jews this was an opportunity to cut off the Christians who had always been regarded as heretics, hence worthy of condemnation.<sup>127</sup> The only reason why they had put up with them until the seventh century was due to Christian rule.

However, in 628 A.D. the time was ready for the Christians to strike back. The Byzantine emperor Heraclius I led his army in the Byzantine re-conquest of Palestine in the spring of 628 A.D. choosing the same invasion route as the Persians fifteen years before him. Naturally Capharnaum was once again one of the first sites affected. Heraclius and his army sought revenge for the devastation of Christian communities and sites. It seems probable that it was his men who razed the synagogue in Capharnaum as well as the rest of the village and expelled or even exterminated the Jewish inhabitants.<sup>128</sup> The two

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<sup>123</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering.*, 31. “This bold project (the octagonal church) is to be attributed to the Gentile-Christians who by that time were strong enough to contrast the supremacy of the old Jewish-Christian community of Capharnaum. It is well known that the relations between these two branches of Christianity were far from smooth; very often the Jewish Christians met strong opposition both from the Orthodox Jews and from Gentile-Christians. Yet, the Gentile-Christians were not afraid of preserving the sacrality of several Jewish-Christian shrines.” LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering.*, 66.

<sup>124</sup> “Capharnaum’s apogee was clearly in the Byzantine period. Supported mainly by a strong fishing and agricultural base, the economy was augmented by tourism and trade.” LAUGHLIN 1993, “Capernaum,” in: BAR (5), 61. Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, “Capernaum,” in: OEANE, 417–418.

<sup>125</sup> The Sassanid dynasty ruled over Persia from the third to the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

<sup>126</sup> TZAFERIS, V.: New Archaeological Evidence on Ancient Capernaum, in: *Biblical Archaeologist* 46 (1983), 204. Cf. CORBO, V. C., LOFFREDA, S., BUSHHELL, G.: *New Memoirs of Saint Peter by the Sea of Galilee. Excavations Conducted by the Custody of the Holy Land* 1968, Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1969, 66.

<sup>127</sup> “To this end there was Jewish cooperation with the Persians: contemporaneous literary sources mention a treaty of friendship and cooperation between the Jews and the Persians. Whether true or not, the Jews surely participated in the destruction of many Christian churches and sites, particularly those in areas with large Jewish communities, such as in Galilee.” TZAFERIS 1989, *Excavations.*, 215.

<sup>128</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 216.

most renowned buildings in Capharnaum, the octagonal church and the synagogue, so highly praised and admired by pilgrims in the centuries prior to the Persian conquest thus came to a violent end within a period of fifteen years.

Following the Byzantine re-conquest, the Roman Byzantine Capharnaum was abandoned simultaneously with the construction of a new settlement spreading north and east of the synagogue.<sup>129</sup> The town built during the 7 - 8 years long period of Byzantine recovery was of a totally different plan and character than its predecessor. It seems, based on the density of the buildings, that the new settlement was several times larger both in size and population.<sup>130</sup> It stood in larger part on virgin soil and in smaller part over earlier remains. That the synagogue was abandoned without being re-used or replaced indicates that the new population was no longer Jewish and not needing a synagogue.

### 4.3 The Early Arab Period and the Crusader period

The Arab conquest of the Holy Land in 636 A.D. and their victory over the Byzantine army in the battles of Yarmuk and Sennabra marks the beginning of what is usually referred to as the Arab period. Prior to the excavations in the Greek-Orthodox area, the Franciscan archaeologists believed, based on the complete break of coins and pottery after about 700 A.D., that Capharnaum did not withstand the Arab conquest and was slowly abandoned.<sup>131</sup>

The first four seasons of excavations in the area of Capharnaum belonging to the Greek Orthodox Church as well as the more recent excavations carried out on the Franciscan side, however, have refuted the earlier theories.<sup>132</sup> The results show that Capharnaum continued to exist for another four hundred years on the same general lines fixed at the close of the Byzantine period<sup>133</sup> when the settlement's center shifted eastward as above-mentioned. According to the stratigraphy neither the general plan of the city nor the plans of the

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<sup>129</sup> Cf. TZAFERIS 1989, *Excavations.*, 214–217. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering.*, 28, 31. REED 2002, *Archaeology.*, 151.

<sup>130</sup> “All the evidence points to a settlement spreading over the entire area presently owned by the Greek Orthodox Church—some 25,000 m<sup>2</sup>, as well as over a good portion of the area north of the synagogue, where the Franciscans are continuing their archaeological work.” TZAFERIS, V. et al.: *Excavations at Capernaum 1978–1982*, Vol. 1, Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1989 216.

<sup>131</sup> Cf. CORBO 1975, *Capernaum I.*, 220. LOFFREDA 1982, *A visit to.*, 19.

<sup>132</sup> Cf. TZAFERIS 1989, *Excavations.*, 214–221. LOFFREDA 1985, “Kefar,” in: ESI (4), 59. WEISS 1981, “Recent,” in: BS (1), 24–25. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering.*, 28. TZAFERIS, V., PELEG, M.: Kefar Nahum 1984, in: *Excavations and Surveys in Israel* 3 (1984), 64.

<sup>133</sup> Cf. TZAFERIS 1989, *Excavations.*, 218.

dwellings were subject to any extreme changes at the transition between the Byzantine and Early Arab period.<sup>134</sup>

As regards the Christians and their possible presence in the Early Arab settlement, it is difficult at this time to draw any conclusions. The literary sources from the ninth century mention a *domus Theologi*<sup>135</sup> shown to the visitors in Capharnaum at that time, which is by some modern scholars interpreted as a church dedicated to St. John the Evangelist.<sup>136</sup> The remains of this church have yet to be discovered. The only archaeological finds, used by Vassilios Tzaferis as an argument for the continued presence of Christians in the Capharnaum of the Early Arab period, are numerous bowls and bowl-fragments of various types generally referred to as “Late Roman Ware”. The bowl bases are decorated with impressed depictions and motifs, some which are of a clearly Christian character such as the cross and the “Good Shepherd”. These bowls date back to the Byzantine period, around sixth century A.D.;<sup>137</sup> but the use of this type of bowls with stamped Christian symbols continues, according to V. Tzaferis, in the Early Arab period.<sup>138</sup> A gemstone with an engraved monogram of Christ (Chi-Rho) possibly in use in the Early Arab period has also been found in the excavations. Bowls decorated with Christian symbols used in the Early Arab period could as well have been used by Muslims as by Christians after they had conquered Capharnaum. Moreover, as mentioned above, the remains of a church replacing the octagonal church, which was demolished during the Persian occupation, have so far not come to light; and it remains a question whether they ever will. The discovery of a post-sixth century church in Capharnaum could probably verify this theory; but at present, it seems premature to draw a conclusion whether the Christians indeed were present in Capharnaum after the Arab invasion or not.

The Early Arab settlement continued to flourish under the rule of the Ummayyad dynasty, the two main occupations and income sources for the town’s inhabitants being agriculture and fishing. The excavators have unearthed a large number of querns, pits for the storage of grain or other agricultural products<sup>139</sup> and agricultural tools such as hoes,

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<sup>134</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 217–218.

<sup>135</sup> Epiphanius Monachus who visited the Holy Land in the 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D. renders the following account on Capharnaum: “Ex ea parte est oppidum Capernaum, ubi habitabat Christus et Deus noster. Ad hæc domus Theologi ibidem fuit, et centurionis miraculum; ibidemque laxarunt paraclytum cum grabato a tecto.” BALDI 1935, *Enchiridion*, 374.

Cf. WILKINSON 2002, *Jerusalem pilgrims*, 214. “St. Helenæ et Constantini Vitæ” in: BALDI 1935, *Enchiridion*, 375.

<sup>136</sup> TZAFERIS 1989, *Excavations.*, 217.

<sup>137</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1974, *Cafarnao II*, 75–88. TZAFERIS 1989, *Excavations.*, 40–41.

<sup>138</sup> Cf. TZAFERIS 1989, *Excavations.*, footnote 11 on page 217.

<sup>139</sup> Cf. TZAFERIS 1989, *Excavations.*, 218.

plowshares and a sickle.<sup>140</sup> Remnants of the thriving fishing industry have also been found in form of numerous fishing hooks and lead sinkers. In addition to these fishing implements, a fishery was found comprised of two large, rather shallow, concave semicircular pools, one at each end of an elevated platform standing in the middle of them. Catches of fish were kept in the semicircular fish ponds, while the platform was presumably used by the fishermen for cleaning the fish which were most likely sold to the customers directly from the platform. A thick coat of watertight plaster covers the walls of the semicircular ponds and the entire structure is well-built. The pottery sherds found in this fishery point to the fact that it may have been in use as late as the tenth century.<sup>141</sup>

Trade also seems to have played an important role in Capharnaum's economy in the Early Arab period, perhaps even more important than in the past in that the entire Middle East was under Islamic rule. The Arab dominance in this part of the world led to a more intense and frequent use of the important roads that had passed Capharnaum since the Roman period.

The Capharnaum of the Early Arab period was, contrary to its predecessors, crisscrossed with quite broad, straight streets with an extensive sewerage system underneath them.<sup>142</sup> The edifices, several of them two stories, were well-constructed of roughly hewn stones covered by a thin overlay of white plaster.

A gold hoard consisting of 282 Ummayyad dinars was discovered deposited beneath a stone slab in one of the larger buildings. Their owner hid them there probably during the turbulent final years of the Ummayyad rule, which was a period of political unrest and internal struggles for power. The hoard was obviously never recovered by its owner. The latest coin in the gold hoard was minted in 744 A.D. Shortly after, in 746 A.D. or 747 A.D., an earthquake befell Capharnaum, wreaking havoc on it. Rooms filled with thick layers of rubble and with rocks from the hillside above bear witness to this devastating catastrophe which destroyed the settlement in its entirety. It was, however, rebuilt soon after over the ruins of the destroyed town; and the new settlement marks the beginning of the Abbasid rule in Palestine.

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<sup>140</sup> Cf. TZAFERIS 1993, "Capernaum: Excavations," in: NEAEHL, 296.

<sup>141</sup> Cf. WEISS 1981, "Recent," in: BS (1), 24. TZAFERIS 1993, "Capernaum: Excavations," in: NEAEHL, 295. TZAFERIS 1989, *Excavations.*, 218. DEVRIES, L. F.: *Cities of the Biblical World*, Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997, 275.

<sup>142</sup> TZAFERIS 1989, *Excavations.*, 217.

The Abbasid takeover boded ill for Capharnaum as it did for the whole of Palestine. If the last years of the Ummayyad dynasty were marked by unrest, then the entire period of Abbasid rule was full of internal strife, bloody intrigues and unrest. The new rulers from far-off Bagdad intervened in every social sphere and levied high taxes on all non-Muslims. Capharnaum experienced a sharp decline during the period of Abbasid rule. It was once again demolished, apparently due to rebellions among the villages in Galilee; but the settlement of the site continued. A typical Arab village was raised with small and densely built houses and small narrow alleyways in between them. In the mid-tenth century the village was destroyed under unknown circumstances and resettled shortly after. It was abandoned for good in the eleventh century prior to the Crusader period after suffering a last fatal blow by an earthquake. The Franciscan excavators have uncovered some structures on their property from the twelfth and thirteenth century A.D. and some even from a later date. But Capharnaum as such was at that time nothing but a pile of ruins which is also confirmed by the literary sources from the thirteenth century. Burchardus, a Dominican from Mount Zion, visited the site in 1283 stating that: "Capharnaum, once a noble city, but is now an exceeding mean one, scarce containing seven houses of poor fishermen."<sup>143</sup>

## 5 CAPHARNAUM REDISCOVERED AND EXPLORED

**James Silk Buckingham** visited a site called *Tal-hewn* or *Tal-hewm* which formerly was known as *Caphernaom*.<sup>144</sup> In 1816 he published a sketch of the place depicting what appears to be the remnants of the octagonal church (see fig. 2).<sup>145</sup> Noteworthy is the fact that the arcade of the central octagon is depicted in this drawing as if it was still standing at the time.<sup>146</sup>

**Edward Robinson**, an American biblical scholar, um inphilologist, orientalist and explorer, was the first to survey Tell H 1838. The ruins he observed where of a considerable extent consisting chiefly of the foundations and fallen walls of dwellings and other buildings which where all made of unhewn stones. His description corresponds quite well with the one written by Nau more than two hundred years earlier. There were, however, two buildings which were standing out and which caught Robinson's attention in

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<sup>143</sup> BURCHARDUS DE MONTE SION 1897, "A Description.," in: PPTS (12), 29.

<sup>144</sup> Cf. LAUGHLIN, J. C. H., "The identification of the site," in: TZAFERIS 1989, *Excavations.*, 197.

<sup>145</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, "Capernaum," in: OEANE, 417.

<sup>146</sup> Cf. FOERSTER, G.: Notes on Recent Excavations at Capernaum (Review Article), in: *Israel Exploration Journal* 21 (1971), 210.

particular. One was a small structure near the lake-shore which was actually the only building still standing. After having a closer look at it, he concluded that it was erected in later times out of hewn stones, columns and pilasters of former buildings. Situated not far away from this structure were “the prostrate ruins of an edifice, which, for expense of labour and ornament, surpasses everything we had yet seen in Palestine.”<sup>147</sup> Within the space enclosed by the foundations of this structure and in its vicinity “are strewn, in utter confusion, numerous columns of compact limestone, with beautiful Corinthian capitals, sculptured entablatures, ornamented friezes, and the like.”<sup>148</sup> Robinson goes on to describe some of the architectural features he observed and the general impression he got of the site. He finds the whole place desolate and mournful and states that the only people living there were some Arabs of the Semekîyeh tribe who were encamped in tents. Apart from the tents, they had built some hovels among the ruins which were used as magazines. He also noticed that some excavations had taken place between the ruins of the above-mentioned edifice. He had a hard time determining the character of this edifice which he finally took for being either a church or a heathen temple, slightly favoring the former. It is commendable that he, when returning to Tell Hum several years later in 1857, correctly identified these ruins as the remains of a synagogue. He failed however to identify Tell Hum with Capharnaum which he wrongly identified with Khan Minyeh (Khirbet Minyeh) situated approximately three kilometers west-southwest of the Synagogue, near Ein-Sheva. Excavations at Khan Minyeh have, however, shown that the site was first settled in the Umayyad period and that none of the remains antedate that period. Robinson’s contention has thus been refuted once and for all; and the excavations conducted at Tell Hum clearly show that this is the ancient Capharnaum mentioned by the Gospels, Josephus Flavius and by numerous pilgrim accounts from the fourth century A.D. onwards. The identification of Tell Hum is thus no longer a matter of dispute as it was especially in the nineteenth century A.D.<sup>149</sup>

An English expedition lead by **Charles Wilson** in 1865 – 1866 conducted some partial soundings in the synagogue on behalf of the London-based Palestine Exploration Fund. These soundings were superficial and incomplete,<sup>150</sup> and thus their sketches

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<sup>147</sup> ROBINSON, E., SMITH, E.: *Biblical Researches in Palestine, Mount Sinai, and Arabia Petræa*, Boston: Crocker & Brewster-University Press, 1841, 298.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 298.

<sup>149</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering.*, 17.

<sup>150</sup> “L’exploration à été conduite, néanmoins, d’une manière imparfaite et superficielle, ce dui a donné lieu à une grave méprise dans la reconstitution du plan.” MEISTERMANN, B.: *Capharnaüm et Bethsaïde. Suivi d’une étude sur l’âge de la synagogue de Tell Houm*, Paris: Picard, 1921, 164.

contained some mistakes such as a quadruple colonnade instead of a double colonnade.<sup>151</sup> Wilson succeeded, nevertheless, in correctly identifying the site as Capharnaum. He also rendered us a description of two monumental tombs, one of which is a Roman mausoleum still visible at present some 200 meters north of the synagogue.<sup>152</sup> Of some interest also is his allusion to a basilica: “Outside the synagogue proper, but connected with it, we uncovered the remains of a later building, which may be those of the church which Epiphanius says was built at Capernaum, and was described by Antoninus, A.D. 600, as a Basilica enclosing the house of Peter.”<sup>153</sup> His soundings, apart from being the first ones conducted on the site, were of no great scientific significance, but they had the unfortunate consequence of prompting large-scale looting of the site by local Bedouins. The Bedouins living in the vicinity of Capharnaum had until now not paid any attention to the ruins, half-covered with earth; but, seeing the deep interest of the British explorers, they commenced with treasure hunting on their own. As a result, the precious remains of the synagogue suffered heavy damage in the following years with the Bedouins smashing and overturning the ancient architectural fragments such as capitals, friezes and sculptures in search of small finds to sell on the local antiquities market. The now-exposed and unprotected ruins were subsequently used as a quarry by neighboring Arab building constructors who employed the overturned and broken stones in new construction projects. **Victor Honoré Guérin**, a French Palestinologist who visited Capharnaum in 1870 and 1875, deplored in vain this pitiable destruction when describing the contemporary state of Capharnaum (see fig. 3). He states that “si un pareil vandalisme ne s’arrête pas bientôt on cherchera vainement dans un avenir prochain les derniers vestiges et meme l’emplacement de cet édifice vénérable.”<sup>154</sup>

British Lieutenant and later lord **Horatio Herbert Kitchener** surveyed Capharnaum for the Palestine Exploration Fund in 1877 and dated the synagogue to the second or third century A.D., as opposed to his predecessors who unanimously believed that the visible remains of the synagogue were those of the synagogue referred to in the Gospel according to Luke:

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<sup>151</sup> “En afgjørende Fejl har Planen, idet den anfører en firdobbelt Søjlerække i Stedet for den dobbelte.” HJERL-HANSEN, B.: *Kapernaum. Jesu egen by - dens ruiner og dens Gaader*, New York - Oxford: [s.e.], 1940, 60.

<sup>152</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, “Capernaum,” in: OEANE, 417. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering.*, 11, 81.

<sup>153</sup> WILSON, C. W. et al.: *The Recovery of Jerusalem. A Narrative of Exploration and Discovery in the City and the Holy Land*, London: R. Bentley, 1870, 26.

<sup>154</sup> GUÉRIN, V.: *Description Géographique, Historique et Archéologique de la Palestine. Troisième Partie: Galilée*, Paris: [s.e.], 1880, 228.

“agapa|gar to eqnoj hmwh kai. thn sunagwghn autoj w|kodomhsen hmi.h.”<sup>155</sup>

The reports of these early explorers aroused, when published, a general interest primarily among some Christians who regarded it as an unique opportunity to unearth the center of Jesus' Galilean ministry. In order to achieve that, *La Custodie Fransiscaine de Terre Sainte* (The Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land) decided to take the proper measures and the Franciscan Father Jacques de Castelmadama started negotiations with the Bedouin proprietors regarding the purchase of their property. The negotiations dragged on for four years and during these negotiations the Franciscan Fathers ran into several difficulties. One of them was that a sales contract could only be signed with the consent from the heads of all the families of the tribe who were all listed as owners. Some of the heads kept on opposing the sale in the hope of receiving a higher bid. The sale was finally brought to a successful conclusion in 1894. E. L. Sukenik, one of the most renowned scholars working in this field, commented about this purchase with the following words: “The Franciscan Order earned the gratitude of all friends of Palestine antiquities by purchasing the ruin from its Bedouin owners.”<sup>156</sup> The Franciscan Fathers acquired, through Brother Guiseppe Baldi of Naples, two-thirds of the ruins while the remainder of the site became the property of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem. For the purpose of preserving the ruins and preventing vandalism and plundering, the whole Franciscan property was enclosed by a high stone wall and the remains of the synagogue were covered with earth. Knowing that the Bedouins have respect for young trees, the Franciscans even planted some mulberry trees over the ruins to ensure that none of the remnants would be carried away. A small Franciscan monastery was erected at the site north of the synagogue; and this was later razed and replaced by the present monastery, built on the lakeshore in 1925.

At the turn of the century the Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft (The German Oriental Society) applied for and obtained an excavation permit from the Franciscan custodians. In 1905 architect-archaeologist **Heinrich Kohl** and archaeologist **Dr. Carl Watzinger** were assigned with the task to survey the Galilean synagogues. The excavations took place in April and May 1905.<sup>157</sup> Kohl and Watzinger uncovered the central and eastern naves of the synagogue and dug some additional trenches in the western nave which enabled them to make a reconstruction of the plan of the building. The preliminary report of the survey and

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<sup>155</sup> Lk 7,5.

<sup>156</sup> SUKENIK, E. L., *Ancient Synagogues in Palestine and Greece*, London: [s.e.], 1934, quoted by Stanislaw Loffreda in: LOFFREDA 1982, A visit to, 7.

<sup>157</sup> 05.04. - 25.04. and 18.05. - 27.05. Cf. MEISTERMANN 1921, *Capharnaüm*, 166.



of the first season of excavations was published in 1916 in their magnificent work *Antike Synagogen in Galilaea*.<sup>158</sup>

The first season of excavations had made them realize the archaeological importance of the site, and they were eager to resume the excavations in 1907. However, they were not the only who had become aware of the immense scientific and religious value of this site. To Kohl's and Watzinger's utter disappointment, the application for a renewal of their excavation permit was politely but firmly refused by the Franciscan proprietors who were determined to continue on their own. In fact, they had already commenced excavating in 1905 subsequent to the departure of the German excavators. The Franciscan excavations were conducted under the direction of **Brother Wendelin Hinterkeuser**<sup>159</sup> who cleared the rest of the monumental synagogue together with its courtyard. He excavated also parts of the ancient village on the western and southwestern sides of the synagogue. Under his direction, the unearthing of the octagonal church some 30 meters south of the synagogue got under way. In 1915 A.D., Wendelin Hinterkeuser was forced to put the excavations on hold due to World War I which just had broken out.

The excavations were taken up again by the Galilean-born Christian Arab of Syrian origin, **Father Gaudence Orfali** in 1921 A.D. Gaudence Orfali picked up where Hinterkeuser had left off, with the uncovering of the octagonal church and its mosaic pavement. He went on excavating the top levels of the area situated between the synagogue and the octagonal church where he exposed an Arab level of the town. He also undertook the restoration of the synagogue using, as far as possible, authentic building materials. Orfali had, in order to accomplish this task, to acquire a significant number of heavy ashlar blocks from the neighboring Arabs who in previous times had taken the blocks to use them as building material for their own dwellings. He did a tremendous job both with the dig and the reconstruction and he managed to publish his scholarly monograph on the excavations in 1922 A.D. called *Capharnaïm et Ses Ruines*.<sup>160</sup> Orfali was unfortunately never able to finish the excavations because of his tragic death in a car accident in 1926 A.D.

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<sup>158</sup> Cf. KOHL, H, WATZINGER, C.: *Antike Synagogen in Galilaea* 29. Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft, Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1916, 4–40.

<sup>159</sup> He is by some sources referred to as Brother Wendelin von Menden. Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering*, 12. LOFFREDA 1997, "Capernaum," in: OEANE, 417.

<sup>160</sup> Cf. ORFALI, G.: *Capharnaïm et ses ruines. D'après les fouilles accomplies a Tell-Houm par la Custodie Franciscaine de Terre Sainte (1905–1921)*, Paris: Auguste Picard, 1922.

It took more than forty years before the Franciscans again resumed excavating the extensive ruins of ancient Capharnaum (see fig. 4). **Virgilio Corbo** and **Stanislao Loffreda**, from the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, were in charge of the excavations throughout the nineteen seasons from 1968 until 1986. During these excavations a considerable portion of the village from the first century A.D. was brought to light.

The Greek Orthodox side of Capharnaum had been totally neglected until 1930. In 1931 a small church with an adjacent winter residence were erected by Damianos the Greek Patriarch of Jerusalem. The buildings were used only for a few years before being abandoned. Capharnaum became a sort of a no-man's-land in 1948 since it was located between the Syrian and Israeli border. The situation changed totally in 1967 after the Six-Day-War, the Metropolitane Germanos, a member of the Patriarchate in Jerusalem, sought to utilize the site by restoring and renovating the two buildings which were both quite rundown. He had also planned to plant trees on the site and to found gardens but, fortunately, before putting the plan into effect, he took time to consult the Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums. It was decided that soundings had to be conducted before any other action was taken. The excavations started in 1978 and ran through 1987 and they were carried out as a joint project of the Israel Antiquities Authority and a consortium of Schools from Canada and U.S.A. under the direction of **Dr. Vassilios Tzaferis** of the Department of Antiquities. A majority of the remnants uncovered in these excavations stem from the seventh century onwards, with the exception of some structures from the Byzantine and Roman period unearthed in the immediate vicinity of the partition separating the Franciscan and Greek Orthodox properties (see fig. 4).

A small number of these remains date back to the first century A.D. and are of particular interest to us.

### **5.1 Capharnaum's extent**

According to Stanislao Loffreda, the ruins of ancient Capharnaum stretch from its easternmost limit, which is the spot where the Greek Orthodox Church stands at present, for about 300 meters to its westernmost limit and for approximately 200 meters from the lakeshore to the north, covering a total area of approximately 6 hectares.<sup>161</sup> Although not explicitly specifying what is meant by ancient Capharnaum it seems certain that he had in mind all the remains excavated, not only the ones stemming from the Late Hellenistic and

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<sup>161</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering.*, 18.

Early Roman period but also the ones dating to the Byzantine and Early Arab period. This can be concluded in that the area uncovered by the Franciscans does not exceed 35,000 square meters. This contention is furthermore strengthened by the fact that almost all the remains uncovered in the 120 by 220 meters large area owned by the Greek Orthodox Church<sup>162</sup> postdate the fifth-sixth century A.D.<sup>163</sup> This area is included by Loffreda in his estimates of the site's size which seems to further vindicate the above-mentioned contention. When assessing Capharnaum's population during the town's maximal expansion in the Byzantine Period, Loffreda presumes 6 hectares as the area covered by this settlement.<sup>164</sup> One, however, would have expected some more clarity from the excavators on this seemingly trivial matter. The severe inaccuracies that occur in a very large number of the publications dealing with Capharnaum cause confusion to the careful reader and should have been avoided. Vassilios Tzaferis, when estimating the size of Capharnaum prior to the seventh century A.D., states that it covered an area not exceeding 17,000 square meters ( 1.7 hectares) to which he adds, in parenthesis, the very misleading dimensions of 350 by 500 meters.<sup>165</sup> 350 x 500 meters equals 175,000 square meters which is 17.5 hectares. This gross error, without being considered as such, had inauspicious consequences. For instance, it has been employed by Jonathan L. Reed in his monograph "Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus a re-examination of the evidence" as an estimation of the area that was occupied in the Late Roman period.<sup>166</sup> Adding to the confusion, Jonathan L. Reed uses wrongly Loffreda's estimate of 6 hectares (60,000 square meters) as an assessment of the area settled during the time of Jesus in spite of the fact that this number is clearly referring to the area inhabited in the Byzantine period, as shown above. According to Reed, Loffreda attained this number on the basis of Early Roman pottery finds which he located across this area. Loffreda could not possibly have located Early Roman pottery in an area of 6 hectares since this area is much larger than the area he, together with V. Corbo, actually excavated. Moreover, the excavators on the Greek Orthodox side of Capharnaum have reported only small deposits of Early Roman pottery

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<sup>162</sup> Cf. TZAFERIS 1989, *Excavations.*, 1, 216. The entire area owned by the Greek Orthodox Church contained ancient material, according to Tzaferis who located the center of a seventh century A.D. settlement at this very spot. Cf. *Ibid.*, 2. According to John C. H. Laughlin "the Greek Orthodox portion comprises about 71, 760 square feet" i.e. 6666 square meters. Cf. LAUGHLIN 1993, "Capernaum.," in: BAR (5), 56. Since being at variance with the numbers rendered by the director of the excavations V. Tzaferis, this must be considered as being a shortcoming of the author.

<sup>163</sup> Cf. TZAFERIS 1989, *Excavations.*, 1–28, page xix of his preface.

<sup>164</sup> LOFFREDA 1997, "Capernaum," in: OEANE, 418.

<sup>165</sup> Cf. TZAFERIS 1989, *Excavations.*, 216.

<sup>166</sup> REED 2002, *Archaeology*, 151.

found in limited areas of their property.<sup>167</sup> The excavations on both sides have shown “that Capharnaum in the seventh century A.D. lay mostly in previously unsettled areas spreading north and east of the synagogue area”.<sup>168</sup> Two other renowned archaeologists, Eric M. Meyers and James F. Strange in their work *Archaeology, the rabbis and early Christianity*, used Wilson’s estimate of one-half mile by one-fourth mile, arriving at 30 hectares as the approximately correct area of Capharnaum at the time of Jesus.<sup>169</sup> They rejected the 500 by 200 meters proposed by the Franciscan excavators in their earlier publications;<sup>170</sup> and they clung to the much less accurate description of Wilson who J. L. Reed says “makes no claim to accuracy, i.e., he is not reporting on a scientific survey.”<sup>171</sup> The above-mentioned examples must suffice as an illustration that even something as obvious and basically incontrovertible as the area of the excavated ruins is subject to controversy and discrepancies. The areas that have been unearthed, together, do not exceed 6 hectares, as is evident from the general plans of the ruins on both the Franciscan and the Greek Orthodox side of Capharnaum (see fig. 5 and 6).

## 6 EXCAVATIONS AT THE FRANCISCAN SIDE OF CAPHARNAUM

We will first turn our attention to the portion of Capharnaum which is owned and excavated by the Franciscans because most of the discoveries from the late Hellenistic and the Early Roman period were made there. From 1968 until 1986 the Franciscans, under the direction of Virgilio Corbo and Stanislao Loffreda, conducted nineteen seasons of excavations.<sup>172</sup> Even after these nineteen seasons of excavations the rediscovery of ancient Capharnaum continued for five more years until the death of Father Virgilio Corbo at the close of the year 1991.<sup>173</sup> At the beginning of the new millennium Stanislao Loffreda

<sup>167</sup> Cf. TZAFERIS 1993, “Capernaum: Excavations,” in: NEAEHL, 295–296.

TZAFERIS 1989, *Excavations.*, 4. TZAFERIS. V., PELEG. M.: Kefar Nahum - Excavations of the Department of Antiquities - 985, in: *Excavations and Surveys in Israel* 4 (1985), 59. LAUGHLIN 1993, “Capernaum,” in: BAR (5), 57.

<sup>168</sup> TZAFERIS 1989, *Excavations.*, 216. Cf. CORBO, V. C.: Gli ultimi giorni di Cafarnao: Rapporto preliminare dopo la XV campagna di scavo 6 giugno - 16 luglio 1983, in: *Liber Annus* 33 (1983), 373–390.

<sup>169</sup> Cf. MEYERS, E. M., STRANGE, J. F.: *Archaeology, the Rabbis and Early Christianity*, Abingdon/Nashville: The Parthenon Press, 1981, 58. REED 2002, *Archaeology.*, 149–150. REED, J. L.: Population Numbers, Urbanization and Economics - Galilean Archaeology and the Historical Jesus, in: *Society of Biblical Literature, Seminar Papers*, Atlanta: Scholar Press, 1994, 208.

<sup>170</sup> Cf. MEYERS - STRANGE 1981, *Archaeology*, 58, footnote 40 on page 184.

<sup>171</sup> REED 1994, “Population,” footnote 24 on page 209.

<sup>172</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, “Capernaum,” in: OEANE, 417.

<sup>173</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering*, 12.

resumed the excavations at Capharnaum and he has hitherto conducted four seasons of excavations from 2000 – 2003.

During the course of the Franciscan excavations a total of twelve so-called *insulae* were brought to light (see fig. 5). *Insula* signifies island in Latin and is a frequently, although in J. L. Reed's opinion somewhat inconsistently, employed term by archaeologists who are engaged in work in the Mediterranean world.<sup>174</sup> The term *insula* refers prevalently, according to J. L. Reed, to a multi-story apartment complex as the one excavated in Ostia. However, it sometimes serves as a designation for any unit surrounded on four sides by street as in the case of Pompei.<sup>175</sup> This term is employed by the Franciscans in its latter sense as confirmed by Loffreda who, using *insula* II as a prototype, states that an *insula* is a distinct group of private houses limited by streets surrounding it and distinguished by several courtyards being flanked by roofed rooms.<sup>176</sup>

*Insula* I is situated some 30 meters south of the synagogue and approximately 40 meters from the lakeshore. *Insula* I was designated *Insula Sacra* by its excavators "because it included the house of Saint Peter, according to tradition."<sup>177</sup>

Capharnaum owes its fame to Jesus, who made it the hub of his ministry in Galilee. In fact Jesus is described as being *en oikw*<sup>178</sup> (at home) in Capharnaum. Matthew says Jesus *katwkh*sen *eij Kafarnaoum*<sup>179</sup> (settled down in Capharnaum) and that Jesus, when returning to Capharnaum after a journey to the territory of the Gadarenes on the other side of the Lake, came to *thn idian polin*<sup>180</sup> (his own town). Jesus did not own a house in Capharnaum but he stayed in the house of Peter and Andrew which played a central role in his ministry. The numerous references in the Gospels to this house are rather striking when taking into account the almost proverbial conciseness of the Gospels leaving out all the superfluous details. This house is ascribed, therefore, by many scholars with various symbolical meanings in addition to its central role as the physical house in which Jesus lived when in Capharnaum. "This house was not only the place where Jesus lived, but also a house of formation for his disciples, a beautiful and eloquent image of the Church."<sup>181</sup> In

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<sup>174</sup> Cf. REED 2002, *Archaeology*, 152–153.

<sup>175</sup> Cf. WALLACE-HADRILL, A.: *Houses and Society in Pompei and Herculaneum*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, 134 referred to in: REED 2002, *Archaeology*, footnote 45 on page 152.

<sup>176</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1981, "Capernaum - Jesus'." in: BS (1), 5.

<sup>177</sup> LOFFREDA, S.: *Saint Peter's House at Capharnaum the Very First Domus Ecclesiae*, in: *Dedicatio memorialis Sancti Petri. Capharnaum 29/VI/1990*, Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1990, 73.

<sup>178</sup> Mk 2,1; 9,33.

<sup>179</sup> Mt 4,13.

<sup>180</sup> Mt 9,1.

<sup>181</sup> LOFFREDA 1990, *Saint*, 73.

this paper we will leave out the symbolical meaning when dealing with the House of Saint Peter and rather focus on it as the real house it was, and on which the archaeological excavations may shed some light.

Before proceeding to the thorough description of the excavations let us in brief call to mind what the Gospels tell us about the House of St. Peter and the events that took place therein. It was there where Jesus cured Peter's mother-in-law who was in bed with fever. The word spread quickly and in the evening, after sunset, the whole town assembled at the door of that house in order for Jesus to heal all the ill and demoniac that they had brought along with them.<sup>182</sup> On another occasion while Jesus together with his apostles and a large crowd were gathered inside the house four men carrying a paralytic lowered him down from the roof so that Jesus could heal him.<sup>183</sup> Apart from performing numerous miraculous healings inside this house, Jesus also frequently preached therein.<sup>184</sup> It was actually on such an occasion that his mother Mary together with some other relatives came to see him in Capernaum.<sup>185</sup> Another event that occurred in this house was the payment of the temple tax, a story recorded solely by Matthew who himself was a former tax collector.<sup>186</sup>

## **6.1 The excavations in Insula I**

The excavations under the direction of Virgilio Corbo and Stanislaus Loffreda commenced on April 16, 1968; and they continued where their predecessor, Gaudence Orfali had left off, namely within the area of the eight-sided basilica. The eight sided basilica or the octagon, as it is so frequently referred to, had already been brought to light by Father Orfali and the excavators were by no means intending to rediscover what had been unearthed in the previous excavations. Their principal aim, according to Virgilio Corbo, was to bring to light the remains of Capernaum "because it was this town which, above all others, was most familiar to Jesus Christ."<sup>187</sup> Their first task, when excavating within the octagonal basilica, was thus to remove the remains of the Late Byzantine mosaic pavement of the church. This enabled them to study each level of the strata beneath the Byzantine floor.<sup>188</sup> The excavators, already from the outset, were convinced that they would come across buildings antedating the basilica some of which could be among those

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<sup>182</sup> Cf. Mk 1,29–34; Mt 8,14–17; Lk 4,38–41.

<sup>183</sup> Cf. Mk 2,1–12; Mt 9,1–8; Lk 5,17–26.

<sup>184</sup> Cf. Mk 9,33–37; Mt 18,1–5; Lk 9,46–48.

<sup>185</sup> Cf. Mk 3,20–23a; 31–35; Mt 12,46–50; Lk 8,19–21.

<sup>186</sup> Cf. Mt 17,24–27.

<sup>187</sup> CORBO - LOFFREDA - BUSHELL 1969, *New Memoirs*, 9.

<sup>188</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 14.

mentioned in the Gospels.<sup>189</sup> Refusing to call it mere guesswork, they argued that ancient traditions had so often been confirmed by scientific discoveries, and they firmly believed that the tradition that the octagon was built atop the house of St. Peter would be vindicated by these excavations.<sup>190</sup>

After the mosaics had been carefully removed and taken in for repairs, which they so desperately needed, the examination of the various sub-soil levels commenced, leading to the identification of three principal strata (see fig. 7). The lowest of the three strata, stratum 1 was of private houses dating to the second century B.C. and in use until the fourth century A.D.<sup>191</sup> Among these especially one room stood out, being larger and with traces of veneration which were not found anywhere else within the excavated area.<sup>192</sup> According to the excavators this is the traditional House of St. Peter. Stratum 2 constituted of the so-called “house church” in which the House of St. Peter had been converted in the late fourth century A.D.<sup>193</sup> Almost the entire *insula* I had been surrounded by an enclosure wall with a perimeter of 112.25 meters;<sup>194</sup> and while some old structures were razed on the west side, new rooms were constructed and added to this “house-church”.<sup>195</sup> Stratum 3 was of the octagonal church which was built in the second half of the fifth century A.D. within the perimeter of the enclosure wall of the “house-church.”<sup>196</sup>

### **6.1.1 The octagonal church**

The octagonal church consisted of a small central octagon with a diameter of approximately 7.5 meters (including the walls),<sup>197</sup> a larger concentric outer octagon with approximately 16 meters in diameter (including the walls)<sup>198</sup> and an outer semi-octagon whose ends were joined by a large eastern wing (see fig. 7 and 8).<sup>199</sup> This wing consisted of two sacristies (room 12 [the northern sacristy] and room 10 [the southern sacristy]) whose walls joined the northeast and southeast corners of the outer octagon with the

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<sup>189</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>190</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>191</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1990, *Saint*, 73–74.

<sup>192</sup> CORBO, V. C., SALLER, S. J.: *The House of St. Peter at Capharnaum. A Preliminary Report of the First Two Campaigns of Excavations. April 16 - June 19, Sept. 12 - Nov. 26, 1968*, (=Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Collectio Minor 5), Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1969, 5–6.

<sup>193</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering.*, 51.

<sup>194</sup> Cf. CORBO 1975, *Cafarnao I.*, 59.

<sup>195</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1982, *A visit to.*, 27–28.

<sup>196</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1993, “Capernaum” in: NEAEHL, 295.

<sup>197</sup> Cf. CORBO 1975, *Cafarnao I.*, tavola IV.

<sup>198</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>199</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering.*, 64–65.

enclosure wall of the house-church. The sacristies were thus almost triangular in form and each of them was built with a dependency. The northern dependency had one room (13) while the southern dependency consisted of two rooms (22 and 23).<sup>200</sup> The outer semi-octagon is actually a five-sided portico giving access both to the interior of the church and to the eastern sacristies with their respective dependencies. Gaudence Orfali identified this edifice as a Late-Byzantine baptistery basing his theory on contemporary examples of similar octagonal baptisteries such as San Giovanni in Fonte of Ravenna which were also surrounded on the outside by a portico paved with mosaics.<sup>201</sup> Orfali interpreted the depression in the central octagon as deliberately made by the mosaicists and thus he regarded it as the baptismal font. This theory has been refuted by the latest excavations which have revealed that the depression in the mosaic floor inside the central octagon was caused by the amount of debris which lay on top of it. In Orfali's defense he was not familiar with the subsoil on which the mosaic floor rested and thus was not aware that there was a thick fill of red earth situated 12 centimeters beneath the mosaic floor. This red earth is subject to compression which explains the non-uniform sinking of the floors.<sup>202</sup> Besides, the excavations clearly showed that neither the mosaics nor the beds upon which they lay were watertight.<sup>203</sup> Moreover, a baptismal font (11) was unearthed within a semicircular apse abutting the eastern side of the outer octagon.<sup>204</sup> The apse had previously been discovered and only partly excavated by the Franciscan Father A. Gassi who had done some occasional excavations in the area of the octagonal church.<sup>205</sup> In the excavations directed by Corbo and Loffreda the apse was uncovered in its entirety along with the baptistery. These finds are of the utmost importance for the identification of this edifice as a church. The apse was oriented eastwards as was common in ancient churches. "The discovery of the eastward-oriented apse and the baptistery removed any doubt that the structure was in fact an ancient church".<sup>206</sup> The archaeologists have not yet determined the date of these annexes but, according to them, substantial archaeological evidence establishes that they postdate the building of the main part and thus belong to a second

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<sup>200</sup> Cf. CORBO - SALLER 1969, *The house*, 32–33.

<sup>201</sup> Cf. ORFALI 1922, *Capharnaïm*, 106–109. SAPIR - NE'EMAN 1967, *Capernaum*, 81. STRANGE. J. F., SHANKS. H.: Has the House Where Jesus Stayed in Capernaum Been Found? in: *Biblical Archaeology Review* 8/6 (1982), 31.

<sup>202</sup> Cf. CORBO - SALLER 1969, *The house*, 5–6.

<sup>203</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>204</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 8, 25–27.

<sup>205</sup> Cf. *Ibidem* footnote 2 on page 3. CORBO 1975, *Cafarnaon I.*, 26.

<sup>206</sup> STRANGE - SHANKS 1982, "Has the house.," in: *BAR* (6), 31.



building phase.<sup>207</sup> Along the front-side of the southern enclosure wall, a wing which seems to have consisted of six oblong rooms (from east to west rooms: 24, 35, 26, 27, 28 and 29) was brought to light. The excavators surmise they could have served as storerooms and habitations. The two westernmost rooms (28 and 29) appear to have been reused in the late medieval period for olive-oil production as indicated by a press and an olive-mill which were discovered there.<sup>208</sup> Loffreda (1993) ascribes this wing to the so-called second building phase<sup>209</sup> while Corbo (1968), on the other hand, is of the opinion that they most likely were erected in the same period as the octagonal church.<sup>210</sup>

The central octagon had eight pilasters, one in either of its corners, which presumably were crowned by arches which in turn supported a tiled dome covering the central octagon.<sup>211</sup> The foundations of the central octagon rest in part on the pavement and on the walls of the late fourth century A.D. house-church, and in part on the walls of the venerated House of St. Peter. The outer concentric octagon had three sills which were found out of place by Corbo but which were all spotted *in situ* by Orfali when he conducted his excavations in the early 1920's.<sup>212</sup> These three doors provided access to the church from the west, northwest and southwest sides. On the southeast side a fourth door was discovered still *in situ*. This door which Orfali failed to notice was leading to the southern sacristy (10). The walls of the concentric octagon are quite well preserved except for the northeastern wall of which the central part has been obliterated by a small structure (2a) of a later date than the Byzantine church.<sup>213</sup> This structure of a somewhat indeterminable nature could, according to the excavators, have served as a reservoir. It had been inserted into the subsoil of the octagonal church after the removal of the octagon's foundations.<sup>214</sup>

Of the semi-octagonal portico the northern and northwestern sides stand out as the ones being better preserved. Mosaic pavements as well as two large sills (the northern

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<sup>207</sup> A lime floor was found running underneath the platform for the apse bearing witness that there used to be a passage between the two sacristies (10 and 12) which was blocked by the baptismal font and the rubble surrounding it. From this evidence Corbo and Loffreda derive the fact that apse and the baptistery within it were constructed at a later date than the church itself. Cf. CORBO - SALLER 1969, *The house*, 25. TAYLOR, J. E.: Capernaum and Its "Jewish-Christians"; A Re-Examination of the Franciscan Excavations, in: *Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society* 9 (1989-1990), 9.

<sup>208</sup> Cf. CORBO - SALLER 1969, *The house*, 34. CORBO 1975, *Cafarnaon I.*, 58.

<sup>209</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1993, "Capernaum" in: NEAEHL, 295.

<sup>210</sup> Cf. CORBO - SALLER 1969, *The house*, 33.

CORBO-LOFFREDA - BUSHELL 1969, *New Memoirs*, 21.

<sup>211</sup> Cf. CORBO - SALLER 1969, *The house*, 10.

CORBO-LOFFREDA - BUSHELL 1969, *New Memoirs*, 19.

<sup>212</sup> Cf. ORFALI 1922, *Capharnaïm*, 104. CORBO - SALLER 1969, *The house*, 10.

<sup>213</sup> Cf. CORBO - SALLER 1969, *The house*, 12.

<sup>214</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 24-25.

measuring 6.20 meters and the northwestern measuring 6.70 meters) and the remains of two pilasters have been found there. The other sides have been preserved on a level lower than the sills and thus no vestiges of them nor of the pilasters have been found on these sides whatsoever. The Franciscan excavators have, however, on their plan of the octagonal church, drawn in three pilasters on the other sides “in order to create a more complete idea of the portico”.<sup>215</sup>

The foundations of the octagonal church are fashioned from basalt stones and cemented with high-quality mortar of white lime together with fine basalt gravel. The superstructure is made out of a hard white crystalline limestone called *mizzi* which was also used in the construction of the synagogue in Capharnaum. The excavators infer from the fragmentary pieces of mosaics found in both of the octagons and in the portico that all the floors had been paved in their entirety with mosaics.<sup>216</sup> In the semi-octagon a large fragment of a mosaic consisting of large rosettes has been preserved while in the concentric octagon a single patch of a mosaic with a lotus-flower motif was found. The mosaic in the central octagon depicts a peacock, the symbol of immortality, fanning out its tail while being haloed by a rainbow. The peacock was encircled by a band of lotus-flowers forming a chalice.<sup>217</sup>

After the removal of the mosaics a 2 centimeters thick layer of mortar of white lime, upon which the mosaics had rested, came to light.<sup>218</sup> Underneath this layer another layer was found, consisting of poor quality mortar together with sand and gravel from the lakeshore. This layer was between 8 and 10 centimeters thick; and it rested on a thick fill of red earth from the fields,<sup>219</sup> which, for its own part, rested on a “destruction layer” of debris from the demolition of the previous edifice.<sup>220</sup>

The octagonal church in Capharnaum is, dated as aforementioned by Corbo and Loffreda, to the second half of the fifth century A.D.; and their dating has been accepted by a vast majority of the scholars working in this field. They base their dating on the pottery and numismatic finds made underneath the foundations of the octagonal church along with

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>216</sup> Cf. CORBO–LOFFREDA - BUSHELL 1969, *New Memoirs*, 20.  
CORBO - SALLER 1969, *The house*, 12–15.

<sup>217</sup> A similar mosaic of a haloed peacock is to be found in the church of Saint George in Gerasa which is dated to the sixth century A.D. Cf. CORBO - SALLER 1969, *The house*, 14.

<sup>218</sup> Cf. Ibid., 5.

<sup>219</sup> Cf. Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Cf. STRANGE. J. F.: The Capernaum and Herodium Publications, Part 2, in: *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 233 (1979), 68. For graphic illustration of the strata underneath the octagon see CORBO 1975, *Cafarnaon I.*, Tavola 3.

the relevant literary sources, namely the reports of Aetheria, Epiphanius of Salamis and the so-called Anonymus Placentinus (the anonymous pilgrim from Piacenza). The total number of coins discovered in *insula* I amount to 172 of which almost all stem from the fourth century A.D. Nine of them stem from the first decade of the fifth century A.D.<sup>221</sup> and two others are of an even later date.<sup>222</sup> Almost all of them were collected in the destruction level underneath the fill of red earth. With regard to the pottery found in this level, a predominant part of it is dated by Loffreda to the fifth century A.D. These coins, together with the pottery found in this level, which was, according to Loffreda mostly from the fifth century A.D., clearly suggest a date in the second half of the fifth century A.D.

Moreover the excavators contend that the literary evidence that has come down to us from that period furnishes us with information corroborating this theory. The report of the so-called Anonymus Placentinus (570 A.D.) is the only one mentioning a structure as standing on the very site of the House of St. Peter, which could possibly correspond with the octagonal church. Corbo states that the Anonymus Placentinus provides us with a *terminus ante quem* for the construction of the octagonal church in Capharnaum while the report of Aetheria (381 – 384 A.D.) can serve as a *terminus post quem*. This report mentions that the House of St. Peter with its original walls still standing has been converted into a *domus ecclesia*. Corbo underlines the fact that the house itself was the church and thus that it hadn't yet been obliterated by a more recent structure as was the case when the octagonal church was erected. The passage from the pen of Epiphanius of Salamis (374 – 377 A.D.) in his *Panarion* is highly tentative as mentioned in the chapter on the pilgrim reports.<sup>223</sup> Corbo surmises that Count Joseph was the one who converted the House of St. Peter into the fourth century *domus ecclesia*;<sup>224</sup> but this contention, even if ever proven correct, would not have any bearing on the dating of the octagonal church. On the whole, the Franciscan's second half of the fifth century A.D. dating of the octagonal edifice seems to be in keeping with the extant literary evidence. James Strange and Gideon Foster are two renowned scholars who, as opposed to the bulk of their colleagues, contest

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<sup>221</sup> Coin no. 150 (393–408 A.D.)

No. 95, no. 98 and no. 158 (395–408 A.D.)

No. 2, no. 16b, no. 79, no. 109 and no. 149. (402–408 A.D.)

Cf. CORBO 1975, *Cafarnaon I.*, 54-55. STRANGE 1977, "The Capernaum and Herodium Publications," in: BASOR (226), 68.

<sup>222</sup> Coin no. 7 (408–425 A.D.)

Coin no. 91 (425–450 A.D.)

Cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>223</sup> See p. 14 – 15.

<sup>224</sup> Cf. CORBO 1975, *Cafarnaon I.*, 71–72.

the second half of the fifth century A.D. dating.<sup>225</sup> James Strange believes that the construction of the church was completed by the mid-fifth century A.D. but that it, based on the numismatic finds, commenced in the time of Theodosius I (383 – 395 A.D. at the earliest or during the reign of Arcadius (395 – 408 A.D.) at the latest.<sup>226</sup> His theory presupposes that the date of the coins is the exact date of the razing and rebuilding which, as Joan Taylor points out, may be incorrect.<sup>227</sup> Gideon Forster suggests an early sixth century A.D. dating on account of its striking resemblance, in ground plan, to the Church of the Theotokos on Mount Gerizim raised by the Emperor Zeno after what is known as the Samaritan revolt of 484 A.D.<sup>228</sup> Joan Taylor opines that neither one of the churches “needed to be copied from the other, since the architectural model of an octagonal church could have been used separately.”<sup>229</sup>

Churches with an octagonal ground plan are certainly not wanting in the Holy Land but their dating is, in many cases, very controversial. The Franciscan excavators claim that the octagonal church in Capharnaum is the oldest church in the shape of an octagon that has been unearthed in Palestine to date. According to Corbo, the only octagonal church that could antedate it is the church in Bethlehem if indeed an octagon. Corbo is of the opinion that the extant remains provide no certain evidence that the edifice was an octagon.<sup>230</sup> However, that the church in Bethlehem was an octagon has reached a wide acceptance among archaeologists engaging in excavations in the Holy Land.<sup>231</sup> A church frequently mentioned in this connection is the octagon of the Ascension on the Mount of Olives, by some scholars ascribed to the fourth century A.D. Corbo, who himself has been conducting excavations on the Mount of Olives,<sup>232</sup> most firmly refuses to accept the octagonal church of the Ascension as a Byzantine structure, arguing that his excavations proved that the structure dating from the fourth century A.D. was round in ground plan while “the church with the octagonal plan at the Ascension is entirely medieval.”<sup>233</sup> Notwithstanding it is an irrefutable fact that octagonal churches were erected in the Holy Land during the

<sup>225</sup> Cf. TAYLOR 1989–1990, “Capernaum.,” in: BAIAS (9), 8–10.

<sup>226</sup> Cf. STRANGE 1977, “The Capernaum and Herodium Publications,” in: BASOR (226), 68.

<sup>227</sup> Cf. TAYLOR 1989–1990, “Capernaum.,” in: BAIAS (9), 8.

<sup>228</sup> Cf. FOERSTER 1971, “Notes,” in: IEJ (21), 210.

<sup>229</sup> TAYLOR 1989–1990, “Capernaum.,” in: BAIAS (9), 9.

<sup>230</sup> Cf. CORBO - SALLER 1969, *The house*, footnote 12 on page 15.

<sup>231</sup> Cf. STRANGE - SHANKS 1982, “Has the house.,” in: BAR (6), 31. MCRAY, J.: *Archaeology and the New Testament*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991, 164.

<sup>232</sup> For more on the Mount of Olives excavations see CORBO, V. C., *Ricerca archeologica al Monte degli Ulivi*, (=Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Collectio Maior 16), Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1965, referred to by Corbo in *The House of St. Peter at Capharnaum*, footnote 13 on page 15.

<sup>233</sup> CORBO - SALLER 1969, *The house*, footnote 13 on page 15–16.

Byzantine period and, moreover, that it was a common practice to raise octagonal buildings on sites where special events in Christian history had supposedly taken place in order to commemorate them.<sup>234</sup> According to J. F. Strange and H. Shanks, the octagon in the Church of the Nativity was built supposedly straight above the cave where Jesus was born in order to mark this spot.<sup>235</sup> These scholars, among several others, presume that the octagon in Capharnaum was a memorial church intended to commemorate Jesus's temporary residence there and "may well have been connected with ancient memories or traditions regarding the location of St. Peter's house, also called 'the house of Simon and Andrew' in Mark 1, 29."<sup>236</sup> They believe these theories to have been further supported by the Franciscan excavations bringing to light what they call hard evidence. The Franciscans themselves are convinced that the inner octagon of the church in Capharnaum was placed directly over what they believe was a room in St. Peter's house which according to them was venerated from the first century A.D. onwards.

### ***6.1.2 The floors underneath the destruction layer***

The "destruction layer" began directly upon the pavement upon which the excavators found thousands of painted plaster fragments from the destroyed walls of what they called the "house-church" or *domus-ecclesia*.<sup>237</sup> The floor within the inner octagon upon which the "destruction layer" rested was polychrome, made out of crushed limestone (designated 3 by the excavators).<sup>238</sup> While this floor was left undisturbed in the southern half of the central octagon in order to be preserved, in the northern half a total of four trial trenches (trench *a*, *b*, *c*, and *d*) were dug (see fig. 9).<sup>239</sup> Beneath this floor, in all of the four trenches, were found the remains of another crushed limestone pavement (A 1) with fragments of plaster painted red.<sup>240</sup> These two pavements formed the floors which, according to the excavators, belonged to the *domus-ecclesia* dated by them to the late fourth century A.D.<sup>241</sup> Underneath these two floors, several other superimposed pavements

<sup>234</sup> Cf. MEYERS - STRANGE 1981, *Archaeology*, 59–60. STRANGE - SHANKS 1982, "Has the house.," in: BAR (6), 37. MCRAY 1991, *Archaeology*, 164. STRANGE 1977, "The Capernaum and Herodium Publications," in: BASOR (226), 67.

<sup>235</sup> Cf. STRANGE - SHANKS 1982, "Has the house.," in: BAR (6), 31–32.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>237</sup> Cf. CORBO 1975, *Cafarnaio I*, 97. CORBO - SALLER 1969, The house, 66. TAYLOR 1989–1990, "Capernaum.," in: BAIAS (9), 16. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering.*, 58–60.

<sup>238</sup> Cf. CORBO 1975, *Cafarnaio I*, 80, 97. TAYLOR 1989–1990, "Capernaum.," in: BAIAS (9), 16. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering.*, 58.

<sup>239</sup> Cf. CORBO 1975, *Cafarnaio I*, 80. TAYLOR 1989–1990, "Capernaum.," in: BAIAS (9), 15.

<sup>240</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>241</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering.*, 58.

were found in each of the trenches that had been cut, varying, according to Loffreda, from three in trench *d* to nine in trench *b* and all of them are dated by him to the first century A.D. or earlier.<sup>242</sup> The three successive pavements (A 2, B and C) found in trench *d* were all made out of basalt stones<sup>243</sup> resting on a level of fill in which pottery from the second and first century B.C. was discovered.<sup>244</sup> The basalt stone pavement designated A 2 was also found in trench *d* directly underlying limestone floor A 1. Inside this pavement an earthenware pot of the Herodian period was found whose base rested on an underlying floor of beaten dark-black earth.<sup>245</sup> In between these two floors was a layer of dark-brown earth containing scant pottery fragments.<sup>246</sup> Below the floor of beaten-black earth the excavators discovered several floors of crushed lime-stone, each of them resting on a thin bed of black earth.<sup>247</sup> There seems to be a slight disagreement among the excavators on the number of crushed lime-stone pavements discovered. In *Cafarnao I - Gli edifici della citta*, which is the first volume of the final report of the Franciscan excavations at Capharnaum published in 1974, Virgilio Corbo states there were three crushed limestone floors.<sup>248</sup> Stanislao Loffreda, however, related in 1968 that four crushed limestone pavements were found<sup>249</sup> while in one of his more recent publications published in 1997 he went on to state that there were at least six of them.<sup>250</sup> Be that as it may, we can conclude that at least three pavements fashioned from crushed limestone were brought to light in trench *b*.

We will now give our attention to the three superimposed floors of black beaten earth (5) discovered below the above-mentioned limestone pavements, which for obvious reasons are of the greatest interest to us. On the beaten earth pavements (5) were found pieces of pottery used from the first century B.C. to the second century A.D. allowing the excavators to date the floors from the first century B.C. to the first century A.D. These pavements are all very dark in color, a feature ascribed by Loffreda to their great antiquity.<sup>251</sup> Also helping the excavators in the dating of the floors was that underlying the lowest of these floors was the same fill as in trench *d* with embedded pottery from the

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<sup>242</sup> Cf. CORBO–LOFFREDA - BUSHELL 1969, *New Memoirs*, 29–30.

<sup>243</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 29; CORBO 1975, *Cafarnao I*, 97.

<sup>244</sup> Cf. TAYLOR 1989–1990, “Capernaum.,” in: BAIAS (9), 17. CORBO 1975, *Cafarnao I*, 80.

<sup>245</sup> Cf. CORBO–LOFFREDA - BUSHELL 1969, *New Memoirs*, 29.

<sup>246</sup> Cf. CORBO 1975, *Cafarnao I*, 80. TAYLOR 1989–1990, “Capernaum.,” in: BAIAS (9), 17.

<sup>247</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>248</sup> Cf. CORBO 1975, *Cafarnao I*, 97.

<sup>249</sup> Cf. CORBO - LOFFREDA - BUSHELL 1969, *New Memoirs*, 29.

<sup>250</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering.*, 57.

<sup>251</sup> Cf. CORBO - LOFFREDA - BUSHELL 1969, *New Memoirs*, 30. CORBO 1975, *Cafarnao I*, 97.

second to the first century B.C. These pavements belonged to a domestic unit that was built during the second century B.C. and was in use until the fourth century A.D.<sup>252</sup>

Remains of walls and other finds associated with these floors have been unearthed in the Franciscan excavations underneath the Byzantine octagon. The truncated walls of a total of twelve small habitations encompassing a large room (room 1) were brought to light.<sup>253</sup> In fact, it seems as if they were intentionally preserved by the architect of the octagon who, instead of obliterating the previous edifices completely, took time to fill in earth round about them to preserve them substantially for all posterity.<sup>254</sup> The truncated walls of these edifices were simply buried with all their pavements just as they were at the time when the construction of the Byzantine octagon commenced.<sup>255</sup> Further evidence supporting this theory of intentional preservation is a small bridge from the Late Byzantine period which was discovered as built over a sill belonging to one of the buildings buried beneath the octagon. This sill would have been built into the foundations of the octagon and thus lost forever if it were not for the bridge placed there by the architect.<sup>256</sup> He also took care to place the central octagon directly above room 1 exactly following its very dimensions.<sup>257</sup> This raises the question why the architect of the octagonal church did employ such an effort to preserve the remnants of these private dwellings characterized by Corbo as being “extremely poor.”<sup>258</sup> What was so important about these poor structures and especially about room 1 above which the central octagon was sited? Presumably these buildings and especially room 1 must have been of a special importance since such an effort was expended in preserving them. The Franciscan excavators state that they are indebted to this unknown architect through whose efforts it was possible “to retrace and bring to light among the buildings, undoubtedly of the Byzantine church and its dependencies, other older buildings with completely different characteristics.”<sup>259</sup> The twelve dwellings which were excavated beneath the octagonal church were, as aforementioned, erected during the second century B.C. and constituted together with room 1 the lowest of three principal strata identified by Corbo and Loffreda. The second stratum was of structures stemming from the fourth century A.D. and belonging to the so-called *domus-ecclesiae*. Above these remnants lay the ruins of the octagonal church dated by its

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<sup>252</sup> Cf. Loffreda 1990, *Dedicatio*, 73–74.

<sup>253</sup> Cf. CORBO - LOFFREDA - BUSHELL 1969, *New Memoirs*, 23.

<sup>254</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>255</sup> Cf. CORBO - SALLER 1969, *The house*, 35.

<sup>256</sup> Cf. CORBO - LOFFREDA - BUSHELL 1969, *New Memoirs*, 22.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, 21–22.

<sup>258</sup> Cf. CORBO - SALLER 1969, *The house*, 35.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*

excavators to the second half of the fifth century A.D. constituting stratum three. Apart from these three main strata many other so-called intermediary levels indicating periods of habitation were found.<sup>260</sup>

## **6.2 The first century A.D. dwellings**

At the outset of our description of the oldest structures found underneath the octagon we should be aware that the excavators themselves admitted that “it is not always easy to recognize the original distribution of the loci which we found owing to the transformation of the loci in the venerated house in the complex of the house church and more so after the imposition of the network of foundations of the rings of the Byzantine church.”<sup>261</sup> As mentioned above, when we include room 1, the remnants of a total of 13 “extremely poor” dwellings were brought to light (see fig. 10). Let us now have a closer look at the evidence bearing witness to this “extreme poverty”.

### **6.2.1 The walls**

The walls from the late Hellenistic and Early Roman period were all constructed out of undressed basalt stones collected from the lakeshore and from the surrounding fields where these stones are abundant to this very day.<sup>262</sup> No true foundations surfaced during the excavations and thus it seems that the walls were built straight on the tamped and leveled ground.<sup>263</sup> Corbo relates that “the poverty of the proprietors of these houses did not permit the least fashioning of these stones”.<sup>264</sup> The stones were all large, some described by the excavators as huge and they were all laid dry without the use of mortar (see fig. 11).<sup>265</sup> Corbo states that the stones might have been bound by earth which was made into paste, but that it is difficult to confirm since the buildings have been buried for several centuries under layers of earth. In fact, the immediate impression which they received after they had uncovered the walls and examined them closely was that “every form of paste was lacking”.<sup>266</sup> It seems that a vast majority of the scholars are not taking this fact into account since they tend to describe the walls of these houses in Capharnaum as bound with

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<sup>260</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1990, *Dedicatio*, 73–74.

<sup>261</sup> Cf. CORBO - SALLER 1969, *The house*, 39.

<sup>262</sup> Cf. Cf. *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>263</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering*, 20.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>265</sup> Cf. CORBO - LOFFREDA - BUSHELL 1969, *New Memoirs*, 23.

<sup>266</sup> CORBO - SALLER 1969, *The house*, 37.



mud, earth or clay.<sup>267</sup> In fact even Loffreda, in some of his later publications, states that mud was used to fasten the stones.<sup>268</sup> Based on the most recent excavations, we can conclude with that the interstices which were formed between the stones were filled in with pebbles in order to make the walls more secure and that even mud may have been employed.<sup>269</sup> The stones that were used to build the walls were carefully stacked and aligned without being dressed or worked. They were simply being used as they were found strewn all about.<sup>270</sup> Walls so constructed could never have been able to hold a second story nor could they have supported heavy-roofing in the form of masonry nor could they have carried a vault.<sup>271</sup> This contention is further strengthened by the total absence of stones shaped as arch or vault pieces from the period in question.<sup>272</sup>

### 6.2.2 *The roofs*

No remains of the roofs of these houses have been found; but based on the construction and thickness of the walls, everything seems to indicate that the roofs were fashioned out of wooden beams bearing rods (branches or reeds) protecting them from humidity (see fig. 12).<sup>273</sup> These rods were placed across, side by side, and then covered with a mixture of mud and straw for further insulation. In order to preserve the roofs, new layers of mud and straw had to be added annually and they were subsequently compacted either by the use of a stone roller or by foot. In fact, the maintenance of the roof determined the lifetime of a house. If the roof was well maintained it could last up to seventy or even eighty years before it was taken down and replaced by a new roof which was constructed as soon as the supporting walls had been repaired.<sup>274</sup> The flat-roofed house seems to have been the most common type in Palestine in antiquity.<sup>275</sup>

Houses having arched or vaulted roofs made of dressed stones have also been found in Palestine, the oldest ones date from the third to first century B.C. Only the most affluent

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<sup>267</sup> Cf. REED 2002, *Archaeology*, 159. TAYLOR 1989–1990, “Capernaum.,” in: BAIAS (9), 14. NUN, M.: Has Bethsaida Finally Been Found?, in: *Jerusalem Perspective* 54 (1998), 28.

<sup>268</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1982, A visit to, 22. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering*, 20.

<sup>269</sup> Cf. CORBO - SALLER 1969, *The house*, 37. STRANGE - SHANKS 1982, “Has the house.,” in: BAR (6), 34. DEVRIES 1997, *Cities*, 274.

<sup>270</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>271</sup> Cf. CORBO - SALLER 1969, *The house*, 37.

<sup>272</sup> Cf. REED 2002, *Archaeology*, 159.

<sup>273</sup> Cf. CORBO - SALLER 1969, *The house*, 37.

<sup>274</sup> Cf. BOTHA 1998, “Houses,” in: N-JNTSSA (1), 42.

<sup>275</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 43. The roof of the house of Simon the Tanner in Jaffa, on which St. Peter was praying when the messengers from Cornelius arrived (Acts 10, 9), was, according to John Mcray, of the same type as the roof in Capharnaum. Cf. MCRA Y 1991, *Archaeology*, 164.

part of the population in Palestine could have afforded such a luxury. These building techniques were, for instance, employed by Herod the Great's builders when constructing manor houses. It hardly comes as a surprise that the vaulted roofs never became a substitute for the far less expensive and far more common flat roofs. So far we have only mentioned the kind of flat roof which was covered with straw and mud, but there were also other types of flat roofs. Some houses had roofs of cut basalt slabs that could be up to 3 or 4 meters long and weighing from 100 to 400 kilograms. The advantage with this kind of roof was that it had an almost infinite lifetime, the downside, however, was that the length of the stone slabs together with sufficiently strong support limited the width of the rooms, not to mention all the workers and implements needed for the transportation and the placement of the stone slabs.<sup>276</sup> Another type of flat roofs was a pitched roof covered with fired pottery tiles. These tiled roofs, based on the sparse archaeological evidence to date, seem to have been rather uncommon in Roman Palestine. Fired pottery roof tiles were most likely introduced in Palestine by the Roman army at the close of the first century A.D.<sup>277</sup> One of the small number of fired pottery roof tile finds from the Roman Period was made in En Yael, which is situated in the vicinity of Jerusalem, where the archaeologists, during the excavation of a Roman villa, came across roof tiles bearing the stamp of the Tenth Legion enabling them to date them to the late second century A.D.<sup>278</sup>

The total absence of roof tiles from the Roman period in Capharnaum is significant to us since it allows us to correct a mistake committed by Luke, when relating the healing of the paralytic who was let down through the roof of St. Peter's house in Capharnaum. Luke speaks of a tiled roof (ο' keramoj) through which the paralytic was lowered<sup>279</sup> as opposed to Mark who describes the roof as being uncovered and broken through by the men carrying the paralytic on a stretcher.<sup>280</sup> It has been widely accepted that Mark must have had a thatched roof in mind when referring to the roof as being broken through by digging a hole. Marks's account is thus consistent with the Italian excavators' contention that the roofs must have been fashioned out of beams and branches being covered with

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<sup>276</sup> "Heavy stones were carried by workers using ropes and strips of cloth; transport animals were used for long distance hauling. Ropes, hoists and winches were used to position such large and heavy stones". BOTHA 1998, "Houses," in: N-JNTSSA (1), footnote 12 on page 42.

<sup>277</sup> Cf. BOTHA 1998, "Houses," in: N-JNTSSA (1), footnote 13 on page 43.

<sup>278</sup> Cf. EDELSTEIN, G.: What's a Roman Villa Doing Outside Jerusalem, in: *Biblical Archaeology Review* 16/6 (1990), 40.

<sup>279</sup> Cf. Lk 5,19.

<sup>280</sup> Cf. Mk 2,5.

straw and mud.<sup>281</sup> “The episode of the paralytic let down from the room roof in front of the Lord in the house of Capernaum makes one think precisely of a roof of this kind which which could have been undone at one point in a few minutes without causing damage to the many people assembled in the house”.<sup>282</sup> Corbo makes a most interesting point by mentioning that no one was injured when the roof was broken through. One can only imagine the consequences that breaking through a tiled roof would have for the crowd that was gathered underneath it. Furthermore, the walls unearthed in these excavations could not possibly have supported a tiled roof. Taking into account that ceramic tiles were not introduced to Palestine prior to the late first century A.D. a conclusion that the roof could not have been tiled seems incontestable.<sup>283</sup> This, however, raises the question why Luke wrongly refers to a tiled instead of a thatched roof? According to an ancient tradition, which goes back to the second century A.D., Luke was a native of Antioch in Syria writing his gospel for a predominantly Gentile-Christian community. His city background or the city background of the intended recipients of his gospel appears to have been reflected in his choice of words since people living in an urban setting were more familiar with tiled roofs than with thatched roofs.<sup>284</sup> According to J. L. Reed “Mark’s ‘they dug through the roof’ (Mk 2, 5) made no sense in Luke’s urban setting where tiles were common.”<sup>285</sup> The men carrying the paralytic must have used a flight of stairs in order to reach the house-roof. Actually, remnants of these stairs leading from the courtyard to the roof of the house have been found by the Franciscans.<sup>286</sup> Based on these remnants, Loffreda estimated the height of the rooms at less than 3 meters.<sup>287</sup>

Outdoor stairs bear witness to the fact that these dwellings were poor, since indoor stairs, though not uncommon at the time, appear to have characterized the dwellings of the

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<sup>281</sup> Cf. CORBO - LOFFREDA - BUSHELL 1969, *New Memoirs*, 24. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering.*, 72. CHARLESWORTH, J. H., WEAVER, W. P.: *What has Archaeology to do with Faith?* Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992, 9; STRANGE - SHANKS 1982, “Has the house,,” in: BAR (6), 34. NUN 1998, “Has Bethsaida,,” in: JP (54), 28. H. Keith Beebe is one of the few scholars disputing this by claiming that such a roof would not have been substantial enough to support the men carrying the paralytic. He posits an arch and slab roof instead but the examples presented by him are from several centuries later. Cf. MCRAE 1991, *Archaeology*, endnote 56 on page 386. Needed to be mentioned in this connection is that the majority of the scholars do not seem to have attached any importance to H. Keith Beebe’s contention and actually assert that the flat roofs served as working places for which they were ideal and that they furthermore presumably doubled as sleeping places during the hot summer months. Cf. MEYERS - STRANGE 1981, *Archaeology*, 58. BOTHA 1998, “Houses,,” in: N-JNTSSA (1), 45.

<sup>282</sup> CORBO - SALLER 1969, *The house*, 37.

<sup>283</sup> Cf. BOTHA 1998, “Houses,,” in: N-JNTSSA (1), 43 footnote 13.

<sup>284</sup> Cf. FEINBERG-VAMOSH, M.: *Daily Life at the Time of Jesus*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001, 44.

<sup>285</sup> REED 2002, *Archaeology*, 159.

<sup>286</sup> Cf. CORBO 1975, *Cafarnaon I*, 77.

<sup>287</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1982, *A visit to*, 22.

wealthy.<sup>288</sup> Indoor stairs were taking up a lot of roofed space; and thus, it seems perfectly reasonable that the poor inhabitants of Capharnaum used the already limited indoor space in a more effective fashion and constructed outdoor staircases in the courtyard.

### 6.2.3 *The floors*

Several floors dating from the late second century B.C. to the first century A.D. were brought to light. The lowest and thus oldest levels excavated revealed floors that were either fashioned out of beaten earth, which had blackened by ashes and dampness, or out of black basalt pebbles. In the higher superimposed levels, irregular undressed cobblestones of black basalt were employed as paving-stones.<sup>289</sup> These rough pavements which imitated the paving of the Roman roads served as a protection against the abundant humidity of the subsoil due to infiltration of water from the nearby lake. Their insulational effect is the reason they tended to be preferred to the above-mentioned floors of tamped blackened earth which were found both on some of the lower levels as well as on some of the higher levels.<sup>290</sup>

Botha relates that although the most common flooring in first century Galilee was either tamped earth or stone slabs, a considerable number of houses excavated throughout Galilee display parts of floors surfaced with well-smoothed plaster. With the exception of the aforementioned floors of crushed limestone unearthed in room no. 1, together with a floor uncovered in trench XIX underneath the white limestone synagogue, plastered floors from the period in question are totally wanting on the Franciscan side of Capharnaum which bears witness to their poor financial situation. The excavations on the Greek Orthodox property, however, provide us with a totally different picture. During the course of these excavations several plastered floors stemming from the first century A.D. came to light and thus it seems reasonable to assume that the wealthier inhabitants of Capharnaum resided there. We will give a thorough report on these finds later in a separate chapter.

Almost all the floorbeds that surfaced in these excavations were made of earth on which the floors of roundish black basalt stones rested. Corbo notes that some of the excavated basalt floors were covered with a layer of earth being yellowish in color.<sup>291</sup> A characteristic feature of these floors are the large and relatively deep interstices between

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<sup>288</sup> Cf. BOTHA 1998, "Houses," in: N-JNTSSA (1), 43.

<sup>289</sup> Cf. CORBO - LOFFREDA - BUSHHELL 1969, *New Memoirs*, 24.

<sup>290</sup> Cf. 39.

<sup>291</sup> Cf. CORBO 1992, "Capernaum," in: ABD, 867.

the rough and uneven cobblestones, making it easier for us to place the Gospel parable of the lost drachma, as recorded in Luke 15, 8–10, into its rightful context (see fig. 13). One can imagine that a coin could easily fall in the interstices of such a floor.<sup>292</sup> In fact in some of these interstices some coins were actually found by the excavators along with pottery sherds.<sup>293</sup> Furthermore the excavations revealed that the rooms which, at least in the rainy season served as shelters, had series of small windows which always opened onto the inner courtyard and never on to the streets.<sup>294</sup> They were formed of jambs which were rested on stylobate walls and supported crudely carved architraves.<sup>295</sup> The fact that the windows provided the rooms with only a limited amount of light might explain why the women in the above-mentioned parable lit her lamp when searching for her lost coin. All the evidence seems to point to the fact that this was most likely the kind of floor Jesus had in mind when narrating the parable of the lost Drachma since a coin could easily fall in the interstices of such a floor and become basically invisible in the dimly lighted room.<sup>296</sup>

#### 6.2.4 *The doors*

Apparently none of the internal openings, both the one ones leading to the courtyards and the ones connecting the different rooms clustering the courtyards, had doors.<sup>297</sup> The total absence of door-jambs in all the internal openings that were uncovered led the excavators to reach the conclusion that inside doors were not present at Capernaum.<sup>298</sup> However, in the doorways from which the street was reached, the Italian archaeologists encountered hewn sills fashioned out of ashlar and door-jambs with pins still *in situ*.<sup>299</sup> Noteworthy is the fact that these long basalt blocks used as sills and door jambs are, according to Corbo, the only stones used in the construction of these habitations that have been worked.<sup>300</sup> These door jambs, as J. L. Reed points out, however, are inferior both in quality and sturdiness to those monolithic door frames that have been brought to light at the so-called “House of the Lintel” in the Upper Galilean village of Meiron or at a

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<sup>292</sup> Cf. CORBO - SALLER 1969, *The house*, 39.

<sup>293</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>294</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering*, 21. MEYERS - STRANGE 1981, *Archaeology*, 59.

<sup>295</sup> Cf. CORBO 1992, “Capernaum,” in: ABD, 867.

<sup>296</sup> Cf. ROUSSEAU, J. J., ARAV, R.: *Jesus and His World - an Archaeological and Cultural Dictionary*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995, 45–46. MCRAVY 1991, *Archaeology*, 81.

<sup>297</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1982, *A visit to*, 22. LOFFREDA 1981, *Capernaum* in: BS, 5.

<sup>298</sup> Cf. NUN 1998, “Has Bethsaida,” in: JP (54), 28.

<sup>299</sup> Cf. CORBO 1992, “Capernaum,” in: ABD, 867.

<sup>300</sup> Cf. CORBO–LOFFREDA - BUSHELL 1969, *New Memoirs*, 24. CORBO 1975, *Capernaum I.*, 77.

house in the Galilean village of Horvat Susita, and even more inferior to those found in the urban houses at Sepphoris or in the Herodian Quarters in Jerusalem.<sup>301</sup>

The thresholds unearthed in the Capharnaum excavations were all made in the same fashion with small holes at the two extremities and a notch in the center for the latch from which Corbo deduces that the wooden door must have been folding (see fig. 14). In one of the rooms excavated (room 15) beneath the octagon, a ring with a nail which might have belonged to the door was found in front of the threshold.<sup>302</sup> Each of the “insula-type houses” had only one exit to the street and thus only one door which could be opened and closed at leisure. All the interior openings, however, remained unclosed.<sup>303</sup> J. L. Reed surmises that because the door-jambes are totally missing in the internal openings, wooden beams probably were used instead for framing the opening.<sup>304</sup> Since the crudely fashioned openings were not equipped with any apparent closing mechanism, J. L. Reed suggests that they might have been covered with curtains or straw mats.<sup>305</sup>

### 6.2.5 *The courtyards*

Some of the internal openings lead to the courtyards around which the habitations were structured (see fig. 10 and 12). These houses are, referred to by the various authors, as “complex courtyard houses”<sup>306</sup> or “insula-type houses”.<sup>307</sup> The excavations in the Franciscan section revealed that these “insula-type houses” could have as many as three courtyards.<sup>308</sup> The dwellings were most commonly organized around two spacious interior courtyards, as was customary in Early Roman Palestine.<sup>309</sup> The house of St. Peter was no exception, having a largish L-shaped courtyard situated on the northern side and an even larger courtyard situated on the southern side of the *insula* (see fig. 10). According to Loffreda, the L-shaped courtyard, which was reached directly from the outside entrance located on the eastern side, covered an area of approximately 84 square meters<sup>310</sup> while the

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<sup>301</sup> Cf. REED 2002, *Archaeology*, 159.

<sup>302</sup> Cf. CORBO - SALLER 1969, *The house*, 39.

<sup>303</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1981, *Capernaum* in: BS, 5; CORBO 1975, *Cafarnaon 1.*, 77.

NUN 1998, “Has Bethsaida,” in: JP (54), 28.

<sup>304</sup> Cf. REED 2002, *Archaeology*, 159.

<sup>305</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>306</sup> Cf. BOTHA 1998, “Houses,” in: N-JNTSSA (1), 61–63. HIRSCHFELD, Y., *The Palestinian dwelling in the Roman-Byzantine period*, Franciscan Printing Press, Jerusalem 1995, 57.

<sup>307</sup> Cf. ROUSSEAU–ARAV 1995, *Jesus and His World.*, 45.

<sup>308</sup> Cf. CORBO 1992, “Capernaum,” in: ABD, 867.

<sup>309</sup> Cf. STRANGE - SHANKS 1982, “Has the house.,” in: BAR (6), 34.

<sup>310</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering*, 52.

area of the southern courtyard was approximately 123 square meters.<sup>311</sup> In addition to these two rather spacious courtyards, a third, considerably smaller courtyard was located in the northwestern corner of the *insula*.<sup>312</sup> It seems to have been common in Capharnaum that some of the dwellings had other, smaller courtyards on the periphery of the *insula*.<sup>313</sup> Just as a side note, Corbo usually refers to the small courtyards with the term *cortiletto*. Confusingly enough, however, in his final report, he regards locus 18 as being a *cortiletto*<sup>314</sup> while Loffreda, in one of his publications, clearly considers it as a part of the so-called L-shaped courtyard.<sup>315</sup> Furthermore, locus 14, which at present is still of a somewhat indeterminable nature,<sup>316</sup> is also labeled a *cortiletto* by Virgilio C. Corbo.<sup>317</sup>

The main open courtyard, which in *Insula I* was in the shape of an L, apparently was the focal point of the “insula-type house”.<sup>318</sup> An average summertime temperature of around 31°C dictated its conspicuous size in comparison to the small roofed rooms and it seems that the courtyard functioned as the house’s external dimension for which each square centimeter must have been highly valued by its inhabitants. As a matter of fact, most of the daily life activities were conducted in the courtyard while the rooms surrounding it, apart from being employed as sleeping shelters in the rainy season, as mentioned above, merely served throughout the rest of the year as a place where the inhabitants kept their personal belongings.<sup>319</sup>

Hirschfeld considers the open central courtyard as being an “integral part of the house”<sup>320</sup> and Botha does not hesitate to refer to it as “the most characteristic feature of Palestinian dwellings.”<sup>321</sup> It seems beyond all doubt that the unroofed central courtyard must be regarded as an organically combined unit of the Early Roman period “insula-type” houses in Palestine and as the defining area of the basic residential unit.<sup>322</sup> The fact that a number of roofed rooms shared one courtyard clearly suggests that several families lived

<sup>311</sup> Cf. CORBO 1975, *Cafarnao I.*, Tav. IX (Gli edifici dell’*insula* sacra nel primo periodo romano.)

<sup>312</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering*, 53.

<sup>313</sup> Cf. “Capernaum,” in: NEUSNER, J., GREEN, S. W. (ed.): *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period 450 B.C.E. to 600 C.E.* vol. 1, New York: Macmillian Library Reference USA, 1996, 113

<sup>314</sup> Cf. CORBO 1975, *Cafarnao I.*, 99–100.

<sup>315</sup> Loffreda must have included locus 18 into the calculation when reaching an area size of 84 square meters for the L-shaped courtyard. Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering*, 52. Corbo is evidently not considering locus 18 as belonging to the L-shaped courtyard, according to him the total area of the courtyard was approximately 70 square meters and included merely loci 5, 6, 16 and 17. Cf. CORBO 1975, *Cafarnao I.*, 104.

<sup>316</sup> Cf. CORBO - SALLER 1969, *The house*, 41.

<sup>317</sup> Cf. CORBO 1975, *Cafarnao I.*, 103.

<sup>318</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering*, 21.

<sup>319</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>320</sup> HIRSCHFELD 1995, *The Palestinian*, 290.

<sup>321</sup> BOTHA 1998, “Houses,” in: N-JNTSSA (1), 44.

<sup>322</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

together around it in a patriarchal fashion.<sup>323</sup> Thus the excavations clearly confirmed what is recorded in the Gospels that Peter's house was occupied by two other families in addition to Peter's own family, namely the families of his mother-in-law<sup>324</sup> and of his brother Andrew.<sup>325</sup> Needed to be said is that the house of Peter was not an exception in any way since this was the standard pattern of all the private houses being brought to light in the living quarters of Capharnaum.<sup>326</sup> The impressive size of these houses is by no means indicative of the inhabitants being wealthy.<sup>327</sup> On the contrary, it actually seems that these houses tended to develop from smaller units and that they were part of a survival strategy where several rather poor families congregated together and provided each other mutual support when sharing both living and working space, not to mention all the quotidian chores.<sup>328</sup>

All the archaeological finds that were unearthed in the courtyard during the course of the Franciscan excavations support the contention that the central courtyard served both as the families' kitchen<sup>329</sup> as well as the main working area for whatever industry the house-proprietors were engaged in.<sup>330</sup> Domestic installations such as *taboun* ovens, grinding stones and hand-mills unearthed in the Franciscan excavations were always located in the courtyard. It seems that all the cooking and baking of bread took place in the courtyard and that it rightfully deserves to be called the families' kitchen.<sup>331</sup> The above mentioned implements together with mortars and bowls, mostly of basalt stone, were, for the greater part, made in Capharnaum itself based on the finds of several unfinished artifacts.<sup>332</sup> These objects were highly treasured<sup>332</sup> and were thus usually passed down from one generation to the other.<sup>333</sup>

*Taboun* ovens were quite common in the Levant having a round shape with a diameter regularly exceeding 50 centimeters.<sup>334</sup> Both the bottom and the sides were fashioned of basalt stones. The sides, for their own part, were commonly covered with a

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<sup>323</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1985, A visit to, 22. LOFFREDA 1981, *Capernaum* in: BS, 5. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering*, 52. The families living together were usually conjugal families although in some cases, as Botha notes, they were simply families 'working together' without being related. See BOTHA 1998, "Houses," in: N-JNTSSA (1), 62.

<sup>324</sup> Cf. Mk 1,30.

<sup>325</sup> Cf. Mk 1,29.

<sup>326</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering*, 71.

<sup>327</sup> Cf. BOTHA 1998, "Houses," in: N-JNTSSA (1), 62–63, HIRSCHFELD 1995, *The Palestinian*, 50–51.

<sup>328</sup> Cf. BOTHA 1998, "Houses," in: N-JNTSSA (1), 45–46.

<sup>329</sup> Cf. STRANGE - SHANKS 1982, "Has the house.," in: BAR (6), 31.

<sup>330</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>331</sup> Cf. NUN 1998, "Has Bethsaida," in: JP (54), 28.

<sup>332</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering*, 20.

<sup>333</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>334</sup> Cf. CORBO 1975, *Cafarnaon I.*, 77.



layer of refractory (fire-proof) earth varying in thickness from 1 to 3 centimeters.<sup>335</sup> In the L-shaped courtyard the *taboun* oven, which was excavated on the southern side in locus 17 adjacent to the wall, had a diameter of 63 centimeters.<sup>336</sup> To the northeast of it, in its immediate vicinity, the excavators came across a deposit of ashes. Traces of ashes were also found elsewhere in the *insula* such as in room no. 7. Unfortunately it seems that these finds have not been subjected to any technical analysis. This means that important data have been irretrievably lost, provided that they have not been preserved for future analysis. Apart from the *taboun* in locus 17, two other remains of ovens were unearthed in the same courtyard. The one situated in locus 6 stems from the Hellenistic period based on the fact that the stone pavement into which the oven was sunk produced only Hellenistic sherds.<sup>337</sup> Abutting the remains of the western wall's foundations in locus 18 were the few extant remnants of what used to be a *taboun* oven.<sup>338</sup>

Loffreda is of the opinion that the courtyard, besides serving as a kitchen and a working place, also functioned as a sleeping place, at least during the summertime. People would sleep on straw mats stretched out on the floor.<sup>339</sup> Beds did exist at the time in Palestine but these were only to be found in Roman-style houses owned by the wealthy citizens who had small bedsteads fashioned of wood or even bronze which were covered by mats. Most of them were singles, but some married couples had double beds (*lecti geniales*).<sup>340</sup> Needless to say, none such were excavated in early-Roman Capernaum.

In the main courtyard, atop the basalt stone pavement C, were unearthed fragments of jars and pots which were common in Palestine in the Late-Hellenistic period and at the beginning of the Roman period.<sup>341</sup> On the superimposed basalt stone pavement B, numerous pottery sherds were discovered dated by Loffreda to the first and third centuries A.D. Similar finds were made inside the dwellings where the occupational levels from the second century B.C. to the late first century A.D. were all made up of layers of beaten earth mixed with fragments of house-wares such as jars, bowls, cooking pots, lamps, pans, plates, pitchers, cups and amphorae (see fig. 15).<sup>342</sup> As Corbo relates, in addition to the

<sup>335</sup> Cf. CORBO - SALLER 1969, *The house*, 50.

<sup>336</sup> Cf. Ibid. For finds of pottery sherds around this oven see: LOFFREDA 1974, *Cafarnao II*, 107–108.

<sup>337</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering*, 55. LOFFREDA 2005, *Cafarnao V*, 58–59.

<sup>338</sup> Cf. CORBO - SALLER 1969, *The house*, 50.

<sup>339</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering*, 21.

<sup>340</sup> Cf. MCRAE 1991, *Archaeology*, 82.

<sup>341</sup> The pots and jars found on this level belong to the class designated by the Franciscan archaeological ceramicist Loffreda as class F. The ones in question were of the types F1 and F2. LOFFREDA 1974, *Cafarnao II*, 63, 105.

<sup>342</sup> Cf. CORBO 1992, "Capernaum," in: ABD, 867. LOFFREDA 1990, *Dedicatio.*, 74; LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering*, 55. STRANGE - SHANKS 1982, "Has the house.," in: BAR (6), 34.

pottery, a number of black basalt vessels and containers of various sizes and forms surfaced during the course of the excavations. White chalk vessels also known as Herodian stone vessels for holding water were also a common part of each domestic unit is furnishings.<sup>343</sup> Besides being clearly indicative of Jewish ethnicity, the chalk vessels unearthed in Capharnaum tell their owners' lower socio-economic status since they are all either handmade or turned on a small pottery wheel. The roughly fashioned Herodian chalk vessels which were brought to light in Capharnaum stand in stark contrast to the expensive large lathe turned chalk vessels found in Jerusalem among several other sites all over Palestine.<sup>344</sup> J. L. Reed concludes that "the material culture inside the rooms from the Late Hellenistic and Early Roman Periods bespeaks a simple existence that one would expect in a fishing and agricultural village."<sup>345</sup>

According to Hirschfeld, installations for keeping animals and storing their fodder were usually located in the courtyard.<sup>346</sup> In the so-called House of St. Peter the southern courtyard is believed to have served this purpose.<sup>347</sup> It may also have partly functioned as an additional working area.<sup>348</sup> J. F. Strange notes that, regrettably, no bones were saved in these excavations and that such a decision must be called in question.<sup>349</sup> One can only wonder how it is possible that the excavators allowed such a gross mistake to happen. Animal bones are crucial when it comes to determining both the diets and religious beliefs of their inhabitants. Imagine, for instance, the impact pork bone finds would have on the research of first century A.D. Capharnaum.

Allegedly, security and seclusion from passersby and street life in general were highly valued and thus this concern for privacy is by some scholars believed to have been one of the major features of the ancient Palestinian dwelling culture.<sup>350</sup> Hirschfeld states "the courtyard had the important function of serving as a barrier between the public and private domains".<sup>351</sup> Hirschfeld is convinced that regardless whether the house-proprietors were affluent or poor, none of them would relinquish the virtues and comfort of having a courtyard beside or inside their houses.<sup>352</sup> However, the average height of the courtyard's

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<sup>343</sup> Cf. CORBO 1992, "Capernaum," in: ABD, 867. REED 2002, *Archaeology*, 160.

<sup>344</sup> Cf. REED 2002, *Archaeology*, 160.

<sup>345</sup> REED 2002, *Archaeology*, 160.

<sup>346</sup> Cf. HIRSCHFELD 1995, *The Palestinian*, 290.

<sup>347</sup> Cf. STRANGE - SHANKS 1982, "Has the house," in: BAR (6), 31.

<sup>348</sup> Cf. MCRAY 1991, *Archaeology*, 165.

<sup>349</sup> Cf. STRANGE 1977, "The Capernaum and Herodium Publications," in: BASOR (226), 66.

<sup>350</sup> Cf. REED 2002, *Archaeology*, 157. HIRSCHFELD 1995, *The Palestinian*, 290.

<sup>351</sup> HIRSCHFELD 1995, *The Palestinian*, 290.

<sup>352</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

walls was approximately 1 meter and hardly ever exceeded 1.5 meters. Moreover, the rooftops of the houses doubled as sleeping quarters and were apparently widely used as such.<sup>353</sup> By virtue of this, it seems that “the concealment from the public eye of any activity which takes place in the yard is a lost cause; it would be better to describe the ancient courtyard as ‘semi-private,’ a sort of fortuitous privacy”.<sup>354</sup>

In connection with the healing of Simon Peter’s mother-in-law and the subsequent curing of people sick with various diseases and the casting out of demons of those being possessed, we read in the Gospel according to Mark that “the whole town was gathered at the door”.<sup>355</sup> That the entire town came crowding around the door clearly indicates that a large, open space must have been located in front of the main entrance. During the excavations, the presence of such an open space was vindicated by the Franciscan excavators when they brought to light exactly where one would expect that to find it, i.e. between the street and the doorway from which the L-shaped courtyard could be reached.<sup>356</sup> Apart from a fire space, which was discovered in the irregularly shaped open space adjacent to the northern wall of room 1, no traces of habitations were found prior to the erection of the so-called sacred precinct in the late fourth century A.D.<sup>357</sup> The fire place was constructed antecedent to the fourth century A.D. and it is in fact included in Corbo and Loffreda’s isometric drawings of *Insula I* from the time of Jesus.<sup>358</sup>

### 6.2.6 *The fish-hooks*

A discovery which naturally evoked attention was the find of two iron fish-hooks inside the house of St. Peter (see fig. 16).<sup>359</sup> Automatically some regarded this as incontestable proof that the house’s original inhabitants engaged in fishing and considering who the presumed inhabitants of this dwelling were, one can only imagine the great impact this find could have on the verification of the Gospel’s truthfulness, at least with respect to its description of Peter and James as fishermen. John J. Rousseau and Rami Arav are among those scholars who jump to this conclusion when they state that: “Artifacts such as

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<sup>353</sup> Cf. BOTHA 1998, “Houses,” in: N-JNTSSA (1), 44–46.

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>355</sup> Mk 1,33. Cf. Mk 1,29–34; Mt 8,14–17; Lk 4,38–41.

<sup>356</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering*, 52–54, 71. CORBO 1992, “Capernaum,” in: ABD, 867. CORBO - SALLER 1969, *The house*, 39.

<sup>357</sup> Cf. CORBO - SALLER 1969, *The house*, 24, 31–32.

<sup>358</sup> Cf. CORBO 1975, *Cafarnaon I.*, tavola X. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering*, 53.

<sup>359</sup> Cf. CORBO 1975, *Cafarnaon I.*, 97. CORBO - SALLER 1969, *The house*, 69–70. CORBO - LOFFREDA - BUSHHELL 1969, *New Memoirs*, 30. LOFFREDA 1982, *A visit to*, 28. NUN 1998, “Has Bethsaida,” in: JP (54), 28. STRANGE - SHANKS 1982, “Has the house.,” in: BAR (6), 37.

Herodian coins, Herodian lamps and fish hooks discovered in the so-called House of Peter show that the house was occupied as early as the first century B.C. and that people involved in fishing lived in or around the house.”<sup>360</sup> However they can only have that impact provided that they really stem either from the first century B.C. or from the first century A.D. which they definitely do not if one is to believe Stanislaw Loffreda. He has, with certainty, assigned a second half of the fourth century A.D. date to them.<sup>361</sup> He also points out that only two hooks were found, as opposed to J. L. Reed, who seems to exaggerate greatly when contending that “fishhooks were strewn about”<sup>362</sup> in order to convey to his readers the impression that fish hooks were ubiquitous in the ruins of ancient Capharnaum. In fact the two fishing hooks did not have to have belonged to the inhabitants of the *insula sacra* at all, at least if one is to believe Joan Taylor who conjectures that they could just as well have been placed there by pilgrims paying this sacred site a visit and, through this gesture, wishing to call to remembrance the activity of Saint Peter.<sup>363</sup> Be that as it may, we can with certainty state that these fishing hooks can not prove that the house’s inhabitants, neither former nor latter, were indeed fishermen. They can merely generate guesses that they were somehow involved in fishing.

### **6.3 The white limestone synagogue**

Some 30 meters north of the octagonal church, underneath which *Insula I* was unearthed, stands the well-preserved imposing remains of what by many is characterized as the queen of the Galilean synagogues and a splendid archaeological masterpiece without peer (see fig. 17 and 18). Robinson, upon visiting Capharnaum in 1838, totally enchanted by the ruins of the magnificent synagogue, claimed it surpassed everything that he had seen hitherto in Palestine. It is no wonder, to this very day that the amazing ornaments in the form of lintels, cornices, friezes and capitals with depictions of typical Jewish symbols such as incense shovels, the “star of Solomon”, the “menorah”, the “shofar” (a trumpet which was fashioned out a ram’s horn and used during the Jewish feast of Rosh Hashanah and at the end of Yom Kippur) the “*lulav*” (the palm frond used during the Jewish festival of the Tabernacles) and the “holy Ark” together with depictions of pomegranates, rosettes, dates, palm-trees and grape clusters mixed with symbols borrowed from other cultures

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<sup>360</sup> ROUSSEAU–ARAV 1995, *Jesus and His World.*, 40. Cf. DEVRIES 1997, *Cities*, 274.

<sup>361</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1974, *Cafarnaon II*, 114.

<sup>362</sup> REED 2002, *Archaeology*, 157.

<sup>363</sup> Cf. TAYLOR 1989–1990, “Capernaum.,” in: BAIAS (9), 14.

such as lions, eagles, cupids, bulls and mythological animals still offer a sight which leaves the visitors spellbound.<sup>364</sup>

The surviving synagogue is constructed almost entirely of large limestone blocks some weighing up to 4 tons and were transported to the site from quite distant quarries.<sup>365</sup> It consists of a total of four units, namely the prayer hall designated A by the excavators, the eastern courtyard (B), the southern porch (C) and a side-room (D) abutting the outer northwestern corner of the prayer hall (see fig. 19). It is inferior in quality built as it was of blocks of black basalt and probably employed as a store-room. The prayer hall, with its façade facing south towards Jerusalem, is rectangular in ground plan with interior sides measuring 23 meters from north to south and 17.28 meters from east to west.<sup>366</sup> Painted plaster and sophisticated stuccoes adorned the inner faces of the walls of the prayer hall.<sup>367</sup>

This outstanding synagogue was excavated by the Germans Kohl and Watzinger, who in 1905, were in charge of excavations inside the synagogue, dated to the late second-early third century A.D. They based their dating of the synagogue mainly on stylistic and historical considerations and the bulk of the scholars, closely following the excavations being conducted by the Germans and subsequently being taken over by the Franciscans, accepted Kohl and Watzinger's theory for the dating of the Capharnaum synagogue.<sup>368</sup> These theories are, according to Corbo and Loffreda, no longer tenable, and they contend that the monumental synagogue was raised in the late fourth-early fifth century A.D. and support this theory with archaeological evidence consisting primarily of a hoard of more than 30,000 Early Byzantine coins (Late Roman when using the Franciscans' somewhat misleading chronology. See chronological tables and J. F. Strange's apt comment in the appendix ) and of the results of Loffreda's studies of the pottery found therein.<sup>369</sup> Corbo and Loffreda's dating of the lime-stone synagogue set off a lively debate among scholars all over the world which is still ongoing. It is doubtful a common agreement on the date of the late synagogue will ever be reached. Since it does not concern the time of Jesus, this debate is of marginal importance to us. In the past, however, the first century A.D. dating had its advocates among which were Charles Wilson and Gaudence Orfali who both

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<sup>364</sup> Cf. KLONER, A.: Ancient Synagogues in Israel - An Archaeological Survey, in: LEVINE, L. I., *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, Jerusalem: [s.e.], 1981, 13; LOFFREDA 1982, A visit to, 57. STRANGE, J. F., SHANKS, H.: Synagogue Where Jesus Preached Found at Capernaum, in: *Biblical Archaeology Review* 9/6 (1983), 28.

<sup>365</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering*, 32.

<sup>366</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>367</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>368</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1982, *A visit to*, 49.

<sup>369</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering*, 41.

believed the monumental synagogue was the one referred to in the Gospels.<sup>370</sup> Today, this theory is universally rejected on account of the archaeological evidence which has been brought to light during the course of the Franciscans' modern excavations at the site. This brings up the question, if this is not the first century synagogue, then where can the remains of it, if any, be found?

#### 6.4 The search for a first century synagogue in Capharnaum

At the outset of this discourse we have to define the Greek term as it was perceived by the Jews in a first century A.D. setting. According to Richard Horsley the term συναγωγή referred primarily to the assembly itself and only secondarily to the edifice.<sup>371</sup> True as it might be, it does not refute that both the Greek term συναγωγή as well as its Hebrew equivalent *beth kneset* refer to the gathering of people as well as the actual place where the people congregated.<sup>372</sup> It does not, however, say anything about the physical nature of such an assembly place leaving room for scholarly speculation. Several scholars point out that such an assembly place in the second Temple period could have been in a private house of which one room had been converted to a *domus-synagoga* i.e. a house-synagogue. Synagogues in the first century A.D., if one is to believe Rousseau and Arav, tended to be simple meeting places in private homes.<sup>373</sup> It could also have been a part of a larger undetermined structure set apart for worship and not necessarily a domestic unit.<sup>374</sup> A synagogue functioned chiefly, as the Hebrew terms for it indicate, as a house of prayer (*beth tefilah*) and a house of study (*beth midrash*).<sup>375</sup>

Of note is that only Luke's version of the healing of the centurion's servant contains an allusion to a synagogue structure which the centurion built out of love for the Jewish nation.<sup>376</sup> It is important to bear in mind that Luke narrates the events recorded in his Gospel when he lived in the Diaspora (probably Syria) where the term συναγωγή along with the term προσευχή was more commonly employed to signify an edifice.<sup>377</sup>

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<sup>370</sup> Cf. LAUGHLIN 1993, "Capernaum.," in: BAR (5), 61. STRANGE - SHANKS 1982, "Has the house.," in: BAR (6), 29. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering*, 41.

<sup>371</sup> Cf. HORSLEY, R. A.: *Galilee—History, Politics, People*, Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1995, 131–153 referred to by Jonathan L. Reed in: REED 2002, *Archaeology*, 155 footnote 50.

<sup>372</sup> Cf. MEYERS - STRANGE 1981, *Archaeology*, 141.

<sup>373</sup> Cf. ROUSSEAU-ARAV 1995, *Jesus and His World.*, 40.

<sup>374</sup> Cf. MEYERS - STRANGE 1981, *Archaeology*, 141.

<sup>375</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>376</sup> Cf. Lk 7, 5; Mt 8,5–13, Jn 4,43–54.

<sup>377</sup> Cf. HENGEL, M., *Proseuche und Synagoge: Jüdische Gemeinde, Gotteshaus, und Gottesdienst in der Diaspora und in Palaestina* in: JEREMIAS, G. - KUHN, H. W. - STEGEMANN, H., *Tradition und Glaube: das frühe Christentum in seiner Umwelt. Festgabe für Karl Georg Kuhn zum 65. Geburtstag*,

The first century A.D. synagogue, if it ever existed in form of a building, could, as discussed above, just as well have been a larger room in a private dwelling which had been converted into a synagogue and not necessarily a large public building as the later white lime-stone synagogue. Actually, no public buildings from the first century A.D. such as a hippodrome, an amphitheater, a theater or even a small roofed theater called an *odeion* were found in Capharnaum<sup>378</sup> as opposed to nearby Sepphoris where several of these buildings were brought to light. What, however, was not brought to light in the Sepphoris excavations was a synagogue from the time in question. In fact, only a few synagogues from the first century A.D. have been unearthed in Palestine to date, namely the synagogues in Masada, Herodium, Gamla (presumably), Magdala and perhaps Chorazim<sup>379</sup> and Horvat Ethri.<sup>380</sup> Moreover, in Jerusalem an inscription has been found clearly belonging to a first century A.D. synagogue.<sup>381</sup>

Like churches, synagogues tended to be constructed on the same site as its predecessors. Synagogue sites rarely changed within the same town as is well-known from a number of excavations at different sites in the Levant.<sup>382</sup> The newer synagogue was simply erected atop the remains of the older one. Already in the early nineteenth century William Foxwell Albright (1891 – 1971), who was a renowned American orientalist and a pioneer in what is frequently referred to as Biblical Archaeology, believed that the first synagogue could rest under the well preserved remains of the later synagogue. At the same time he, much to his own regret, considered it highly unlikely that someone would “pull down” this magnificent edifice in order to find potential inferior ruins from the first century A.D.<sup>383</sup> Loffreda states in his publication “Recovering Capharnaum,” with unconcealed pride, that “what Albright deemed as an improbable and formidable task was indeed accomplished by the Franciscan archaeologists.”<sup>384</sup> Not only did they excavate all the areas in the synagogue’s immediate vicinity, they also opened several trenches inside the synagogue itself where, after as many as sixteen seasons of strenuous and painstaking

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Vanderhoeck and Ruprecht, (Göttingen 1971) 157–184 referred to by J. L. Reed in: REED 2002, *Archaeology*, 155 footnote 51.

<sup>378</sup> Cf. REED 2002, *Archaeology*, 153–155.

<sup>379</sup> Cf. STRANGE-SHANKS 1983, “Synagogue,” in: BAR (6), 25.

<sup>380</sup> Cf. ZIZZU, B., “Village razed, rebel beheaded,” in: *Biblical Archaeology Review*, 33/5 (2007) 36.

<sup>381</sup> Cf. SHANKS, H., *Judaism in Stone*, The Biblical Archaeology Society and Harper and Row, (New York and Washington 1979) 17–19 referred to by James F. Strange and Hershel Shanks in: STRANGE-SHANKS 1983, “Synagogue,” in: BAR (6), 25.

<sup>382</sup> Cf. STRANGE-SHANKS 1983, “Synagogue,” in: BAR (6), 31. STRANGE - SHANKS 1982, “Has the house.,” in: BAR (6) 26, 29–30. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering*, 47. ROUSSEAU - ARAV 1995, *Jesus and His World.*, 43–44.

<sup>383</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering*, 43.

<sup>384</sup> LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering*, 43.

excavations, they unearthed and identified the remains of the long-searched for first century A.D. synagogue.<sup>385</sup> As late as 1982, after 10 seasons of excavations, Loffreda reported that clear archaeological evidence for the presence of a first century synagogue underneath the remains of the later synagogue was hitherto wanting.<sup>386</sup> A first century A.D. level had come to light, but the task of identifying the remains of a synagogue from that period seemed a virtually impossible task. The excavators stated in 1982 that they might have been misled by the presumption that the first century synagogue must have been an outstanding and richly adorned edifice such as the later synagogue.<sup>387</sup> The Franciscan excavators gradually reached the opinion that in the context of a small and quite poor village the synagogue would rather have been a fairly modest structure.<sup>388</sup> This new assumption appears to have facilitated the identification of one of the first century A.D. floors as belonging to a synagogue, presumably the one mentioned by the Gospel of Luke. The synagogue, uncertain whether referred to as a structure or as a congregation, is also mentioned both in the Gospel of Mark and in the Gospel of John. Mark informs us that Jesus taught in the synagogue making a deep impression on his listeners. While teaching a man possessed with an unclean spirit approached him and the evil spirit was subsequently cast out of him by Jesus.<sup>389</sup> Mark also mentions a synagogue official by the name of Jairus whose deceased daughter Jesus raised to life.<sup>390</sup> According to John it was in this very synagogue that Jesus delivered his famous “I am the bread of life speech”, a speech so many of his disciples were scandalized by and led to their parting with Jesus.<sup>391</sup>

James F. Strange and Hershel Shanks leave open the possibility of the presence of more than one synagogue in first century Capharnaum. The authors of the Gospels always employ the definite article (*thn sunagwghn*)<sup>392</sup> when mentioning the synagogue in Capharnaum which, according to the scholars Strange and Shanks, can either signify that they knew of only one synagogue in Capharnaum, or it could also mean that they used the definite article on account of the fact that everyone’s attention was focused on this synagogue in particular.<sup>393</sup> In our opinion, however, it seems highly unlikely that there

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<sup>385</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering*, 43–49.

<sup>386</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1982, *A visit to*, 51–52.

<sup>387</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1982, *A visit to*, 51–52.

<sup>388</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>389</sup> Cf. Mk 1,21–28; Lk 4,31–37.

<sup>390</sup> Cf. Mk 5,21–43; Lk 8,40–50.

<sup>391</sup> Cf. Jn 6,26–71.

<sup>392</sup> Cf. Mk 1,21.29; 3,1; 6,2; Lk 4,33.38; 7,5; 8,41; Jn 6,59.

<sup>393</sup> Cf. STRANGE - SHANKS 1982, “Has the house,” in: *BAR* (6), 25.



existed more than one synagogue in Capharnaum at the time of Jesus's ministry there. This contention is based on the consideration of the size of the village and its material culture, not to mention that the excavations, conducted on both sides of Capharnaum, brought to light the remains of only one structure identified as a synagogue from the period in question.

## 6.5 Excavating the synagogue

In total, three strata were uncovered underneath the floor of the synagogue whose erection is posited by the Franciscan excavators to the late fourth-early fifth century. In descending order these strata are as follows:

- Stratum C: The uppermost of these three strata consisting of a layer of thick mortar underlying the floor of the later synagogue.
- Stratum B: The intermediate stratum being composed of the fill constituting an artificial platform upon which the mortar from Stratum 3 was laid.
- Stratum A: The lowest stratum consisting of the remains of a number of buildings being buried under the later synagogue.

### 6.5.1 *Stratum C*

The layer of mortar in Stratum C was approximately 30 centimeters thick in average and it was whitish in color which indicates that it was fashioned out of crushed limestone chips from limestone blocks transported from afar and employed for the construction of the synagogue.<sup>394</sup> A vast amount of limestone chips was actually found underlying the layer of mortar in trench I.<sup>395</sup> This stratum was present in all the trenches that were sunk both in the prayer hall and in the courtyard. The only place where this layer of mortar was wanting was the porch in trench VIII.<sup>396</sup> In order to preserve the pavement made of up to 55 centimeters thick white limestone pavers, the excavators initially chose to cut trenches exclusively in the areas where the original pavers were missing.<sup>397</sup> Among these were trenches I, II and IV.

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<sup>394</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA, S.: The Synagogue of Capharnaum - Archaeological Evidence for Its Late Chronology, in: *Liber Annuus* 22 (1972), 11.

<sup>395</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>396</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>397</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 10, 12.

As the excavations proceeded, some trenches in the eastern courtyard were also dug in sections where the pavement was still intact. Here the pavement had been abundantly preserved, and it was of inferior quality in comparison to the patches of surviving pavers in the area of the prayer room. In trench XII which was laid open in the eastern courtyard after the removal of 11 pavers, a hoard was discovered comprising of 20,323 coins<sup>398</sup> dated by the excavators to the Late Roman Period, i.e. the Early Byzantine period according to our chronology.<sup>399</sup> The bulk of them was found resting upon the upper layer of mortar underneath the pavers while about 1,400 of them were discovered beneath it upon a second layer of mortar.<sup>400</sup> A hoard of coins was also unearthed in the prayer room in trench XIV which had been sunk where the pavers were missing. The total of coins found there in stratum C amounted to 2,922 Late Roman Coins i.e. Early Byzantine coins chiefly from the late fourth-early fifth century A.D. belonging to e.g. Honorius, Arcadius, Valentinian and Eudoxia.<sup>401</sup>

In trench II many coins were found embedded in the white mortar which is indicative of the fact that they were posited there while the mortar was still fresh. They belong to the following emperors of the fourth century A.D.: Constantine the Great, Constantius II, Constantius Gallus, Julian and Valentinian.<sup>402</sup> According to the excavators the latest of these coins, minted in 383 A.D. and belonging to Valentinian, furnished them with the *terminus post quem* for the construction of the pavement.<sup>403</sup>

### 6.5.2 *Stratum B*

Underneath the layer of mortar which formed Stratum C, the excavators encountered a fill constituting a platform upon which the early Byzantine synagogue was erected. This fill varied both in terms of composition and in terms of depth from trench to trench. The fill was necessary to fill a natural slope from north to south and from east to west and it was therefore deeper in the trenches opened in the southern and southwestern part of the platform, reaching up to 3 meters in depth.<sup>404</sup> Furthermore, it was needed in

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<sup>398</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA, S.: Coins from the Synagogue of Capharnaum, in: *Liber Annuus* 47 (1997), 227.

<sup>399</sup> Cf. See chronological tables 113 – 114.

<sup>400</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, “Coins,” in: LA (47), 227.

<sup>401</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 226. Cf. LOFFREDA 1972, “The synagogue,” in: LA (22), 15. LOFFREDA 1982, *A visit to*, 55.

<sup>402</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1972, “The synagogue,” in: LA (22), 15.

<sup>403</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>404</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA, S., AVI-YONAH, M.: The Late Chronology of the Synagogue of Capernaum, in: *Israel Exploration Journal* 23 (1973), 38–42. LOFFREDA 1981, “The late chronology,” in: LEVINE, *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, 53–56.

order to comply with the rabbinic prescriptions that “a synagoguemust be higher than any other edifice built for ordinary use”<sup>405</sup> and also that “no [synagogue] should be opened, unless it is in the peak of the city”.<sup>406</sup> This bylaw was scrupulously adhered to by the Jews on account of a sinister prophecy by Abba Bar-Avyo, one of the most famous Talmudic sages of the third century, which reads as follows: “Any town, whose roofs are higher than the synagogue, will end in destruction”.<sup>407</sup>

The fill was mainly composed of basalt boulders being mixed with earth, ashes and a vast number of broken vessels.<sup>408</sup> In almost all of the trenches the basalt boulders were found lying pell-mell, the exception being trench XVII where the basalt blocks were found stacked one upon the other.<sup>409</sup> Above the top of the fill which had been leveled and just underlying the mortar of stratum C, the excavators encountered a rather thin layer of discarded limestone chips. According to Loffreda, their purpose could have been to serve as a temporary cap while the synagogue was being erected. In trench XVIII, underneath the balcony, the excavators came across a sizeable dump pile of limestone chips nearly 2 meters deep and running from north to south.<sup>410</sup> The coins recovered from stratum B totaled 894 pieces dating from the Hellenistic period onward.<sup>411</sup> The bulk of them, however, stemmed from the Early Byzantine period.<sup>412</sup>

Of paramount import to us are the finds of imposing column drums, one of which was fashioned out of beautiful gray granite, together with fragments of some elegant cornices with egg and dart molding.<sup>413</sup> It is believed that these objects, later being used as part of the fill, originally belonged to an earlier edifice, most likely a synagogue which could have been the one in which Jesus preached, i.e. a first century A.D. synagogue. These are the only decorative architectural elements found to date in Capernaum that can possibly be associated with the first century synagogue if it actually existed in the form of a structure. Although not proving the existence of a first century A.D. synagogue, these finds clearly add weight to the theory that such an edifice truly existed.

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<sup>405</sup> Shabath XI; Shulchan ‘Aruch. Orach Chayim, 68 quoted by Baruch Sapir and Dov Ne’eman in: SAPIR - NEEMAN 1967, *Capernaum*, 56. Cf. LOFFREDA 1982, *A visit to*, 46.

<sup>406</sup> Tosephta, Megilla IV, 3, 23 quoted by Baruch Sapir and Dov Ne’eman in: SAPIR - NEEMAN 1967, *Capernaum*, 56. Cf. STRANGE - SHANKS 1982, “Has the house.,” in: BAR (6), 29.

<sup>407</sup> Shabbath XI, I quoted by SAPIR-NEEMAN 1967, *Capernaum*, 58. Cf. LOFFREDA 1982, *A visit to*, 46.

<sup>408</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA-AVI-YONAH 1973, “The Late Chronology” of in: IEJ 23, 40.

<sup>409</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, “Coins,” in: LA (47), 225.

<sup>410</sup> Cf. Ibid.

<sup>411</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1981, “The late chronology,” in: LEVINE, *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, 40. LOFFREDA 1997, “Coins,” in: LA (47), 230.

<sup>412</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1982, *A visit to*, 53.

<sup>413</sup> Cf. STRANGE-SHANKS 1983, “Synagogue,” in: BAR (6), 31. ANONYMOUS 1996, “Capernaum,” in: DJBP, 113-114.

### 6.5.3 *Stratum A*

Stratum A is the lowest of these three strata and thus, from our point of view, the most interesting one since this is the stratum where one would expect to encounter remnants from the Early Roman period. In fact, underneath the artificial platform, the excavators partly unearthed the remnants of buildings belonging to an *insula* of the Hellenistic-Roman settlement whose size was roughly the size of *insula* II.<sup>414</sup> It is evident that it could not be brought to light in its entirety when considering what was standing above it. Nevertheless a considerable portion of it was uncovered without obliterating the remains of the later synagogue (see fig. 20).

A substantial number of fairly well preserved walls, basalt-stone pavements, a doorway, a staircase, three fireplaces, water-channels and even a plastered pavement surfaced after the removal of the fill of Stratum B.<sup>415</sup> They seem to have belonged to private dwellings which, based on the archaeological evidence found therein, allowed the excavators to set the initial date of these structures somewhat vaguely from the second to the first century B.C.<sup>416</sup> The pieces of evidence enabling the assigning of the initial date of these buildings were two coins unearthed in trench XXIV which, by all appearances, stem from the Late-Hellenistic period<sup>417</sup> together with some Hellenistic and a number of Early-Roman sherds.<sup>418</sup> As for the fixing of the final date of these structures which was assigned by the excavators to the late third-early fourth century A.D., the pottery and the coins again served as evidence.<sup>419</sup> Pottery covering almost the entire Late-Roman period (135 – 324 A.D.) was found on the floors of these dwellings. Several coins out were also found, of which particularly one was of great import to the excavators.<sup>420</sup> This coin of 341-346 A.D. was excavated in trench II and furnished the excavators with a *terminus post quem* for the destruction of the structures found in Stratum A.

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<sup>414</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1982, *A visit to*, 51

<sup>415</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>416</sup> Cf. *Ibid.* See also LOFFREDA 1972, "The synagogue," in: *LA* (22), 7 where he reaches an early-second century B.C. date for the structures in question. In *A visit to Capernaum* Loffreda dates them to the second to first century without specifying whether they were constructed in the early-, mid- or late-second/first century B.C.

<sup>417</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, "Coins," in: *LA* (47), 230, 240.

<sup>418</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 2005, *Cafarnao V*, 20; CORBO - LOFFREDA 1975, *Capernaum*. in: *IEJ* (25), 262.

<sup>419</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1982, *A visit to*, 51.

<sup>420</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, "Coins," in: *LA* (47), 240–241.

### 6.5.3.1 *The large basalt floor*

As mentioned above, the structures unearthed beneath the fill were part of private dwellings; but this applies only to the structures uncovered in the areas of the eastern courtyard, the porch and side aisles of the prayer hall.<sup>421</sup> Underneath the fill in the prayer hall's central nave a black-basalt floor was brought to light (see fig. 21). This floor surfaced in all the trenches being sunk in the central nave.<sup>422</sup> The fact that the size of this floor was much larger than any other floor being excavated lead the archaeologists to reach the conclusion that it was far too large to have belonged to a domestic structure and that it rather should be connected with a public building. As we have previously pointed out, synagogue sites rarely changed in antiquity; and thus it seems reasonable to assume that this floor might have been employed as the floor of an earlier synagogue. If indeed a preceding synagogue, it would also better explain why the later white synagogue was built so close to a Christian sanctuary. Corbo and Loffreda both believe that Aetheria who visited the synagogue in Capharnaum sometime between the year 381 and 384 A.D. and refers to the white limestone synagogue confirms the existence of an ancient tradition that this was the site of the synagogue in which Jesus cured a man being possessed by demons.<sup>423</sup>

In and on this cobbled pavement of black basalt remains of pottery were rescued and dated by Loffreda from the first century A.D. or earlier and thus clearly assigns a first century A.D. date for it at the latest.<sup>424</sup> Underlying this pavement was pottery from the third century B.C. to the latter half of the second century B.C. as well as several coins among which was a coin of Ptolemy VIII Eurgetes who reigned from 146 to 117 B.C.<sup>425</sup> In fact, even ceramics of the Persian period, the Late Bronze Age, and the Middle Bronze Age were found overlying virgin soil underneath the Roman and Hellenistic structures uncovered beneath the entire area of the white limestone synagogue.<sup>426</sup> The first century A.D. floor in the central nave was no exception as it was paved in order to cover earlier structures serving as private dwellings belonging to the nucleus of the preceding settlement.

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<sup>421</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering*, 45.

<sup>422</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>423</sup> Cf. STRANGE-SHANKS 1983, "Synagogue," in: BAR (6), 31. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering*, 47.

<sup>424</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering*, 45. LOFFREDA 1997, "Coins," in: LA (47), 239. STRANGE-SHANKS 1983, "Synagogue," in: BAR (6), 29, 31.

<sup>425</sup> Cf. STRANGE-SHANKS 1983, "Synagogue," in: BAR (6), 31.

<sup>426</sup> Cf. CORBO 1992, "Capernaum," in: ABD, 866–868.

### 6.5.3.2 The “MB”

Uncovered encompassing the large basalt floor was a thick basalt wall designated by Corbo in Italian as the *muro di basalto* or the “basalt stone wall” for which the initials “MB” are employed by the various scholars.<sup>427</sup> The “MB” was later used as the wall upon which the stylobates of the white limestone synagogue rested (see fig. 21). It was found not to extend through the entire length of the central nave and thus neither abutts the south nor the north wall of the limestone synagogue.<sup>428</sup> It actually began and stopped where the stylobates of the later synagogue began and stopped.<sup>429</sup> Prior to the excavation of the “MB” in the central nave of the synagogue, the excavators had encountered the “MB” under the peripheral walls of the later synagogue’s prayer hall. It is present underneath all the four corners of the prayer hall. Moreover a considerable portion of it was uncovered beneath the south wall while it was exposed by Corbo in its entirety along the whole length of the prayer hall’s western wall measuring 24 meters. It had been preserved up to a height of 91.5 centimeters.<sup>430</sup>

The “MB” was conspicuously thick with a width of approximately 1.22 meters which was, by far, the thickest walls unearthed in these excavations.<sup>431</sup> According to J. F. Strange and H. Shanks, this wall was way too large to have been considered a part of a private structure since only public buildings had such thick walls.<sup>432</sup> In comparison, the walls of the superimposed white limestone structure were merely 76 centimeters thick. The “MB” was fashioned out of black basalt blocks which had been worked, as opposed to the stones employed in the construction of the private houses in *insula* I. Similarly though the “MB” was dry-set. When comparing the “MB” to the walls of the private dwellings, one must conclude that the “MB” was of superior quality. However, in comparison to the walls of the limestone synagogue and actually, even to the foundation walls of the eastern courtyard, these walls were inferior both in terms of quality and in terms of finish.

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<sup>427</sup> Cf. STRANGE-SHANKS 1983, “Synagogue,” in: BAR (6), 28.

<sup>428</sup> Cf. Ibid., 30.

<sup>429</sup> Cf. Ibid. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering*, 47–49.

<sup>430</sup> Cf. STRANGE-SHANKS 1983, “Synagogue,” in: BAR (6), 28.

<sup>431</sup> Cf. CORBO 1992, “Capernaum,” in: ABD, 866–868.

<sup>432</sup> Cf. STRANGE-SHANKS 1983, “Synagogue,” in: BAR (6), 30. MCRAE 1991, *Archaeology*, 163–164. LOFFREDA, S., “Ceramica ellenistico-romana nel sottosuolo della sinagoga di Cafarnao,” in: BOTTINI, G. C., *Studia Hierosolymitana. III. Nell'Ottavo Centenario Franciscano (1182–1982)* (Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Collectio Maior 30), Franciscan Printing Press, (Jerusalem 1982) 273–312; CORBO, V. C.: Resti della sinagoga del primo secolo a Cafarnao, in: BOTTINI, G. C.: *Studia Hierosolymitana. III. Nell'Ottavo Centenario Franciscano (1182–1982)*, (=Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Collectio Maior 30), Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1982, 313–357.

The striking difference between the mortared foundations of the eastern courtyard which in Loffreda's own words "were made up of beautiful stone blocks carefully executed and with an excellent refinement of the courses"<sup>433</sup> and the foundations of the prayer hall which were characterized by Loffreda as "simply miserable and without mortar at all"<sup>434</sup> puzzled the excavators and the scholars scrutinizing their findings. First of all, it raised the question why the "MB," if constructed as a foundation wall for the white synagogue's prayer hall was totally absent underneath the eastern courtyard. One would expect to find the same foundations beneath all the parts of the later synagogue.<sup>435</sup> Another fact that bewildered the excavators was that the eastern courtyard as a secondary unit had much better foundations than the prayer hall which was the most important part of the synagogue.<sup>436</sup> Corbo and Loffreda, as well as Strange and Shanks, provide the same answer: The "MB" must have originally belonged to an edifice pre-dating the white synagogue for which they were re-employed as foundation walls.<sup>437</sup> Since the walls of the pre-existing building were confined only to the area of the prayer hall, new and therefore better foundations were later laid for the eastern courtyard.

Further strengthening this conclusion is that the "MB" was out of alignment with the wall of the later synagogue that rested atop of it (see fig. 21).<sup>438</sup> It appeared most clearly at the southwest corner of the prayer hall where the "MB" extended around 30 cm to the west of the southwest corner of the limestone synagogue.<sup>439</sup> The "MB" was evidently out of orientation with the wall it seemingly supported and, moreover, because of the slope from north to south, the first course of the white synagogue had to be tapered in the opposite direction.<sup>440</sup> The tapering of the first course would most probably have been avoided if the "MB" truly had been constructed as the white synagogue's foundation wall. Corbo and Loffreda also observed that, prior to the tapering, the undulant top of the "MB" had been leveled by the use of pebbles.<sup>441</sup> Antecedent to the latest finds, the excavators suspected already at quite an early stage, that the "MB" originally belonged to an earlier structure by virtue of the conspicuous shift in axially. Michael Avi-Yonah, who was a professor of classical archaeology at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and one of the

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<sup>433</sup> LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering.*, 48.

<sup>434</sup> LOFFREDA 1972, "The synagogue," in: LA (22), 26.

<sup>435</sup> Cf. Ibid.

<sup>436</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering.*, 48.

<sup>437</sup> Cf. Ibid. STRANGE-SHANKS 1983, "Synagogue," in: BAR (6), 30.

<sup>438</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering.*, 49.

<sup>439</sup> Cf. STRANGE-SHANKS 1983, "Synagogue," in: BAR (6), 28-29

<sup>440</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering.*, 49.

<sup>441</sup> Cf. Ibid.

most renowned Israeli scholars working in this field, surmised already in 1967, one year before the Franciscans Corbo and Loffreda commenced their excavations in Capharnaum, that the “MB” could have been the wall of the white limestone synagogue’s predecessor.<sup>442</sup> At present the above-mentioned evidence brought to light in the recent excavations seems to verify his theory.

## **6.6 Different interpretations of the finds associated with the first century A.D. synagogue.**

Although Corbo and Loffreda both concurred that both the “MB” and the cobbled basalt floor belonged to a preexisting synagogue, their interpretations of the “MB” differ. While both of them consider the cobbled basalt floor a part of the long-looked for synagogue visited by Jesus, only Corbo links this floor with the “MB” and asserts that they both belonged to the first century A.D. synagogue.<sup>443</sup> Loffreda, on the other hand, claims that the “MB” most likely constituted an intermediate stage between the first century synagogue and the white limestone synagogue.<sup>444</sup> In his opinion the “MB” is later than the first century cobbled pavement in the central nave. The floors of the structures upon which it rests were clearly in use until the fourth century A.D. based on the pottery and coins. . Loffreda thus suggests that the “MB” was constructed in view of a new synagogue which was never completed, perhaps as a consequence of the earthquake of 363 A.D. or some other fourth century earthquake.<sup>445</sup> He also contends that it would be futile to look for the floor of this unfinished synagogue since such a floor never existed and goes on to state several reasons for this interpretation.<sup>446</sup>

In our opinion that there was an intermediate synagogue as Loffreda proposes seems highly unlikely, and this theory is at present unsubstantiated by archaeological evidence. The theory appears to have been artificially constructed in order to explicate why the dwellings enclosed by the “MB” were in use until the fourth century A.D. However, although we do not concur with Loffreda, we commend the importance he attaches to two important facts: That the dwellings were in use until the fourth century A.D. and that these dwellings were found within the MB in the areas of the aisles of the prayer hall. Loffreda is

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<sup>442</sup> Cf. STRANGE-SHANKS 1983, “Synagogue,” in: BAR (6), 29.

<sup>443</sup> Cf. ROUGH ROUGH, R.: A New Look at the Corinthian Capitals at Capernaum, in: *Liber Annuus* 39 (1989), 127.

<sup>444</sup> Cf. Ibid. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering.*, 49.

<sup>445</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, “Coins,” in: LA (47), 239. See also page 31.

<sup>446</sup> Cf. Ibid.



not able to make this fact fit into Corbo's theory that the "MB" underneath the peripheral walls of the synagogue was originally the wall of the first century A.D. synagogue, and neither are we. As a matter of fact Corbo, based on comparisons with other first century A.D. synagogues, goes as far as assuming that benches actually lined the side aisles<sup>447</sup> or at least the western aisle for its entire length while in the eastern aisle a kind of an atrium was situated.<sup>448</sup> Other synagogues from the same period might have had benches and side-aisles but this was not the case for the synagogue in Capharnaum. As opposed to what Corbo proposes, these benches could not have been placed in the side-aisles because the prayer hall was flanked by private dwellings and the side-aisles were thus nonexistent in the first century A.D. synagogue in Capharnaum.

Although side-aisles subsequently appear in the bulk of the ancient synagogues excavated to date, could it not be possible in the case of the earlier synagogue in Capharnaum that these were missing? This type of building, at that time, was still in its infancy and the layout of the synagogue had yet to be standardized. Omitting the dedicatory synagogue inscriptions discovered in Egypt, allegedly stemming from the third century B.C., the oldest building frequently identified as a synagogue has been unearthed at the island of Delos, and it is believed that it was erected in the first century B.C.<sup>449</sup> A handful of synagogues contemporaneous to the one at Delos have recently been unearthed in the Holy Land, namely the synagogues in the Judean settlements of Qiryat Sefer and Modi'in,<sup>450</sup> and also a structure uncovered at Jericho thought to be a synagogue erected in the first century B.C.<sup>451</sup> In total, approximately 100 synagogues have been brought to light in the Holy Land, at least according to Chaim Ben-David who states that the synagogues found cover a period of 1000 years from the year 150 B.C. to 850 A.D.<sup>452</sup>

However, the synagogue as an institution originated much earlier than in the late Hellenistic period, and there exists a vast number of theories regarding when it began. Some date the commencement already in the seventh century B.C., i.e. the First Temple period, while others claim that one must look for the origin of this institution as late as in the Hellenistic period. According to Lee I. Levine, a professor of Jewish history and

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<sup>447</sup> Cf. CORBO 1982, "Resti.," in: BOTTINI, G. C., *Studia Hierosolymitana. III. Nell'Ottavo Centenario Franceseano*, 313–357. STRANGE-SHANKS 1983, "Synagogue," in: BAR (6), 28–30.

<sup>448</sup> Cf. CORBO 1992, "Capernaum," in: ABD, 866–868.

<sup>449</sup> Cf. LEVINE, L. I., "Ancient Synagogues - A Historical Introduction," in: LEVINE, L. I., *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, (Jerusalem 1981) 1.

<sup>450</sup> Cf. BEN-DAVID, C.: Golan Gem - The Ancient Synagogue of Deir Aziz, in: *Biblical Archaeology Review* 33/6 (2007), 46.

<sup>451</sup> Cf. SHANKS, H.: Is it or isn't - a Synagogue? in: *Biblical Archaeology Review* 27/6 (2001).

<sup>452</sup> Cf. BEN-DAVID 2007, "Golan Gem," in: BAR (6), 46.

archaeology at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, who is one of the foremost experts on ancient synagogues, the consensus among scholars today is “that the development of the synagogue followed the destruction of the First Temple in 586 B.C., either during the Babylonian exile or soon after, when Jews returned to Judea during the Restoration period”.<sup>453</sup>

Nevertheless, from an archaeological point of view the earliest synagogues in the Holy Land stem from the first century B.C. and the first century A.D.; and they are rather few in number. Talmudic estimates claiming that there were around four hundred synagogues existing alongside the temple shortly before its destruction by Titus in the year 70 A.D. are, in Lee I. Levine’s eyes, most likely grossly exaggerated.<sup>454</sup> In fact the only synagogue relic found in Jerusalem from the Second Temple period is the so-called Theodotus inscription which was found in an ancient cistern and refers to a synagogue that was raised in Jerusalem as early as in the year 100 B.C.<sup>455</sup> This Greek inscription carved into a 63-by-43-centimeter limestone slab reads as follows:

“Theodotus son of Vettenus, priest and synagogue leader, son of a synagogue leader, grandson of a synagogue leader, rebuilt this synagogue for the reading of the Law and the teaching of the commandments, and the hostelry, rooms and baths, for the lodging of those who have need from abroad. It was established by his forefathers, the elders and Simonides.”<sup>456</sup>

That the text is written in Greek rather than in Hebrew, as well as the allusion to “those who have need from abroad,” seem to indicate that it served to accommodate Jews from the Diaspora pilgrimaging to the Holy Land.<sup>457</sup> Unfortunately, this edifice has not yet been found, and we can only hope that it will be discovered in future excavations. As a matter of fact, it seems reasonable to assume that other first century synagogues or even synagogues predating the first century A.D. might come to light in the future, both in Palestine and elsewhere. However, it would be fanciful to presume that they will surface in the hundreds. The remains of the synagogue underlying the white synagogue in Capharnaum are clearly among the oldest that have been unearthed hitherto, not only in Palestine but in all of the world.

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<sup>453</sup> LEVINE 1981, “Ancient synagogues,” in: LEVINE, *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, 1.

<sup>454</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 4. KROLL 2002, *Po stopách.*, 142.

<sup>455</sup> Cf. SHANKS, H.: “Is it or is not it—a synagogue?” in: *Biblical Archaeology Review*, 27/6 (2001)

<sup>456</sup> Cf. BEN-DAVID 2007, “Golan Gem,” in: *BAR* (6), 47. SHANKS, H.: The Theodotus Inscription, in: *Biblical Archaeology Review* 29/4 (2003).

<sup>457</sup> Cf. SHANKS 2003, “The Theodotus,” in: *BAR* (4).

It seems that pre-70 A.D. synagogues stand in a heterogeneous category of their own. Keeping this in mind, let us now return to Corbo's contention that side-aisles with benches must have been present in the first century A.D. synagogue in Capharnaum. His assertion is based on parallels that he drew from other synagogues erected prior to the first Jewish Revolt. However, when taking into consideration the scarcity and diversity of the preserved synagogue remnants from the period in question, a drawing of parallels in order to get an idea of the layout seems to us as inapplicable at least in the case of the synagogue in Capharnaum. There is nothing similar between the architectural plan of the Capharnaum synagogue and the other synagogues excavated so far.

We can conclude that the pavement found underneath the central nave of the prayer hall most likely belonged to the first century A.D. synagogue. In our opinion so did the "MB" that encompassed the central nave of the synagogue. Loffreda has pointed out that the "MB" underneath the stylobates is, at times, discontinuous and completely missing;<sup>458</sup> and we can surmise that entrances could have been located at least in some of the places where these gaps occur. Surrounding the large room were private dwellings in use until the fourth century A.D., and these were enclosed by the "MB" on all four sides. This, in our opinion, formed a "sacred precinct" similar to the one built a couple of centuries later around the *domus ecclesiae*.<sup>459</sup> It seems that the first century synagogue was actually built as a synagogue as opposed to the contemporaneous synagogues that tended to be re-used buildings rather than buildings initially constructed as synagogues.<sup>460</sup>

Ehud Netzer who participated on the excavations of the synagogue at Masada claims that this structure originally served as a stable, based on the find of animal dung on the building's original floor.<sup>461</sup> However, the fact that the original floor was delicately plastered weakens his argument which he himself admits. Nevertheless, he still believes that the synagogue almost certainly was not built as a synagogue and that, at the outset, it served a different purpose.<sup>462</sup> Several scholars believe that the structure in Masada which was later converted into a synagogue originally was a dining or reception hall as was the case of the contemporaneous synagogue at Herodium.<sup>463</sup> These finds allowed John Mcray to typologize these synagogues as "the re-used building synagogues" and these thus

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<sup>458</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering*, 48–49.

<sup>459</sup> See page 47.

<sup>460</sup> Cf. MCRAJ 1991, *Archaeology*, 67.

<sup>461</sup> Cf. SHANKS, H.: Masada - The Final Reports, in: *Biblical Archaeology Review* 23/1 (1997), 58–63.

<sup>462</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>463</sup> Cf. MA'UZ, Z.: The Synagogue at Gamla and the Typology of Second - Temple Synagogues, in: LEVINE, L.I., *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, Jerusalem: [s.e.], 1981, 35.

constituted the first and earliest synagogue type out of a total of four different types presented by Mcray in his publication “Archaeology and the New Testament”.<sup>464</sup>

The first century A.D. synagogue in Capharnaum, however, was not such a re-used building as the private dwellings previously standing in the area of the later synagogue’s central nave had to be razed in order for the synagogue to be erected on the very same spot. The remaining structures in that *insula* were spared and continued to function as private dwellings until the fourth century. It thus seems that the first century synagogue was the focal point of the dwellings surrounding it and constituted together what we have called a “sacred precinct”. If our contention is correct, then Mcray would have to invent a new category for the first century synagogue A.D. at Capharnaum. Our assertion is further bolstered by the presence of another “sacred precinct” in Capharnaum with the venerated house-church in its midst. This “sacred precinct” with a perimeter of 112 meters was constructed, as aforementioned, in the late fourth century A.D. The wall surrounding it did not only enclose the house of St. Peter but also several other buildings, some of which were ordinary private dwellings that continued being inhabited until the commencement of the construction of the octagonal church.

When taking into account that both the Jews and the Christians in Capharnaum lived side by side for several centuries, it seems that an interrelation must have occurred. Not much is known of their relations; but they appear to have been tolerant, judging from the proximity of their respective shrines. We are reminded that Christianity arose from Judaism and that the first Christians were of Jewish origin. Does it not seem natural that when building their own shrine, they searched for inspiration in their vicinity and that they found it in the nearest situated Jewish shrine, a shrine which their ancestors probably had been visiting on regular basis in the past. Of course, these two precincts are far from identical. The Christian precinct was superior both in size as well as in quality of construction, but they bespeak a similar idea of enclosing a shrine together with the private houses encompassing it. It seems that the construction of the new white limestone synagogue more or less coincided with the building of the Christian sacred precinct which appears logical. Tolerance does not exclude rivalry. It seems that one community did not want to be any worse than the other; and since both of them evidently had enough funds to start building projects, nothing stood in the way of competition. There were also other and more important reasons for commencing these constructions since the various needs of the

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<sup>464</sup> Cf. MCRAY 1991, *Archaeology*, 67.

respective congregations had outgrown the previous structures. Nevertheless, we surmise that rivalry played a significant role. These are mere speculations as are the theories of Corbo and Loffreda, later reproduced by a majority of the scholars. Still, we believe our theory is closer to the truth, based on the above-mentioned arguments and on the serious discrepancies in the theories of Corbo and Loffreda.

This very large room, at least in the context of first century A.D. Capharnaum, bears no trace that it was indeed a synagogue. One would certainly expect to find seats and a torah shrine which were integral parts of a synagogue. But does this presumption count for a first century A.D. synagogue? The bulk of scholars give a negative answer to this question arguing that in the pre-destruction period, synagogues were bereft of torah niches, at least the stationary ones. Portable niches did exist, according to Boaz Zizzu, prior to Titus's conquest of Jerusalem in the year 70 A.D.;<sup>465</sup> and the reason why they have not been preserved is that, according to Zeev Ma'os, they were wooden as were also the seats located within the synagogue.<sup>466</sup> Stationary torah shrines in a first century A.D. setting are thus, in light of the excavations conducted to date, nothing but a prochronism. The enormous thickness of the walls and the large size of the floor together with the fact that synagogue sites rarely changed in antiquity thus remain the main arguments for the identification of this edifice as a synagogue, and this identification has gained considerable acceptance within the scholarly circles.<sup>467</sup>

## 6.7 Excavations in insula IX

Apart from the two *insulae* discussed above also *insula IX* yielded finds from the first century A.D. In this *insula* glass vessels from the first century A.D. surfaced, which definitely seems strange, in the context of this very poor settlement. These are considered signs of wealth and one would hardly expect to encounter them in the Capharnaum excavations yet even less at the Franciscan side.<sup>468</sup> J. L. Reed actually specifically points out that, in Capharnaum, these vessels were absent in a first century A.D. setting.<sup>469</sup> Loffreda, however, has published several pictures of fourteen glass vessels found in locus 669 in *insula IX* and these come from the late first century A.D. (see fig. 22). His reports

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<sup>465</sup> Cf. ZIZZU 2007, "Village," in: BAR (5), 39.

<sup>466</sup> Cf. MA'OS 1981, "The synagogue.," in: LEVINE, L.I.: *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, 35.

<sup>467</sup> Cf. STRANGE-SHANKS 1983, "Synagogue," in: BAR (6), 31. DEVRIES 1997, *Cities*, 269–270. MILLARD, A.: *Discoveries from the Time of Jesus*, Oxford: Lion Publishing plc, 1990, 25.

<sup>468</sup> Cf. ROUSSEAU-ARAV 1995, *Jesus and His World.*, 228–229.

<sup>469</sup> Cf. REED 2002, *Archaeology*, 160.

also state that raw glass lumps were found adjacent to the vessels in the same locus.<sup>470</sup> Moreover, a large amount of molten glass refuse was discovered elsewhere on the site indicating that a glass ware manufactory had been located there.<sup>471</sup> In fact, some of the glass vessels found are attributed by Loffreda to the time of Jesus.<sup>472</sup> The glassware recovered from the excavations was comprised of two *unguentaria*, several plates and bowls as well as a drinking glass. Glassware was well-known both in Italy, Greece, Persia and Egypt but it is seldom found in Palestine prior to the first century A.D. According to Arav and Rosseau, glass vessels were considered a luxury and were affordable only to the most affluent part of the population.<sup>473</sup> This only stresses the importance of the find of these vessels in Capharnaum, a find that certainly merits more consideration than what it has gotten to date.

## 7 THE EXCAVATIONS AT THE GREEK ORTHODOX SIDE

The finds from the Early Roman Period at the Greek Orthodox side, where excavations were conducted under the direction of Vassilios Tzaferis, have sadly been overshadowed by the contemporaneous Franciscan finds. Thus they have not received the attention they deserve. We do not intend, by any means, to belittle the immense historical value of the finds unearthed on the Franciscan side. We merely believe that the remnants from the first century A.D. that have been brought to light on the Greek Orthodox side merit an elaborate examination. Making this examination difficult is the paucity of sources reporting on these finds. Thus we can only glean whatever information there is out of the extant sporadic references on this topic.

As previously mentioned, a partition separates the two properties on the site of ancient Capharnaum and, curiously enough, this random division of the respective properties, without the knowledge of their purchasers, represented in Tzaferis own words “a meaningful separation between the two historically consecutive sites.”<sup>474</sup> Modern-day excavations have clearly shown that the settlement of Capharnaum from the Persian and nearly throughout the Late Byzantine period mainly stood on the Franciscan-owned property whereas the Capharnaum from the close of the Late Byzantine period throughout the Early Arab period was to be found mostly on the side which is currently in the

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<sup>470</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1985, “Kefar,” in: ESI (4), 59.

<sup>471</sup> Cf. Ibid. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering.*, 20.

<sup>472</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering.*, 86.

<sup>473</sup> Cf. ROUSSEAU-ARAV 1995, *Jesus and His World.*, 228–229.

<sup>474</sup> TZAFERIS 1983, “New archaeological,” in: BA (4), 200.

proprietorship of the Greek Orthodox Church. Notwithstanding, a few structures, four to be exact, on the Greek Orthodox side situated adjacent to the dividing wall's southernmost section, located not far from to the lake-shore, seem to stem from the Early-Roman period. Their erection has been assigned by a number of scholars, among whom is Professor John C. J. Laughlin of Averett College who himself partook in the excavations, to the Middle and Late Roman period.<sup>475</sup> Yet, the origin of these same edifices has been dated by the director of the excavations, Vassilios Tzaferis, and another of his collaborators, Michal Peleg, of the Israel Department of Antiquities to the first century A.D.<sup>476</sup> Meriting mention in this context is that Tzaferis and Peleg in their previous report on their excavations published in 1984, i.e. a year prior, dated the building that was identified as a bathhouse to the third century A.D. and surmised it continued to be in use until the tenth century A.D.<sup>477</sup> In the 1985 report, they drastically altered this contention in claiming it ceased to be in use as early as by the close of the first century A.D. i.e. a change of nine centuries less for its total use.<sup>478</sup> Unfortunately, the excavators did not elaborate on this change of dating in their report; they merely stated that the expansion of area B in which the bathhouse was brought to light eventuated into the re-dating of this structure.<sup>479</sup>

### 7.1 The Roman-style bathhouse

What is evident from the 1985 report is that the structure which was earlier believed to stem from the third century A.D. in fact belongs to the first century A.D. Laughlin, Horsley and some other scholars claim that underneath what they regard as a third century A.D. bathhouse, remains of a preceding first century bathhouse were discovered.<sup>480</sup> Out of the four first century A.D. buildings that were unearthed by Tzaferis, the bulk of sources tend to mention only the one that has been identified as a Roman bathhouse, or more precisely a Roman style bathhouse.

A typical Roman-style row-type bathhouse (*balnea*) consisted of the *apodyterium* (the dressing room), the *frigidarium* (the cold room), the *tepidarium* (the warm room), the

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<sup>475</sup> Cf. LAUGHLIN 1993, "Capernaum.," in: BAR (5), 56. REED 2002, *Archaeology*, 155. ROUSSEAU-ARAV 1995, *Jesus and His World.*, 40. TZAFERIS 1989, *Excavations.*, XVIII

<sup>476</sup> Cf. TZAFERIS. V., PELEG. M.: Kefar Nahum - Excavations of the Department of Antiquities-985, in: *Excavations and Surveys in Israel* 4 (1985), 59.

<sup>477</sup> Cf. TZAFERIS-PELEG 1984, "Kefar.," in: ESI (3), 64.

<sup>478</sup> Cf. TZAFERIS-PELEG 1985, "Kefar.," in: ESI (4), 59.

<sup>479</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>480</sup> Cf. LAUGHLIN 1993, "Capernaum.," in: BAR (5), 57, 59. HORSLEY 1995, *Galilee*, 194.

caldarium (the hot room) and the heating room with its furnace.<sup>481</sup> Another much larger and much more pretentious type of bathhouse was the *thermae* which, in addition to these chambers sometimes multiply replicated, also contained stores, libraries, palaestrae (yards for exercise) and of semicircular or oblong recesses called exedrae where poems were recited, and discussions and lectures were held.<sup>482</sup> Moreover a *thermae* often also contained porticos, vestibules, shaded walks and lovely gardens.<sup>483</sup> It seems evident that looking for a *thermae* in Capernaum would be preposterous, to say the least. In the context of such a poor first century A.D. settlement one would not expect to find a row-typed bathhouse or any other bathhouse, for that matter, when one considers the proximity of the lake. A 19.5 x 6.4 m structure which was undisputably identified as a row-type bathhouse, did however surface in the excavations conducted on the Greek Orthodox side.

It was not a complex of rooms but, rather, a row of rooms hence the classification of it as a row-type bathhouse which, according to both Laughlin and Reed, is much similar to the one uncovered at Ein Gedi. The scholars differ in their dating of this bathhouse, some contending that it was constructed during the Roman siege of Masada subsequent after to the capture of Jerusalem in the year 70 A.D.<sup>484</sup> while others place it in the reign of Hadrian (117 – 138 A.D.).<sup>485</sup> There is, however, a broad consensus regarding its row-type designation, and thus parallels are drawn between these two bathhouses.

The outside entrance to this interconnected row of rooms ordinarily led to the *apodyterium* or the dressing room. The Capernaean bathhouse was no exception. An exterior entrance was located leading to the easternmost room whose floor was completely missing.<sup>486</sup> This 3.6 x 6.4 m room with plastered walls was recognized as the *apodyterium* from which one entered the *frigidarium* by way of which the *tepidarium* was reached which, in turn, had a door leading to the caldarium. Remnants of these four rooms were brought to light by Tzaferis and his team of fellow archaeologists.<sup>487</sup> The walls of these

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<sup>481</sup> Cf. REED 2002, *Archaeology*, 155. MCRAE 1991, *Archaeology*, 44–45.

<sup>482</sup> Cf. MCRAE 1991, *Archaeology*, 43.

<sup>483</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 43–44.

<sup>484</sup> Cf. LAUGHLIN 1993, “Capernaum,” in: *BAR* (5), 57, 59. See also SHANKS, H.: Ein Gedi’s archaeological riches, in: *Biblical Archaeology Review* 34/3 (2008).

<sup>485</sup> Cf. REED 2002, *Archaeology*, 155. For more information of the Ein Gedi dig see: MAZAR, B - DUNAYEVSKY, I.: En-Gedi: Fourth and fifth seasons of excavations. Preliminary report, in: *Israel Exploration Journal* 17 (1967), 142–143 and MAZAR, B.: En Gedi, in: STERN, E., LEWINSON-GILBOA, A., AVIRAM, J. (ed.): *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, Vol. 2, Jerusalem: Carta, 1993, 404–405 referred to by Jonathan L. Reed on page 155 footnote 54.

<sup>486</sup> Cf. TZAFERIS–PELEG 1985, “Kefar,” in: *ESI* (4), 59. LAUGHLIN 1993, “Capernaum,” in: *BAR* (5), 57.

<sup>487</sup> Cf. TZAFERIS–PELEG 1985, “Kefar,” in: *ESI* (4), 59.



rooms were fashioned out of uniformly dressed stones laid in even courses with the use of ample mortar.<sup>488</sup> In the *frigidarium* a ceramic pipe was detected resting at floor level and leading under the exterior wall, no doubt in order to drain water to an outside draining ditch which was found running along the entire bathhouse's northern side.<sup>489</sup> The *tepidarium* and the *caldarium* were both identified based on their physical proximity to the *caldarium* as well as their physiognomical similarity to other more or less contemporaneous bathhouses.<sup>490</sup> Finds of both round and square hypocaust bricks spread all over the fourth room aided the excavators to identify this room with certainty as the *caldarium*.<sup>491</sup> As a matter of fact, some of these bricks were discovered still *in situ* and forming the bases for the non-extant hypocaust pillars supporting the superimposed tiled floor.<sup>492</sup> Hot air from the furnace room was channeled between the pillars and subsequently conducted in a quick and effective fashion through the tiles heating the entire room.<sup>493</sup> In the case of Capernaum, the furnace room is still to be found and there is reason to believe it is located on the Franciscan side just waiting to be excavated.<sup>494</sup> Tzaferis has not been accorded permission by the Franciscans to continue the excavations on their side of Capernaum. One can only wonder why his request has been refused and why the Franciscans, more than two decades later, have not yet excavated it.

## 7.2 The other first century structures

Adjacent to the draining ditch which extended along the bathhouse's northern side, another well-constructed building dated by Tzaferis to the first century A.D. was uncovered.<sup>495</sup> It consists of three oblong halls of which only a half of each of them has been excavated. Their other halves are situated on the Franciscan side; and they share a destiny, for the present, with the westernmost part of the bathhouse which remains unexcavated. It seems to have been a public building of some kind, the most common conjecture being a storehouse.<sup>496</sup>

<sup>488</sup> Cf. REED 2002, *Archaeology*, 155.

<sup>489</sup> Cf. LAUGHLIN 1993, "Capernaum.," in: BAR (5), 57.

<sup>490</sup> Ibid.

<sup>491</sup> Cf. TZAFERIS-PELEG 1984, "Kefar," in: ESI (3), 64.

<sup>492</sup> Cf. LAUGHLIN 1993, "Capernaum.," in: BAR (5), 57. TZAFERIS-PELEG 1984, "Kefar," in: ESI (3), 64.

<sup>493</sup> Cf. MCRAY 1991, *Archaeology*, 46.

<sup>494</sup> Cf. LAUGHLIN 1993, "Capernaum.," in: BAR (5), 57.

<sup>495</sup> Cf. Ibid., 58. MCRAY 1991, *Archaeology*, 166.

<sup>496</sup> Cf. LAUGHLIN 1993, "Capernaum.," in: BAR (5), 57-58. ROUSSEAU - ARAV 1995, *Jesus and His World*, 40.

Slightly north-east of the bathhouse the plan of an enormous rectangular building was exposed. The building had been severely damaged in antiquity, and it had later been repeatedly repaired as witnessed by several superimposed floors being uncovered. According to John Laughlin, this numerous reconstructed edifice remained in use through the inception of the Early Arab period.<sup>497</sup> Although meager, the remnants demonstrate that it was very large with a central court and most likely of a public character. Tzaferis has, in a private interview with the author, inferred that this large edifice might have served as a barracks for the soldiers stationed there.

Located nearly halfway between the bathhouse and the large rectangular building was a beautiful contemporaneous edifice which Tzaferis believes was two-storied. From underneath its floor the remains of a young man were disinterred. Unfortunately, no information has been revealed concerning their dating.<sup>498</sup> Tzaferis conjectured in the interview that this house might actually have been the house of the centurion referred to in the Gospels.<sup>499</sup>

The very unpretentious and extremely poor first century A.D. dwellings on the Franciscan side stand in stark contrast to the first century edifices being excavated on the Greek Orthodox side which were all spacious and well-constructed of dressed stone.<sup>500</sup> Moreover, large amounts of plaster had been employed to cover both their walls and floors, something which seem to have been absolutely unthinkable on the other side of town.<sup>501</sup> The partition wall between the two properties thus seems to represent a meaningful division in more ways than one. It also seems to mark, more or less, the division between the considerably larger poor western part of first century Capharnaum and the substantially wealthier but much smaller western part.

### **7.3 The interpretations of these finds with regard to the centurion at Capharnaum**

Various theories arose instantly in the wake of the find of the bathhouse, most of them asserting that this discovery vindicated the fact that a Roman centurion together with

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<sup>497</sup> Cf. LAUGHLIN 1993, "Capernaum.," in: BAR (5), 57, 59.

<sup>498</sup> Cf. Ibid., 57–58.

<sup>499</sup> Cf. Mt 8,5–13; Lk 7,1–10. See also John's similar account where the protagonist instead of a centurion is a royal official and the one being cured is not his servant but his son. Jn 4, 46–54.

<sup>500</sup> Cf. LAUGHLIN 1993, "Capernaum.," in: BAR (5), 57–58.

<sup>501</sup> Cf. Ibid., 58.

a garrison of Roman soldiers were stationed at first century A.D. Capharnaum.<sup>502</sup> Actually, a vast majority of scholars seem to be convinced that the centurion referred to in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke was Roman as if it was explicitly stated.<sup>503</sup> Both Matthew and Luke employ the Greek word ἑκατοντάρχος which verbatim means “leader of one hundred” and is the equivalent to the Latin term *centurio*. True enough, this Greek term was, in the Hellenistic world, most commonly used for an officer serving in the Roman army. The term could also be used for a building supervisor, a police officer, and, from the second century A.D. onwards also a tax collector.<sup>504</sup> It could seem reasonable to assume that the ἑκατοντάρχος in the Gospels truly was a Roman centurion if it were not for Herod Antipas’s custom of adopting Greek terms for Roman administrators and officials and employing them for his own non-Roman staff-members.<sup>505</sup> Evidence of this is found in Mark’s Gospel, chapter six, the beheading of John the Baptist. The author employs Greek nomenclature typically used for Roman officials when referring to Herod Antipas’s χιλιάρχοι (the Latin equivalent of which, in its singular form, is a tribune) and σπεκουλάτωρ (whose original meaning is a spy but was at the time of the Roman empire employed for members of the private guard performing various tasks among which was the function of an executioner).<sup>506</sup>

Moreover, that there is no evidence whatsoever for the permanent placement of Roman troops in Galilee prior to the second century A.D. certainly merits consideration. This could be of decisive importance in determining whether the military detachment stationed at first century A.D. Capharnaum was Roman or not. Horsley relates that Roman troops were from time to time present in pre-second century A.D. Galilee when they passed through, for instance, to quell the revolt at Sepphoris which arose in the year 4 B.C., sparked by the death of Herod the Great.<sup>507</sup> The rebellion was quelled by the Roman army deployed by Quintillius Varus who was the Roman legate of Syria at the time. Moreover, these Roman forces were aided by both infantry and cavalry sent by king Aretas IV Philopatris of Nabataea who reigned roughly from 9 B.C. to 40 A.D. Herod Antipas

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<sup>502</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 57, 59.

<sup>503</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1982, *A visit to*, 51–52. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering.*, 18, 45, 68, 76. CORBO–LOFFREDA - BUSHELL 1969, *New Memoirs*, 9. DEVRIES 1997, *Cities*, 269–270. LAUGHLIN 1993, “Capernaum.,” in: *BAR* (5), 55. BÖSEN, W., *Galiläa - Lebensraum und Wirkungsfeld Jesu*, Herder, (Freiburg - Basel - Wien 1998) 89, 93. SAPIR–NE’EMAN 1967, *Capernaum*, 34. HJERL–HANSEN 1940, *Kapernaum*, 71. MEISTERMANN 1921, *Capharnaüm*, 174.

<sup>504</sup> Cf. REED 2002, *Archaeology*, 161.

<sup>505</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 161–162.

<sup>506</sup> Cf. Mk 6,21.27.

<sup>507</sup> Cf. HORSLEY 1995, *Galilee*, 116. BATEY, R. A.: *New Light on Sepphoris and the Urban World of Jesus*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991, 53.

wedded his daughter Phasaelis but subsequently divorced her in favor of Herodias, his niece and sister-in-law in one person, a union strongly rebuked by John the Baptist later causing his decapitation. As a result of the divorce, Aretas IV commenced a military campaign against his former son-in-law in which Herod Antipas suffered a crushing defeat after being overpowered in Perea around the year 36 A.D. Herod Antipas immediately turned to Emperor Tiberius with a plea for military assistance, which he, after some hesitation, was accorded. The Roman legate in Syria was ordered to withdraw his legions from a Parthian campaign and to march against Aretas instead. Vitellius, the Roman legate in Syria followed the Emperor's orders but had to call off the campaign shortly after on account of the death of the Emperor. Nevertheless, even though a military encounter between the Romans and Aretas did not take place, the hostilities ceased because Aretas fled from Perea in fear of a direct war against the Romans. It is evident that Tiberius would have dispatched his Galilean-based legions provided that such legions existed. As a matter of fact, to date, the first archaeological evidence of a legion being stationed in Galilee or in its nearest vicinity on a permanent basis stem from the third decade of the second century A.D. when the VI Ferrata Legion was headquartered at Legio.<sup>508</sup> It thus certainly seems that Roman legions were not permanently stationed in first century Galilee. This is further substantiated by Josephus who explicitly states that Roman troops circumvented travel through Jewish territories on the Jewish principals own request because the depictions on the Romans' ensigns would be considered idolatrous and thus offend the orthodox Jews' religious sensibilities.<sup>509</sup> Based on this evidence, or more the lack of evidence, it seems highly unplausible that the Capharnaum-stationed centurion was a Roman and that he commanded up to 100 Roman soldiers.

While John's similar account on the healing of a royal officer's son in Capharnaum does not make an issue of his ethnicity, as the official apparently is a Jew,<sup>510</sup> both Mark's and Luke's conclusion of the account hinges on the centurion being a Gentile. Rudolf Bultmann contended that John altered the ἑκατοντάρχος into βασιλικός in order to make him a Jew<sup>511</sup> as opposed to John. S. Kloppenborg who argues that if any changes were made they had to have been made in the Q version of the account in which the Gentile-

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<sup>508</sup> Cf. REED 2002, *Archaeology*, 162.

<sup>509</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>510</sup> Cf. Jn 4,46-54.

<sup>511</sup> Cf. BULTMANN, R.: *The Gospel of John*, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971, 206 referred to by REED 2002, *Archaeology*, footnote 73 on page 161.

status of the centurion plays a significant role.<sup>512</sup> In Jonathan L. Reed's opinion, the centurion at Capharnaum was most likely one of several Gentile officers in Antipas' service for whose position Roman terminology had been adopted.<sup>513</sup> One of the most prominent scholars, Michael Avi Yonah, refused as early as in 1967 to label the centurion a Roman when referring to him as the Gentile centurion at Capharnaum which in light of all the extant evidence seems to be the most accurate.<sup>514</sup> It is also in perfect keeping with Mark's and Luke's account.

Another structure designated Roman has been brought to light at the Franciscan side nearly 200 meters north of the synagogue.<sup>515</sup> It was identified as a Roman mausoleum and consisted of two complementary structures: an open air monument called *nephesh* of which only its foundations have come down to us and a subterranean burial place also known as a *hypogeum* which is in an excellent state of preservation.<sup>516</sup> It consists of a main burial chamber flanked on three sides by a corridor (see fig. 23). A total number of five white limestone sarcophagi were recovered from the mausoleum (two from the central chamber and three from the western corridor) in addition to eight *loculi* or *kokhim* which were narrow recesses located in the exterior wall of the mausoleum in which ossuaries have been stored.<sup>517</sup> This mausoleum had been plundered in ancient times, and it has been somewhat vaguely dated by Corbo and Loffreda to the first-second centuries A.D.<sup>518</sup>

Close to the mausoleum a Roman milestone was found which was by Loffreda regarded as evidence of an imperial highway bisecting Capharnaum (see fig. 24).<sup>519</sup> Although he does not explicitly state that it was from the time of Jesus, he definitely implies that it was.<sup>520</sup> The milestone is, however, from the time of the Emperor Hadrian (117 – 138 A.D.) and can thus merely vindicate that an imperial road bypassed Capharnaum in the first half of the second century A.D.<sup>521</sup> To use it as evidence for the time of Jesus would be highly prochronistic which applies to the mausoleum as well. Neither one of these finds proves the presence of Romans in Capharnaum in the first half

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<sup>512</sup> Cf. KLOPPENBORG, J.: *The Formation of Q: Trajectories in Ancient Wisdom Collections*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987, 120 referred to by REED 2002, *Archaeology*, footnote 73 on page 161.

<sup>513</sup> Cf. REED 2002, *Archaeology*, 162.

<sup>514</sup> Cf. AHARONI, Y., AVI-YONAH, M.: *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, New York: Carta - Macmillan Publishing Company, 1977,

<sup>515</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1982, *A visit to*, 67.

<sup>516</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering*., 81.

<sup>517</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>518</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>519</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1982, *A visit to*, 67.

<sup>520</sup> Cf. LOFFREDA 1997, *Recovering*., 68.

<sup>521</sup> Cf. MEYERS - STRANGE 1981, *Archaeology*, 59. REED 2002, *Archaeology*, 147–148.

of the first century A.D. since they both postdate it. They have does no bearing on the matter.

#### 7.4 The harbour

Capharnaum must have had a harbor of some kind as all the other settlements nestled along the shore of the Sea of Galilee. In Capharnaum's case, however, with its rocky shores scattered with basalt stones and boulders, the process of locating the harbor was, according to the foremost expert of Galilean harbors Mendel Nun, considerably aggravated.<sup>522</sup> Whereas in most of the other locations stones had to be brought to the lake shore, at Capharnaum's shore-line the stones and boulders were ubiquitous, and they literally just waited to be employed for the construction of mooring facilities. So quite cleverly, when Mendel Nun visited the site, well aware of the topographical difficulties he was facing, rather than first searching for a stone construction, he instead looked for an area that had been cleared of stones.<sup>523</sup> He actually succeeded in his quest for this stone-cleared area which he immediately regarded as a clear indication that a harbor had been situated here.<sup>524</sup> Reports from both sides of Capharnaum proved him right.<sup>525</sup> A harbor was discovered leading from in front of the entrance to the Franciscan property for about 800 meters along the shore line and terminating approximately 200 meters east of the Greek property where the last pier was found.<sup>526</sup> Thus the harbor extends beyond the town's outer limits at the time of its maximal expansion.

The Franciscans were very surprised by Nun's discovery of the harbor as they tended to employ the previously unlocated harbor as a refuse dump for the rubble from their own excavations.<sup>527</sup> Considering the numerous Gospel references to the Capharnean harbor and the experience from other contemporaneous sites at the shore, all of them equipped with harbor facilities, one is forced to call into question the Franciscans' imprudent decision to dump debris just off the 400 meter long shore line in their possession. Not only was the 2.5 m thick seawall covered by debris, it was missing in several places, having been obliterated in the course of modern construction work and thus

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<sup>522</sup> Cf. NUN, M.: *Sea of Galilee. Newly Discovered Harbours from New Testament Days*, Ein Gev: [s.e.], 1989, 24.

<sup>523</sup> Cf. NUN, M.: Ports of Galilee - Modern Drought Reveals Harbors from Jesus' Time, in: *Biblical Archaeology Review* 25/4 (1999), 26.

<sup>524</sup> Cf. NUN 1989, *Sea of Galilee*, 24.

<sup>525</sup> Cf. TZAFERIS 1993, "Capernaum: Excavations," in: NEAEHL, 296. LOFFREDA 1982, A visit to, 23.

<sup>526</sup> Cf. NUN 1989, *Sea of Galilee*, 25–26.

<sup>527</sup> Cf. NUN 1999, *Ports of Galilee* in: BAR (4), 23–26.

irretrievably lost.<sup>528</sup> A quite different picture emerges at the Greek Orthodox side where a considerable portion of the wall has come down to us in a rather good state of preservation especially on the open shore towards the east. This eastern section of the wall has not been subject to hardly any development, hence its well preserved state.<sup>529</sup>

Adjoining the wall, a paved promenade was unearthed approximately 10 meters in width and around 762 meters in length.<sup>530</sup> This promenade constituted the backbone of the harbor reinforced on the seaward side by the 2.5 meters wide basalt wall.<sup>531</sup> In order to provide the settlement with protection from violent storms a promenade must be located at least 60 centimeters above the maximum lake level as is the case of a modern day promenade at Tiberias which was built exactly at 208.5 meters below sea level which is 60 centimeters above the current maximum lake level.<sup>532</sup> The promenade at Capharnaum is on the other side constructed at a lower level, approximately 209.4 meters below sea level which indicates that the maximum lake level must have been nearly 1 meter lower when the harbor was built.<sup>533</sup> Further evidence comes from the the bathhouse's drainage channel which is at the same level as the promenade. If in operation today, it would flood each time the lake would reach its maximum level.<sup>534</sup> The state of the pavement is much like state of the wall. While the one on the Franciscan has been covered by rubble and partially destroyed, on the Greek Orthodox side the promenade has survived the ravages of time without suffering any substantial damage.

The promenade serves as a base for a triangular dock discovered slightly to the east of the modern-day red-domed Greek Orthodox church. The two side piers extending from the seawall are both 30 meters long and fashioned out of black basalt stones.<sup>535</sup> Apart from these two piers, several other were found on both sides of Capharnaum having the same length as the previously mentioned piers but, in contrast, they were all constructed at right angles. These piers had a width varying from 1.5 to 4 meters and tended to be built in pairs with ends curving towards each other in order to provide better protection for the boats mooring there.<sup>536</sup> Whereas on the Franciscan side five or six pier are discernable today, on the Greek Orthodox side an even larger number of piers were found. Some of them,

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<sup>528</sup> Cf. NUN 1989, *Sea of Galilee*, 24–25.

<sup>529</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>530</sup> Cf. NUN 1999, *Ports of Galilee*: BAR (4), 26.

<sup>531</sup> Cf. NUN 1989, *Sea of Galilee*, 24.

<sup>532</sup> Cf. NUN 1999, *Ports of Galilee*: BAR (4), 26.

<sup>533</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>534</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>535</sup> Cf. NUN 1989, *Sea of Galilee*, 25.

<sup>536</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

however, were later used as foundations for modern facilities. Thus, the total number of extant piers from both side amounts to fourteen.<sup>537</sup>

A reconstruction of the Capharnean harbor from the time of Jesus appears to be virtually impossible in that the harbor was not constructed simultaneously but rather in different stages, some of which are difficult to date. Mendel Nun considers it highly unlikely that all of the harbor's components ever were in use at the same time. He also notes that, although the harbor is one of the longest, its protected area is small in comparison with that of other harbors.<sup>538</sup> Of main import to us, however, is that some of its components clearly stem from the first century A.D. and thus vindicate that Capharnaum was not bereft of a harbor at the time Jesus dwelled there.

## **8 CAPHARNAUM'S POPULATION NUMBER IN THE FIRST CENTURY A.D.**

The actual extent of the site's ruins is particularly important when one attempts to assess the population size of the settlement.<sup>539</sup> In addition to the developed area a coefficient of the number of people per hectare is needed in order to arrive at an estimate of the population number. The coefficient used by Strange and Meyers, which they obtained from an article by Magen Broschi<sup>540</sup>, is 400 – 500 people per hectare. Since they adhered to Wilson's fantastical dimensions of 750 by 375 meters, they arrived at a population of 12,000 to 15,000 for first century Capharnaum.<sup>541</sup> This grossly erroneous estimate has subsequently been taken at face value by a number of scholars who reproduced it in their reports on Capharnaum. Not only is their estimate of Capharnaum's size highly exaggerated but also the coefficient employed by them is wrong, at least with regard to Capharnaum. In the larger cities of the Greek-Roman world houses tended to have upper stories, which, as previously explained, were for the most part missing in Capharnaum.<sup>542</sup> Moreover, its inhabitants used to keep livestock in portions of their houses and thus the population density was much lower than the one at urban sites. J. L. Reed proposes a maximum coefficient of 150 people per hectare while asserting that it more

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<sup>537</sup> Cf. Ibid.

<sup>538</sup> Cf. Ibid., 26.

<sup>539</sup> Cf. See pages 40–42.

<sup>540</sup> Cf. BROSHI, M.: Estimating the population size of ancient Jerusalem, in: *Biblical Archaeology Review* 4 (1978), 10–15.

<sup>541</sup> Cf. MEYERS - STRANGE 1981, *Archaeology*, 58.

<sup>542</sup> Cf. REED 2002, *Archaeology*, 151.



likely was around 100 people per hectare. He used this coefficient and reached an estimate of between 600 and 1,500 inhabitants presuming a total area of six to ten hectares for first century Capharnaum.<sup>543</sup> In C.H. Laughlin's opinion, the total number of inhabitants did not exceed 1,000.<sup>544</sup> It is, however, at complete variance with the results of the excavations at both sides. As previously explicated, at the time of Jesus, Capharnaum could not have covered an area of six hectares and its total area was around two hectares at the most. Capharnaum would then not have had more than 300 – 400 inhabitants. First century Capharnaum was not, as Devries contends, "one of the major cities of Galilee and of the most important cities around the perimeter of the Sea of Galilee."<sup>545</sup> It was rather a fishing hamlet situated on the border with a custom post and a small detachment of soldiers. It was predominantly a very poor settlement with some more affluent inhabitants living in vicinity of the bathhouse.

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<sup>543</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*,

<sup>544</sup> Cf. LAUGHLIN 1993, "Capernaum.," in: *BAR* (5), 57.

<sup>545</sup> Cf. DEVRIES 1997, *Cities*, 269–270.

## 9 CONCLUSION

Capharnaum has been rediscovered, explored and excavated. The pilgrim reports that have come down to us have been of great help to the excavators in identifying the site as the “biblical Capharnaum”. Excavations have been conducted on both sides of Capharnaum. On the Franciscan side an insula-type house has surfaced that most likely was the house of St. Peter. Underneath the remains of the white-limestone synagogue parts of a structure that is believed to have been the first century synagogue have come to light. The synagogue was encompassed by contemporaneous dwellings. All the dwellings excavated on the Franciscan side were very poor and unpretentious even by contemporary standards. On the Greek orthodox side four structures of considerable higher quality have been excavated. One was a roman-type-bathhouse; the others could have been soldier barracks and the centurion’s residence. We have clearly shown that the centurion, although Gentile, most likely was not a Roman. There is no archaeological evidence of the permanent placement of Roman soldiers in Galilee prior to the second century A.D. The picture of first century A.D. Capharnaum that has emerged through these excavations is that of a mostly poor and unpretentious hamlet. People lived in small houses clustered around central courtyards. The house of St. Peter, had in addition, an open space in front of it. Thus, the evangelist who asserts that the entire town had crowded around the door could actually be telling the truth without exaggerating. We have also seen that the first century synagogue was quite different from all the other contemporaneous synagogues. It was probably much smaller and surrounded by dwellings that were enclosed by a thick wall thus forming a sacred precinct similar to the one discovered in the area of St. Peter’s house.

We have made the reader aware of the severe discrepancies presented in the reports on the excavations. Later remnants have been used prochronistically for the time of Jesus as was the case of the Byzantine fish hooks and the Early Arab fish pond. A prochronistic approach seems to have been used also in connection with the assessment of the population size of Capharnaum. We have pointed out the gross errors made by the Franciscans who did not preserve bones, ashes nor any other organic material for future analysis. We have attempted to provide the reader with an elaborate description as possible of all the first century remains that were brought to light in the Capharnean excavations. This work is somewhat surprisingly the first of its kind; no one has ever written a monograph on first century Capharnaum. We can only hope that it will not be the last.

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#### **10.4 Atlases of the Bible**

- AHARONI, Y., AVI-YONAH, M.: *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, New York: Carta - Macmillan Publishing Company, 1977.

GARDNER, J. L.: Reader's Digest Atlas of the Bible and Illustrated Guide to the Holy Land, Atlas of the Bible, Montreal: The Reader's Digest Association, 1981.

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## 11 A LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A.D.	Anno Domini
Cf.	Compare
ch.	chapter
ed.	edition
edit.	Editor
e.g.	exempli gratia (for example)
fig.	figure
ibid.	In the same place
Lib.	Liber (Book)
No.	Number
par.	Paragraph
St.	Saint
Tom.	Tomus (Tome)
vol.	volume

### **Abbreviations of the Books of the Bible following the standards of the New American Bible**

Nm – The Book of Numbers

Dt – The Book of Deuteronomy

Jos – The Book of Joshua

1 Mc – The First Book of Maccabees

Mt – The Gospel according to Matthew

Mk – The Gospel according to Mark

Lk – The Gospel according to Luke

Jn – The Gospel according to John

Acts – The Acts of the Apostles



### **Abbreviations of Journal titles**

<b>B</b>	Biblica
<b>BA</b>	Biblical Archaeologist
<b>BAIAS</b>	Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society
<b>BAR</b>	Biblical Archaeology Review
<b>BASOR</b>	Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research
<b>BeO</b>	Bibbia e Oriente
<b>BS</b>	Bible and Spade
<b>ESI</b>	Excavations and Surveys in Israel
<b>IEJ</b>	Israel Exploration Journal
<b>JP</b>	Jerusalem Perspective
<b>LA</b>	Liber Annuus
<b>N-JNTSSA</b>	Neotestamentica – Journal of the New Testament Society of South Africa
<b>PPTS</b>	Palestine <i>Pilgrims' Text Society</i>

### **Abbreviations of Encyclopedia titles**

<b>ABD</b>	The Anchor Bible Dictionary
<b>DJBP</b>	Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period, 450 B.C.E. to 600 C.E.
<b>NEAEHL</b>	The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land
<b>OEANE</b>	The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East

## **12 APPENDIX**

### LIST OF SUPPLEMENTS:

1. CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE OF REPORTS ON CAPHARNAUM
2. Datation of REED 2002, *Archaeology*, 21:
3. Cafarnao I – IV:
4. *Encyclopedia of Excavations in the Holy Land* (1970):
5. James Sauer, Heshbon pottery 1971:
6. Cafarnao V:
7. Chronological Table for Palestine
8. Chronological Table for Palestine
9. PHOTOGRAPHS

## 12.1 Chronological tables

### CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE OF REPORTS ON CAPHARNAUM

Ca. 75-79 A.D.: Josephus Flavius mentions in his work *De Bello Judaico* a spring called Capharnaum.

Ca. 100 A.D.: Josephus Flavius writes in his autobiography that when wounded after falling of his horse he received medical treatment in a village called Kepharnokos.

Ca. 330A.D.: Eusebius of Cesarea – in his *Onomasticon* mentions Kfar-Nachum as a still-existing village in the *finibus* of Zabulon and Neftali.

Ca. 374 A.D: Epiphanius of Salamis – in his Panarion mentions Count Joseph and his church building efforts and implies that he built a church in Capharnaum.

Ca. 384 A.D.: St. Aetheria in Petrus Diaconus's *De Locis Sanctis* – This is most likely the year that St. Aetheria visited Capharnaum, provided the fact that this report stems from her pen. She mentions a synagogue and the house of the Prince of Apostles (St. Peter) which has been made into a church.

Ca. 530 A.D.; A certain Theodosius gives an accurate description of the location of Capharnaum as being situated two miles from the Seven fountains and six miles from Bethsaida. This description is to be found in his guidebook to the Holy Places called *De Locis Sanctis*.

Ca. 570 A.D.: An anonymous pilgrim from Piacenza visits the site and reports on a basilica which is erected over the site of St. Peter's hose. This is the first allusion to a basilica in Capharnaum that has come down to us.

Ca. 670 A.D.: Arculfus, a bishop from France (Gaul) got a view of Capharnaum from a nearby situated hill and he reported that it was unfortified at that time. His pilgrim account was written down by Adamnanus the abbot of Iona.

Ca. 723 – 726 A.D.: Willibaldus, the nephew of St. Boniface and later the bishop of Eichstadt, relates more than 50 years after his visit to Capharnaum that he when visiting it was shown, by the locals, a house of Zebedee and his sons. He also recalls seeing a thick wall on the site. The account of his pilgrimage bears the name *Hodoeporicon* and was written down by his relative, a nun, named Hugeburc just before his death in 785 A.D.

9<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> century A.D.: A guide book ascribed to Epiphanius Monachus refers to a *domus Theologi* as standing in Capharnaum.

10 – 11<sup>th</sup> century A.D.: The passage on Capharnaum from the guide book mentioned above is reproduced with embellishments in *Sancti Helenae et Constantini Vitae*.

### **Chronological tables for Palestine**

#### **Datation of REED 2002, Archaeology, 21:**

Iron II	1000 – 733/32 B.C
Iron III	733/32 – 586 B.C.
Persian	586 – 332 B.C.
Early Hellenistic	332 – 167 B.C.
Late Hellenistic	167 – 63 B.C.
Early Roman	63 B.C. – 135 A.D.
Middle Roman	135 – 250 A.D.
Late Roman	250 – 363 A.D.

It may seem trivial to bring up the matter of chronology, but here is it really the question of chronological norms. All four of the volumes presuppose the following chronological table:

#### **Cafarnao I – IV:**

Late Hellenistic	200 B.C. – 63 B.C.
Early Roman or Roman I	63 B.C. – 135 A.D.
Middle Roman or Roman II	135 – 300 A.D.
Late Roman or Roman III	300 – 450 A.D.

Byzantine	450 – 638 A.D.
Early Arab	638 – 750 A.D.

**Encyclopedia of Excavations in the Holy Land (1970):**

Hellenistic I	332 – 152 B.C.
Hellenistic II or Hasmonean	152 – 37 B.C.
Roman I or Herodian	37 B.C. – 70 A.D.
Roman II	70 – 180 A.D.
Roman III	180 – 324 A.D.
Byzantine I	324 – 451 A.D.
Byzantine II	451 – 640 A.D.
Early Arab	640 – 1099 A.D.

**James Sauer, Heshbon pottery 1971:**

Late Hellenistic	198 – 63 B.C.
Early Roman	63 B.C. – 135 A.D.
Late Roman	135 – 324 A.D.
Early Byzantine	324 – 491 A.D.
Late Byzantine	491 – 640 A.D.
Early Islamic	640 – 1174 A.D.

“We can immediately see that there is no clear agreement, even without considering the problem of later chronology. Part of the source of the confusion here is that some authors are asking the historical question, “What is the major historical break?” And others are asking the archaeological question, “What can we find that signifies a cultural discontinuity?”

The question of terminology is another matter and devolves on agreement among archaeologists. What is more troubling is not the Franciscan terminology itself, but simply that they use the otherwise common terms “Late Roman” and “Byzantine” in now way congruent with presently accepted usage. That is, when one reads “Late Roman” in any of these volumes he or she must make the mental adjustment to “Late-Roman-Early Byzantine”.

This may seem as a minor point, but as a matter of fact, such a caveat at a point as basic as chronological terminology alerts us to look for other anomalies in the texts. We will not be disappointed.”

**Cafarnao V:**

Hellenistic period	325 B.C. – 65 B.C.
Early Roman	65 B.C. – 70 A.D.
Middle Roman	70 – 270 A.D.
Late Roman	270 – 350 A.D.
Early Byzantine	350 – 450 A.D.
Middle Byzantine	450 – 550 A.D.
Late Byzantine	550 – 650 A.D.
Early Arab I	650 – 800 A.D.
Early Arab II	800 – 1000 A.D.
Middle Arab I	1000 – 1200 A.D.
Middle Arab II	1200 – 1400 A.D.

**Chronological Table for Palestine**

Early Hellenistic (Hellenistic I)	323 B.C.
Late Hellenistic (Hellenistic II)	200 B.C. – 63 B.C.
Early Roman (Roman I)	63 B.C. – 135 A.D.
Late Roman (Roman II)	135 A.D. – 324 A.D.
Early Byzantine (Byzantine I)	324 A.D. – 451 A.D.
Late Byzantine (Byzantine II)	451 A.D. – 638 A.D.
Early Arab	638 A.D. – 1099 A.D.
Crusader	1099 A.D. – 1291 A.D.

STRANGE 1977, *The Capernaum and Herodium Publications* in BASOR 226:66 -67.

Chronological Table for Palestine

**Chronological Table for Palestine employed in this thesis**

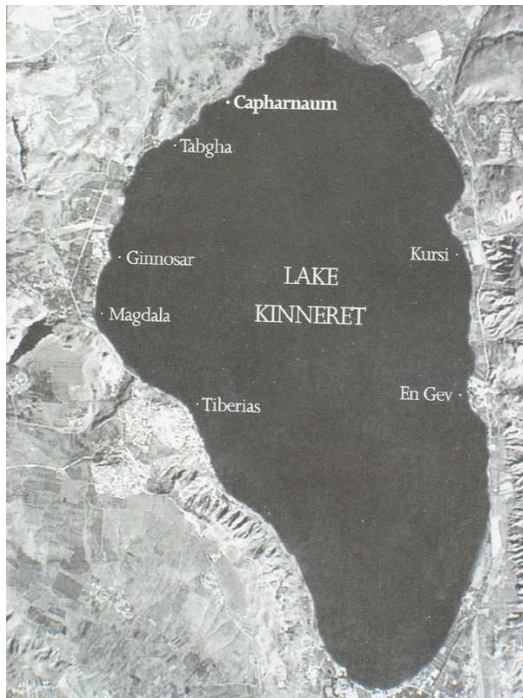
Middle Bronze age	1900 B.C. – 1550 B.C.
Late Bonze age	1550 B.C. – 1200 B.C.
Israelite Period (Iron age)	1200 B.C. – 587 B.C.

Persian Period	587 B.C. – 332 B.C.
Early Hellenistic (Hellenistic I)	323 B.C. – 200 B.C.
Late Hellenistic (Hellenistic II)	200 B.C. – 63 B.C.
Early Roman (Roman I)	63 B.C. – 135 A.D.
Late Roman (Roman II)	135 A.D. – 324 A.D.
Early Byzantine (Byzantine I)	324 A.D. – 451 A.D.
Late Byzantine (Byzantine II)	451 A.D. – 638 A.D.
Early Arab	638 A.D. – 1099 A.D.
Crusader	1099 A.D. – 1291 A.D.
Mamluk Period	1291 A.D. – 1517 A.D.
Ottoman Period	1517 A.D. – 1917 A.D.

## 12.2 Photographs

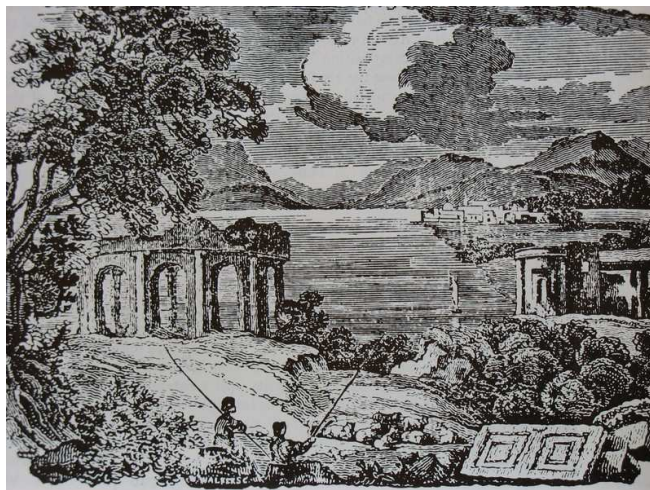
- Fig. 1 Satellite photo of Lake Kinneret with Capharnaum and some other sites indicated on it.
- Fig. 2 Sketch of Capharnaum drawn by James Silk Buckingham
- Fig. 3 A rare photograph of the prostrate ruins of the synagogue
- Fig. 4 Aerial photograph of the ruins on both sides of Capharnaum.
- Fig. 5 General plan of the ruins on the Franciscan side.
- Fig. 6 General plan of the ruins on the Greek Orthodox side.
- Fig. 7 General plan of the three strata uncovered in insula 1.
- Fig. 8 The octagonal church at Capharnaum.
- Fig. 9 Plan of the levels excavated beneath the mosaic pavement of the octagon.
- Fig. 10 General plan of the remnants in *Insula* 1 that stem from the Early Roman
- Fig. 11 In the foreground is the western wall of locus 7 stemming from the Early
- Fig. 12 An isometric reconstruction of *Insula* 1 in the first century A.D.
- Fig. 13 Locus 9 with a floor of rough and uneven black basalt cobblestone with fairly large and deep interstices.
- Fig. 14 The threshold of the entrance to the L-shaped courtyard over which Jesus must have stepped numerous times.
- Fig. 15 Pottery from the time of Jesus.
- Fig. 16 Two iron fish hooks from the second half of the fourth century A.D. discovered on the polychrome floor of the *domus ecclesia*.
- Fig. 17 The remains of the magnificent white limestone synagogue from the late fourth-early fifth century A.D. viewed from the eastern courtyard.
- Fig. 18 The remains of the white limestone synagogue's prayer hall.
- Fig. 19 The general plan of the later synagogue.
- Fig. 20 Structures predating the white limestone synagogue.
- Fig. 21 Excavations in the central nave of the prayer hall.
- Fig. 22 Fourteen first century A.D. glass vessels found in locus 669 in *insula* IX.
- Fig. 23 The eastern corridor of the Roman mausoleum with its three sarcophagi.
- Fig. 24 A Roman milestone found near the mausoleum at Capharnaum.





**Fig. 1** Satellite photo of Lake Kinneret with Capharnaum and some other sites indicated on it.

(Retrieved from LOFFREDA, S.: *Cafarnao V – Documentazione fotografica degli scavi (1968-2003)*, (=Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Collectio Maior 44), Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 2005, 38.)



**Fig. 2** Sketch of Capharnaum drawn by James Silk Buckingham and published in 1816.

Retrieved from SAPIR, B., NE'EMAN, D.: *Capernaum*, Vol. 9. (The Historical sites library), Tel Aviv: [s.e.], 1967, 102.

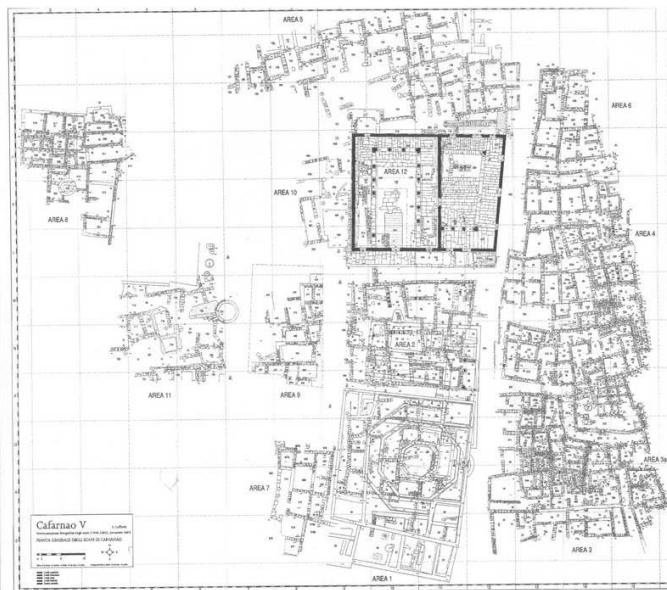


**Fig. 3** A rare photograph of the prostrate ruins of the synagogue, taken prior to the year 1905, which captures the deplorable state of the site.

Retrieved from LOFFREDA, S.: *Recovering Capharnaum*, <sup>2</sup>Jerusalem: Franciscan printing press, 1997, 11.



**Fig. 4** Aerial photograph of the ruins on both sides of Capernaum. In the upper left corner is the modern day Greek Orthodox church and in the lower right corner is the present Franciscan monastery. A partition separates the grass-covered ruins on the Greek side and the uncovered ruins on the Franciscan side.

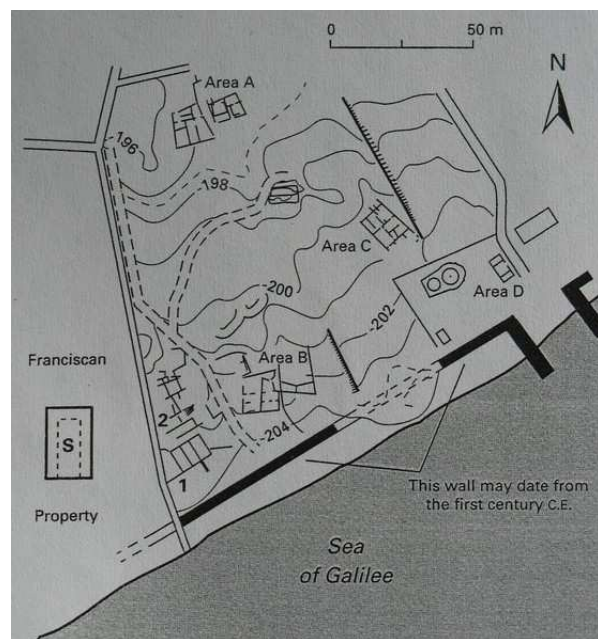


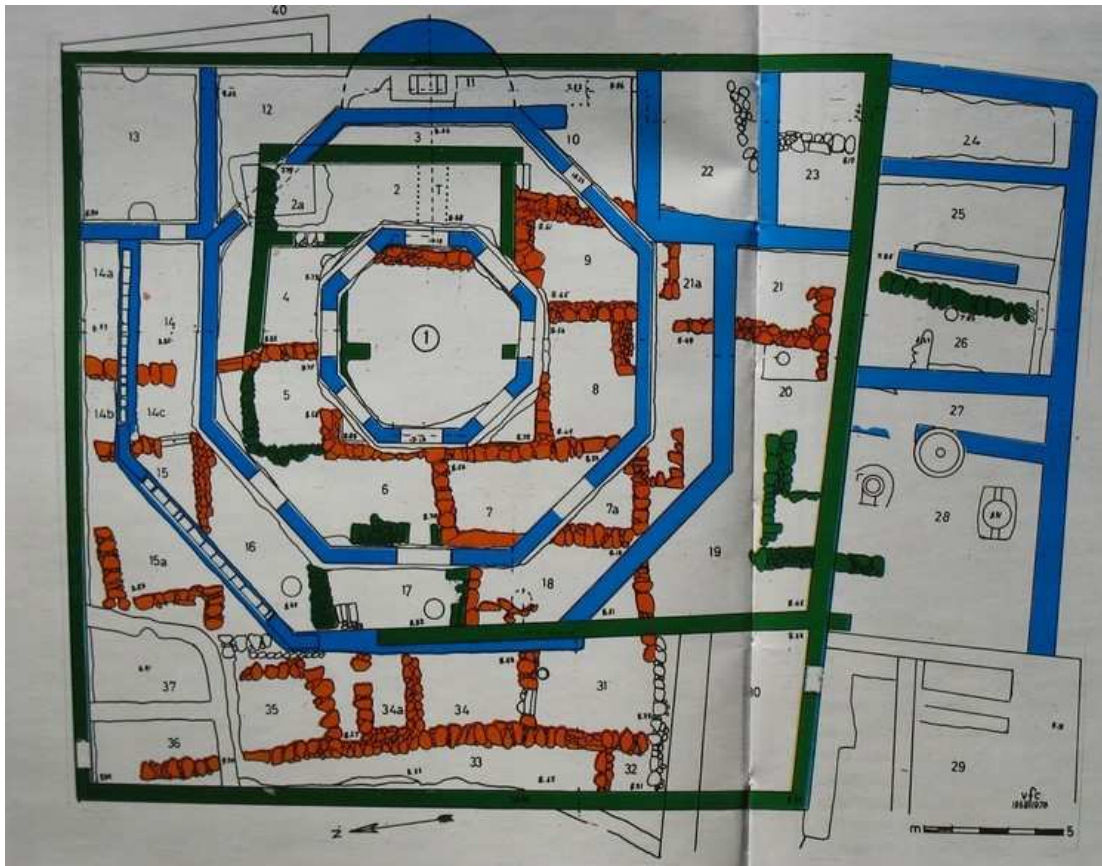
**Fig. 5** General plan of the ruins on the Franciscan side.

Retrieved from LOFFREDA, S.: *Cafarnaon V – Documentazione fotografica degli scavi (1968-2003)*, (=Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Collectio Maior 44), Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 2005, Planta generale degli scavi di Cafarnaon enclosed to it.

**Fig. 6** General plan of the ruins on the Greek Orthodox side.

Retrieved from ROUSSEAU, J. J., ARAV, R.: *Jesus and His World - an archaeological and cultural dictionary*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995, 45.





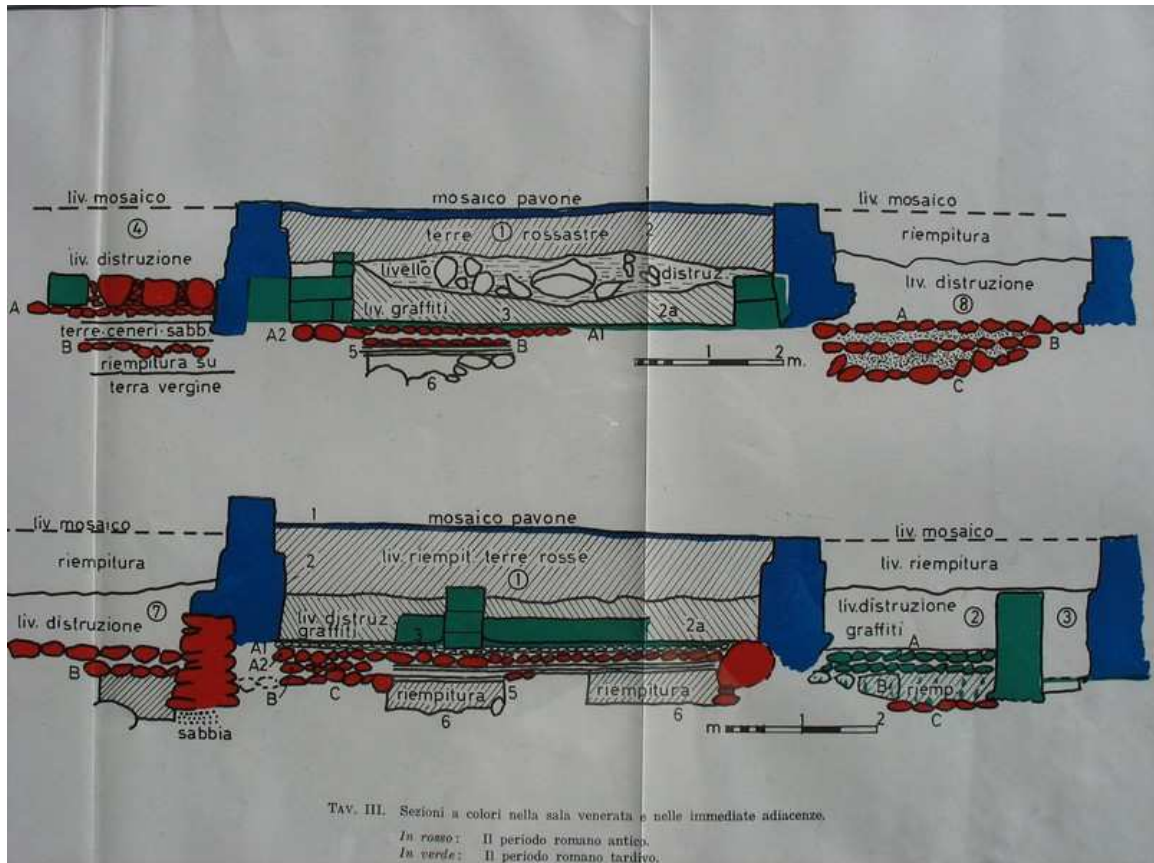
**Fig. 7** General plan of the three strata uncovered in insula 1.  
 Stratum 1 (red): The remnants of the private houses of the first century B.C.  
 Stratum 2 (green): The remnants of the fourth century A.D. *domus ecclesia*.  
 Stratum 3 (blue): The remnants of the octagonal church from the second half of the fifth century A.D.

Retrieved from CORBO, V. C.: *Cafarnaon I - Gli edifici della città*, (=Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Collectio Maior 19), Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1975, tavola II.

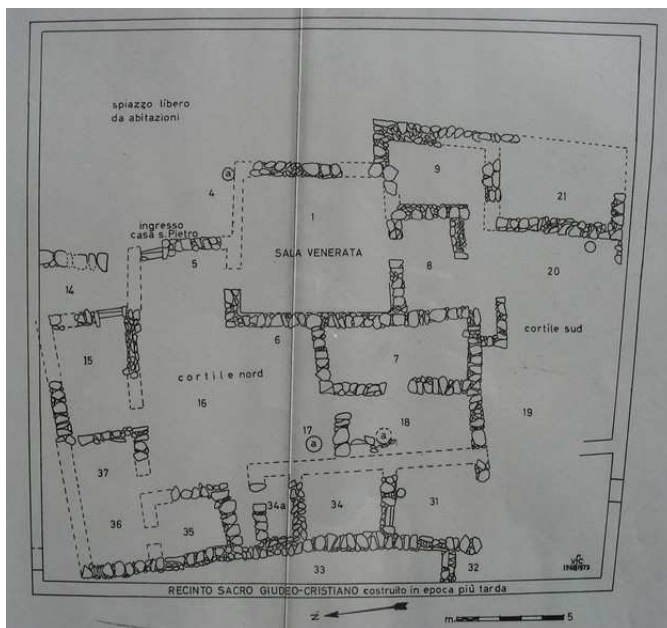


**Fig. 8** The octagonal church at Capharnaum.

Retrieved from *Cafarnaon I - Gli edifici della città*, (=Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Collectio Maior 19), Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1975, 48.



**Fig. 9** Plan of the levels excavated beneath the mosaic pavement of the octagon. In red are the structures from the Early Roman period. In green are the structures from the Late Roman and Early Byzantine period. In blue are the structures from the Late Byzantine period.



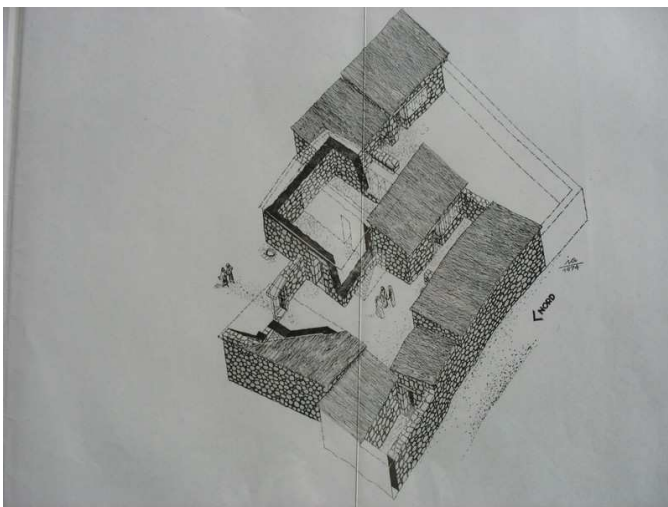
**Fig. 10** General plan of the remnants in *Insula 1* that stem from the Early Roman Period.

Retrieved from CORBO, V. C.: *Cafarnao I - Gli edifici della città*, (=Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Collectio Maior 19), Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1975, tavola 9.



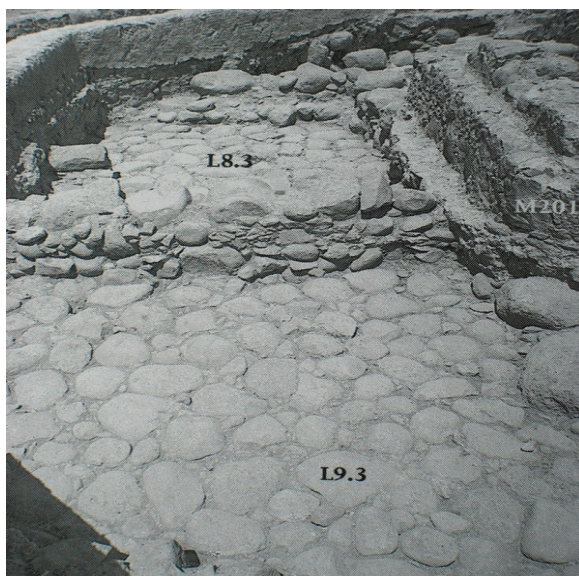
**Fig. 11** In the foreground is the western wall of locus 7 stemming from the Early Roman period.

Retrieved from LOFFREDA, S.: *Cafarnao V – Documentazione fotografica degli scavi (1968-2003)*, (=Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Collectio Maior 44), Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 2005, 61.



**Fig. 12** An isometric reconstruction of *Insula* 1 in the first century A.D.

Retrieved from LOFFREDA, S.: *Recovering Capharnaum*, <sup>2</sup>Jerusalem: Franciscan printing press, 1997, 53.



**Fig. 13** Locus 9 with a floor of rough and uneven black basalt cobblestone with fairly large and deep interstices.

Retrieved from LOFFREDA, S.: *Cafarnao V – Documentazione fotografica degli scavi (1968-2003)*, (=Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Collectio Maior 44), Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 2005, 62.

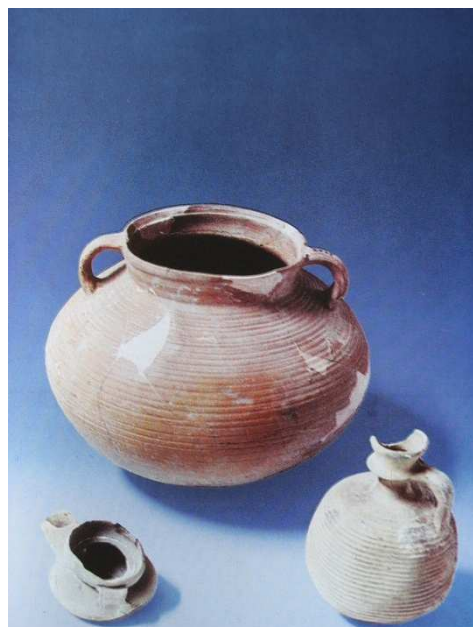


**Fig. 14** The threshold of the entrance to the L-shaped courtyard over which Jesus must have stepped numerous times.

Retrieved from LOFFREDA, S.: *Cafarnao V – Documentazione fotografica degli scavi (1968-2003)*, (=Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Collectio Maior 44), Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 2005, 64.

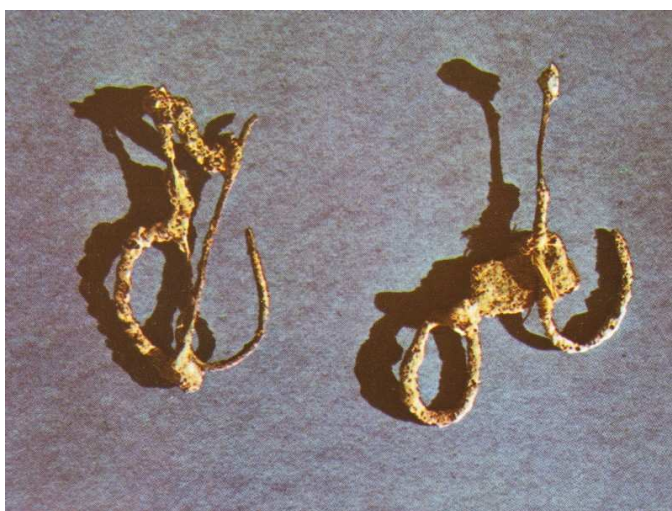
**Fig. 15** Pottery from the time of Jesus. The cooking bowl was found in *Insula 1* while the oil lamp and the narrow-necked vase were discovered in a tomb in the vicinity of Cana.

Retrieved from LOFFREDA, S.: *Holy Land pottery at the time of Jesus - Early Roman Period 63 B.C. – 70 A.D.*, Jerusalem: Franciscan printing press, 2003, plate 15.



**Fig. 16** Two iron fish hooks from the second half of the fourth century A.D. discovered on the polychrome floor of the *domus ecclesia*.

Retrieved from CORBO, V. C.: *Cafarnao I - Gli edifici della citta*, (=Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Collectio Maior 19), Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1975, 81.





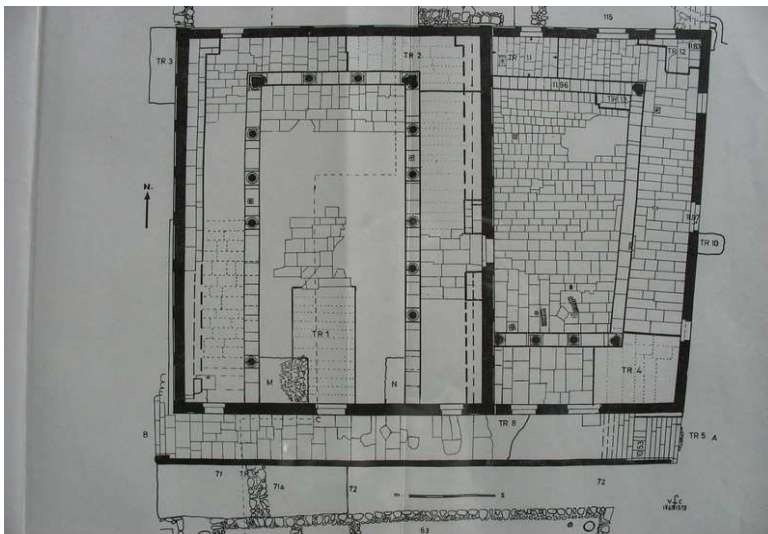
**Fig. 17** The remains of the magnificent white limestone synagogue from the late fourth-early fifth century A.D. viewed from the eastern courtyard.

Retrieved from LOFFREDA, S.: *Recovering Capharnaum*, <sup>2</sup>Jerusalem: Franciscan printing press, 1997, 33.



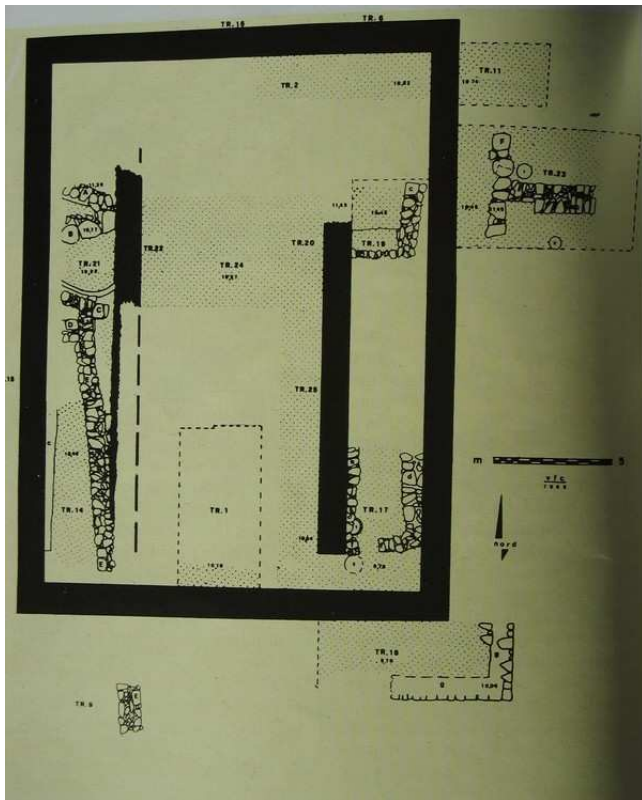
**Fig. 18** The remains of the white limestone synagogue's prayer hall.

Retrieved from LOFFREDA, S.: *Recovering Capharnaum*, <sup>2</sup>Jerusalem: Franciscan printing press, 1997, 33.



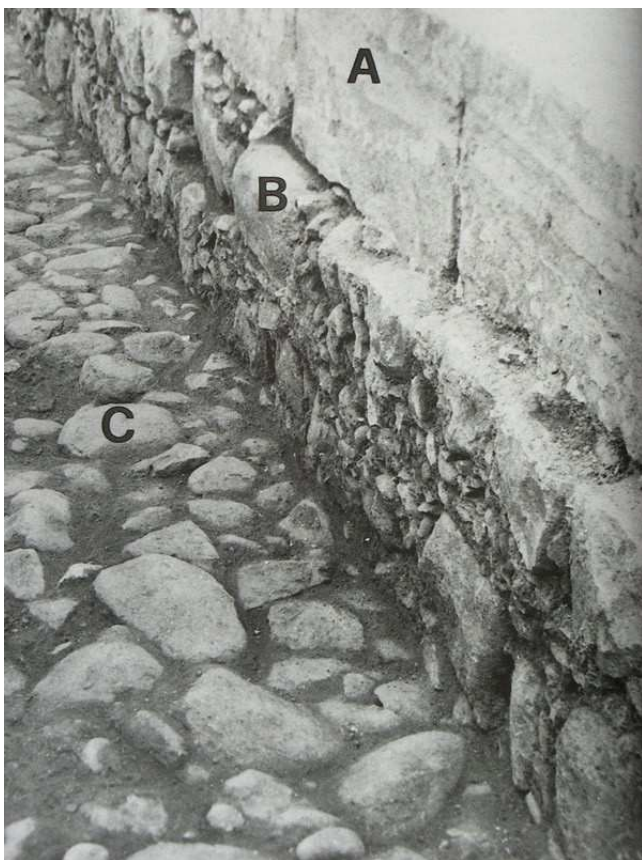
**Fig. 19** The general plan of the later synagogue.

Retrieved from CORBO, V. C.: *Cafarnao I - Gli edifici della citta*, (=Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Collectio Maior 19), Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1975, tavola 9.



**Fig. 20** Structures predating the white limestone synagogue.

Retrieved from LOFFREDA, S.: *Recovering Capharnaum*, <sup>2</sup>Jerusalem: Franciscan printing press, 1997, 44.



**Fig. 21** Excavations in the central nave of the prayer hall.

A. Stylobate of the fourth century A.D.  
 B. The basalt stone wall (MB)  
 C. The large basalt stone pavement from the first century A.D.

Retrieved from LOFFREDA, S.: *Recovering Capharnaum*, <sup>2</sup>Jerusalem: Franciscan printing press, 1997, 46.





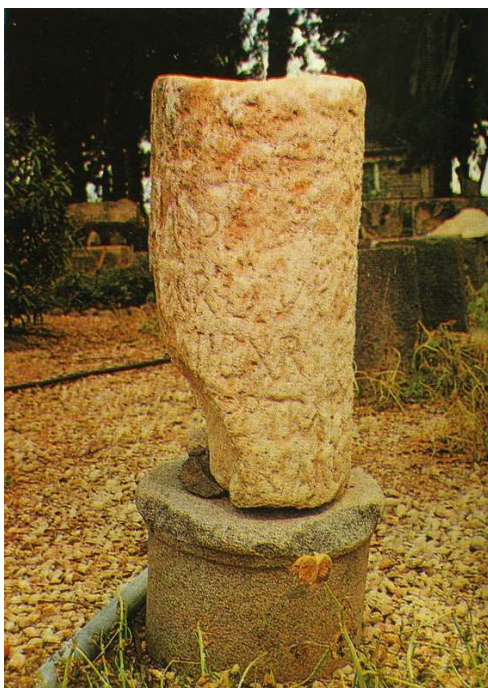
**Fig. 22** Fourteen first century A.D. glass vessels found in locus 669 in *insula IX*.

Retrieved from LOFFREDA, S.: *Recovering Capharnaum*, <sup>2</sup>Jerusalem: Franciscan printing press, 1997, 24.



**Fig. 23** The eastern corridor of the Roman mausoleum with its three sarcophagi.

Retrieved from Retrieved from LOFFREDA, S.: *Cafarnao V – Documentazione fotografica degli scavi (1968-2003)*, (=Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Collectio Maior 44), Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 2005, 189.



**Fig. 24** A Roman milestone found near the mausoleum at Capharnaum stemming from the time of Hadrian (117–138 A.D.).

Retrieved from LOFFREDA, S.: *Recovering Capharnaum*, <sup>2</sup>Jerusalem: Franciscan printing press, 1997, 20.

## **ABSTRACT**

### **The Significance of the Archaeological Excavations in Galilee for the Interpretation of the Gospels.**

During the latter half of the last century a number of excavations have been conducted throughout the Holy Land. Out of all the sites excavated one stands out in particular and that is Capharnaum which Matthew did not hesitate to call Jesus's "own town". The large number of Gospel references to Capharnaum, when taking into account the proverbial conciseness of the Gospels, is striking and it simply underlines the importance it had in Jesus's public ministry. This settlement has actually been extensively excavated and several remnants from the first century A.D. have been unearthed. Among the most significant are the house of St. Peter and the synagogue from the Early Roman period, however, they are not the only ones meriting attention. This thesis is probably the first work attempting to furnish the reader with a complete description of the archaeological findings that are dated to the first century A.D. Moreover, it contains what is probably the most complete presentation of the extra-biblical references to Capharnaum to date. The aim of this thesis is to present and scrutinize these finds comparatively with both the biblical and extra-biblical sources as well as with finds from other contemporaneous sites in the Levant. Apart from providing the reader with insight into the Capharnean excavations it will hopefully allow him or her to envision Capharnaum while reading the Gospels.

#### **Key Words**

Biblical Archaeology

Capharnaum (Capernaum)

First Century Synagogue

House of Saint Peter

Time of Jesus

## **ABSTRAKT**

### **Význam archeologických vykopávek v Galileji pro interpretaci evangelních textů**

Ve druhé polovině 20. století proběhla po celé Svaté Zemi řada archeologických vykopávek. Ze všech zkoumaných míst vyniká obzvláště Kafarnaum, které evangelista Matouš nazývá městem Ježíšovým. Velký počet evangelních zmínek o Kafarnaum je pozoruhodný vzhledem k příslovečné stručnosti evangelií, což pouze podtrhuje význam Kafarnaum v Ježíšově veřejném působení. Vykopávky na tomto místě proběhly ve velkém rozsahu a bylo odkryto mnoho pozůstatků z prvního století po Kristu. Mezi nejvýznamnější nálezy patří Petrův dům a synagoga z rané doby římské, nejsou však jedinými, které si zasluhují naši pozornost. Tato práce zřejmě představuje první ucelený pokus o podrobné popsání archeologických nálezů z doby Ježíšovy. Zároveň přináší doposud nejpodrobnější přehled mimobiblických zpráv o Kafarnaum. Cílem této diplomové práce je představit a analyzovat uvedené archeologické nálezy a porovnat je jak s biblickými i ostatními textovými prameny, tak i s nálezy ze soudobých míst v Levantě. Kromě toho umožní také čtenáři vytvoření lepší představy o Kafarnaum v době Ježíšově.

#### **Klíčová slova:**

Biblická archeologie

Capharnaum (Capernaum, Kafarnaum)

Synagoga z prvního století

Dům svatého Petra

Doba Ježíšova