

# The Myth of a Gentile Galilee

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# 1

## IMAGES OF GALILEE'S POPULATION IN BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP

No single thread unites the frequent claims that numerous pagans lived in Galilee and that the region was rightly known as “Galilee of the Gentiles.” Eminent scholars simply present the description as accepted wisdom. Günther Bornkamm’s widely read *Jesus of Nazareth* and Martin Dibelius’s *Jesus*, for example, both casually refer to the “mixed race” of Galileans.<sup>1</sup> One can identify recurring arguments, usually based on the purported changes produced by one event or another in Galilee’s history, but one is hard-pressed to identify any clear lines of development for this view, at least in the scholarship pre-dating recent excavations.

What differentiates many of the more recent scholarly statements about Galilee is not detailed argumentation but the claim that recent archaeological discoveries irrefutably prove the population’s diversity. Indeed, the extensive archaeological activity that began in the early 1970s and has continued to this day is the only true milestone in the scholarly discussion. One can trace archaeology’s impact on the debate, from early calls for greater attention to the “Hellenistic” or “cosmopolitan” aspects of Lower Galilee to recent claims of paganism’s representation in Galilee’s material culture. A review of the spectrum of scholarly positions on Galilee’s population will identify the key moments in the region’s demographic development as well as the most significant issues raised by archaeological finds.

### Before the digs

Galilee has often been depicted as rural, bucolic hinterland, characterized by natural beauty and simplicity of life. Of these portraits, the romanticism of Ernest Renan is unparalleled.<sup>2</sup> For Renan, the region’s natural

<sup>1</sup> Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 42; Dibelius, *Jesus*, 39–40; cf. Hugh Anderson, ed., *Jesus* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967), 24.

<sup>2</sup> Ernest Renan, *The Life of Jesus*, 13th edn. (London: Mathieson and Co., n. d.), 37.

life, that is, its geography, flora, and fauna, granted it an almost paradisiacal nature, so that “all the dreams of Galilee” had “a charming and idyllic character.” Renan’s glowing prose makes the region sound almost mythical. Galilee, in contrast to gloomy Jerusalem, was “shady” and “smiling,” especially in springtime, when the country was a “carpet of flowers.” The region’s animals were “small and extremely gentle,” and its mountains inspired “loftier thought” than any other mountains in the world.<sup>3</sup> Renan described an essentially rural Galilee, with no large cities but Tiberias. The population was large and diverse: “This province reckoned amongst its inhabitants, in the time of Jesus, many who were not Jews (Phoenicians, Syrians, Arabs, and even Greeks). The conversions to Judaism were not rare in mixed countries like this.”<sup>4</sup> He provided no rationale for this description, however.

Guignebert’s portrayal is similar. “Peasants for the most part, they led simple, healthy lives, scarcely touched by the intellectual problems that perplexed the inhabitants of Judaea.” They were “hard-working and energetic,” devoting themselves to farming the region’s fertile soil, fishing in its lake, and prospering from its position on the trade routes. As for their ethnic and religious composition, it was “very mixed.” Jewish customs predominated, but only because the gentiles living there adopted them “with more or less sincerity and good will” in order to live peaceably among the Jews.<sup>5</sup>

In contrast to Renan and Guignebert, Adolf von Harnack stressed the sophistication of at least some of Galilee’s inhabitants. Galilee was populated by many gentiles and influenced by Greco-Roman trends, he argued, but Jesus’s message and ministry were untouched by any significant encounters with larger Hellenistic society.<sup>6</sup> Harnack uses the Hellenistic atmosphere of Galilee, complete with Greek inhabitants, as a contrasting background for the Jewish Jesus. He was joined in this position by Joseph Klausner, who argued that “Jesus was in no way influenced” by these many gentiles.<sup>7</sup>

Other scholars suggested that the area’s cultural diversity contributed to Jesus’s open-minded acceptance of individuals of various backgrounds. Rather than minimizing the impact a mixture of peoples would have had on Jesus, they emphasized how that diversity affected him. Shirley

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.      <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 13–14.

<sup>5</sup> Ch. Guignebert, *The Jewish World in the Time of Jesus*, trans. S. H. Hooke (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1939), 7–11.

<sup>6</sup> Harnack, *What is Christianity?*, 33–34.

<sup>7</sup> Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 363; cf. 233.

Jackson Case provides a classic example of this reasoning. Case emphasized the importance of Sepphoris, one of Galilee's two principal cities. Less than four miles from Nazareth, Sepphoris was clearly visible from the hills overlooking Jesus's village. This proximity to Nazareth of a city with a population of both "Jews and foreigners" helped to explain the "unconventionality of Jesus in mingling freely with the common people, his generosity toward the stranger and the outcast, and his conviction of the equality of all classes before God . . ." On Jesus's numerous trips to the city, he would have frequently met pagans.<sup>8</sup> Case thus foreshadowed recent developments in Historical Jesus research.

The idea that Galilee's population was mixed influenced other streams within New Testament scholarship besides Historical Jesus research. Some scholars, most notably Ernst Lohmeyer, Robert Henry Lightfoot, Willi Marxsen, and L. E. Elliot-Binns, argued that Galilee was regarded by some early Christians as the "land of salvation" which served as the setting both for Jesus's earthly ministry and for future revelation. This status was most obvious in the Gospel of Mark, especially in Jesus's instructions for the disciples to go to Galilee following the resurrection (14:28; cf. 16:7). Its focus on Galilee was understood to reflect the presence there of early Christian communities, which were comprised of both Jews and gentiles.<sup>9</sup>

Many geographical studies of Palestine also encouraged a view of Galilee as "Galilee of the Gentiles." Often taking the form of a travelogue, such studies interwove images of ancient and modern Palestine, blending reminiscences of travels in the "holy land"; pertinent passages from the Bible, apocrypha, Josephus, rabbinic materials, church histories, and pilgrimage literature; and local traditions about sites. Gustaf Dalman's Galilee, for example, was far from isolated, given the vast amounts of trade – and the vast numbers of gentile traders – that passed

<sup>8</sup> Shirley Jackson Case in "Jesus and Sepphoris," *JBL* 45 (1926): 14–22, quote from 19, and *Jesus*, 199–212.

<sup>9</sup> Ernst Lohmeyer, *Galiläa und Jerusalem* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1936); L. E. Elliot-Binns, *Galilean Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1956); Robert Henry Lightfoot, *Locality and Doctrine in the Gospels* (New York and London: Harper and Brothers Publishers, n. d.); and Willi Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist*, trans. James Boyce et al. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1969). On the diversity of Galilee's population, see especially Elliot-Binns (18–19) and Marxsen (note 64 on page 71). G. H. Boobyer ("Galilee and Galileans in St. Mark's Gospel," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 35 [1953]: 334–348) and Werner H. Kelber (*The Kingdom in Mark: A New Place and a New Time* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974], 130–131) provide other variants of the "land of salvation" theory. Cf. the critiques of such views in Davies, *The Gospel and the Land*, 221–243 and Günter Stemberger, "Galilee – Land of Salvation?" 409–438 in the same volume.

through it.<sup>10</sup> A well-traveled network of roads criss-crossed the region, connecting it to its northern and southern neighbors as well as to the Mediterranean. Nazareth, though only a small village, was a “radiating point of important roads and a thoroughfare for an extensive traffic.”<sup>11</sup> Jesus, Dalman believed, would have been greatly influenced by these economic cross currents.<sup>12</sup> The gentile presence in Galilee was due not only to merchants, however; pagans lived there, especially at places like Magdala, with its Greek hippodrome, and the border village Bethsaida.<sup>13</sup> Dalman stressed, however, that despite the sizable numbers of gentiles, most Galileans were Jews. Even Sepphoris was primarily Jewish; in fact, “Jewish Zippori [Sepphoris] was . . . the religious centre of the district.”<sup>14</sup>

Few of these claims about Galilee's eclectic population included substantial supporting arguments. If their proponents offered any reasons at all for their views, they typically consisted of one or more elements of the following historical schema, drawn from literary sources:

- 1 The reference in Isaiah 8:23 (9:1) to “Galilee of the Gentiles” attests to a non-Jewish population in the late eighth century BCE.
- 2 Following their eighth-century BCE conquest of Israel, the Assyrians depopulated Galilee, carrying away most Israelites in captivity. The settlers the Assyrians introduced to Galilee were non-Jews, as were the neighboring peoples who moved into the region. As subsequent empires – Persian, Ptolemaic, Seleucid, Roman – ruled Galilee, they, too, allowed non-Jewish settlers to come there.<sup>15</sup>
- 3 In Maccabean times, Galilee's Jewish population was still small enough to be seriously endangered by the gentile majority, necessitating Judas's total evacuation of it to Judea (cf. 1 Maccabees 5:9–23).<sup>16</sup>
- 4 The region remained outside the Jewish sphere until Aristobulus I conquered it c. 103 BCE (*Ant.* 13.318ff.), forcibly converting its inhabitants to Judaism and colonizing the region with Jews

<sup>10</sup> Gustaf Dalman, *Sacred Sites and Ways: Studies in the Topography of the Gospels*, trans. Paul P. Levertoff (New York: Macmillan, 1935). See also Clemens Kopp, *The Holy Places of the Gospels* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963) and Albrecht Alt, *Where Jesus Worked: Towns and Villages of Galilee Studied with the Help of Local History*, trans. Kenneth Grayson (London: Epworth Press, n. d.).

<sup>11</sup> Dalman, *Sacred Sites*, 63. <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 11. <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 126, 165. <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>15</sup> E.g., Clark, “Galilee,” 344; Bo Reicke, *The New Testament Era*, trans. David E. Green (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), 68, 117; Guignebert, *Jewish World*, 7–8.

<sup>16</sup> E.g., Clark, “Galilee,” 344.



from the south. Roman-era pagans are the descendents of gentiles who managed to escape Hasmonean Judaization. Many scholars argued that this relatively recent conversion meant that those Jews whose roots lay in the pre-Hasmonean population were Jewish only by religion, not by ethnicity. The result was a “mixed race.”<sup>17</sup> A few followed this suggestion to its logical conclusion, suggesting that because Jesus was a Galilean, he was not truly a Jew.<sup>18</sup>

- 5 In the first century CE, gentiles were found throughout Galilee, especially in the cities.<sup>19</sup>
- 6 Large numbers of Gentile merchants and travellers passed through Galilee, and Roman troops were stationed there.<sup>20</sup>
- 7 The region continued to be known as “Galilee of the Gentiles,” as shown by LXX Isaiah 8:23, LXX Joel 4:4, 1 Maccabees 5:15, and Matthew 4:15.<sup>21</sup> Matthew’s reference, in particular, indicates that Galilee contained large numbers of gentiles in the time of Jesus.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>17</sup> E.g., D. S. Russell, *The Jews from Alexander to Herod* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 69; Guignebert, *Jewish World*, 11; Humphrey Carpenter, *Jesus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 22; Maurice Goguel, *Jesus and the Origins of Christianity*, 3 vols. (New York: Harper Brothers, 1960), vol. II, 254–255. On both points 3 and 4, see especially Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, rev. and ed. Geza Vermes and Fergus Millar, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1973–1987), vol. I, 142 and 216–218 and vol. II, 7–10.

<sup>18</sup> E.g., Walter Grundmann, *Jesus der Galiläer und das Judentum* (Leipzig: Verlag Georg Wigand, 1941), 175; cf. Renan, *Life*, 14; Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 233; Goguel, *Jesus*, vol. II, 254–255; and the earlier claim by Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. John Lees, 2 vols. (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1910), vol. I, 200–213.

On the Nazi-era context of Grundmann’s work, see Susannah Heschel, “Post-Holocaust Jewish Reflections on German Theology,” in Carol Rittner and John K. Roth, eds., *From the Unthinkable to the Unavoidable* (Westport, Conn. and London: Greenwood Press, 1997), 57–69; “Transforming Jesus from Jew to Aryan: Theological Politics in Nazi Germany,” *Dialog* 35 (1996): 181–187; “Nazifying Christian Theology: Walter Grundmann and the Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Church Life,” *Church History* 63 (1994): 587–605.

<sup>19</sup> E.g., Clark, “Galilee,” 347; Boobyer, “Galilee and Galileans,” 334–348; Case, “Jesus and Sepphoris” and *Jesus*, 199–212; cf. Walter Bauer’s characterization of “*halbheidnischen Sepphoris*” in “Jesus der Galiläer,” *Aufsätze und kleine Schriften* (Tübingen: JCB Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1967), 102; see also 92–93.

<sup>20</sup> E.g., Dalman, *Sacred Sites*, 11.

<sup>21</sup> Rafael Frankel’s discussion of the name “Galilee of the Gentiles” (“Galilee [Pre-Hellenistic],” *ABD*, vol. II, 879), also includes LXX Joshua 12:23<sup>B</sup>, but why is unclear. Neither *Septuaginta* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart, 1979) nor the critical edition of Vaticanus (Alan England Brooke and Norman McLean, eds., *The Old Testament in Greek*, vol. I, part 4, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1917], 724) notes variant readings which add “of the gentiles” after “Galilee.”

<sup>22</sup> E.g., Boobyer, “Galilee and Galileans,” 334–348; Reicke, *New Testament Era*, 117.

An extended quote from F. C. Grant's article "Jesus Christ" in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* demonstrates the widespread influence of this schema:

Jesus was a Galilean . . . This fact was of far-reaching significance for his whole career. For Galilee was the "Circle of the Gentiles" . . . either because it was surrounded by foreign nations or because (in later times) the Jews there were surrounded by foreigners . . . [Galilee] had not always been Jewish territory. In the days of Jesus there were many non-Jews, especially Syrians, Phoenicians, Arameans, Greeks, and Romans, living here. Some of these were descended from the peoples who had settled in Palestine during the Exile . . . or earlier still, after the destruction of Samaria, then capital of the Northern Kingdom, in 722 BC. Many had, no doubt, crowded into that land during the terrible days of the Maccabean War . . . when the Maccabees had evacuated the whole Jewish population to Judea for safety. Later (104 BC) these foreigners were forced to accept Judaism . . . The outlook of a Jewish boy, growing to manhood in this region, surrounded by Gentiles, and in contact with foreigners from all parts of the world, was necessarily different from that of a citizen of Jerusalem or of any town in Judea. Across the broad, fertile, Plain of Esdraelon . . . came the ancient caravan road from Egypt . . . [which] moved on into the distant NE, toward Damascus, Palmyra, Babylon, India, China! How could a boy fail to be impressed with the vastness of the world, with the improbability of God's exclusive concern for one people only, when daily before his eyes came "many from east and west" (Matt. 8:11), Gentiles who might be seeking not only the riches of this world but also the kingdom of God!<sup>23</sup>

Few scholars have included in their discussions of Galilee as many points of this historical outline as Grant did. Usually they have referred to only one or two of the arguments described above, if they offered any reason for viewing Galilee's population as mixed.

### **The influence of archaeology**

Many recent works base their understandings of Galilee on the outline described above,<sup>24</sup> but most also cite supposed archaeological evidence.

<sup>23</sup> Grant, "Jesus Christ," 877.

<sup>24</sup> Mack, for example, stresses the inefficacy of the Hasmonean conversion (*Lost Gospel*, 59). Bösen repeats the first three points of the schema, though he believes that the Hasmonean

This new dimension in the discussion of Galilee's cultural ethos and population can be traced to the excavations that have followed Israel's victory in the 1967 war. Although a few Roman-era sites in Galilee had undergone excavation before this time,<sup>25</sup> the 1970s mark the true beginning of archaeology's influence on conceptions of Galilee in New Testament scholarship. Continuing holy site archaeology, such as the high-profile Franciscan project at Capernaum, drew some attention, but it was the American excavations in Upper Galilee at the sites of Meiron, Gush Ḥalav, Khirbet Shema', and Nabratein that were to mark the beginning of a new era in the investigation of ancient Galilee.<sup>26</sup>

### Regionalism and Galilee

On the basis of the data unearthed in the Upper Galilee excavations, Eric M. Meyers proposed that the material culture of Roman and Byzantine Upper Galilee differed significantly from that of Lower Galilee, demonstrating regional differences.<sup>27</sup> The artwork of Upper Galilee was mostly aniconic, with simple representative designs such as menorot, eagles, and geometric designs. Large amounts of Tyrian coinage indicated Upper Galilee's participation in a trade network connected with the

conquest resulted in a predominantly Jewish population (*Galiläa*, 146–148). The idea that "Galilee of the Gentiles" accurately highlights Galilee's diverse population is a recurring view (e.g., Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13* [Dallas: Word Books, 1993], 73; Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew* [Collegeville, Minn.: A Michael Glazier Book published by The Liturgical Press, 1991], 71; Francis Wright Beare, *The Gospel According to Matthew* [San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981], 121; John P. Meier, *Matthew* [Collegeville, Minn.: A Michael Glazier Book published by The Liturgical Press, 1990], 33).

<sup>25</sup> The Franciscans had excavated around the holy sites in Nazareth, for example, and Sepphoris had undergone one season of excavation in 1931.

<sup>26</sup> For an overview of recent excavations, see J. Andrew Overman, "Recent Advances in the Archaeology of the Galilee in the Roman Period," *Currents in Research: Biblical Studies* 1 (1993): 35–57.

<sup>27</sup> Meyers, "Galilean Regionalism as a Factor"; Eric M. Meyers, "Galilean Regionalism: A Reappraisal," in W. S. Green, ed., *Approaches to Ancient Judaism*, 6 vols. (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press for Brown University, 1978–1989), vol. v, 115–131; Eric M. Meyers, "The Cultural Setting of Galilee: The Case of Regionalism and Early Judaism," in Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase, eds., *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, 2.19.1 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1979), 686–702; Eric M. Meyers and James F. Strange, "The Cultural Setting of Galilee: The Case of Regionalism and Early Palestinian Judaism," in *Archaeology, the Rabbis, and Early Christianity* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), 31–47 (a revised version of the article in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*).

Cf. the critique of Ruth Vale in "Literary Sources in Archaeological Description: The Case of Galilee, Galilees, and Galileans," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 18 (1987): 209–226, and that of Richard A. Horsley in "Archaeology and the Villages of Upper Galilee: A Dialogue with Archaeologists," *BASOR* 297 (1995): 5–16 and *Archaeology, History, and Society in Galilee* (Valley Forge, Penn.: Trinity Press International: 1996), 90–95. Meyers responds to Vale and Horsley in "An Archaeological Response to a New Testament Scholar," *BASOR* 297 (1995): 17–26.

predominantly pagan cities on the coast. Meyers argued, in his original formulations of the regionalism argument, that Upper Galilee's ceramic repertoire had more in common with that of the Golan than with that of Lower Galilee. Thus, numismatic and ceramic evidence both suggested that Upper Galilee was economically oriented more to the north than to the south. The most significant discovery of all in Upper Galilee, perhaps, was what was not found: substantial evidence for the use of Greek, either in inscriptions or in mosaics. Despite economic contacts with the Golan and with the coast, Upper Galilee seemed isolated and culturally conservative, resisting Hellenistic influence.

Lower Galilee, in contrast, exhibited a strikingly different openness to Hellenistic culture. Greek inscriptions were much more common, occurring especially in the lake area and at the burial complex at Beth She'arim. Figurative representative artwork was not uncommon, as seen in the rich imagery of the zodiac mosaic at Hammath. Roads passed through Lower Galilee connecting Damascus and the east with the cities on the coast, leading to bustling economic activity and trade in the region. Numismatic and ceramic finds demonstrated participation in far-reaching trade networks extending in all directions. Thus, the cities and villages of Lower Galilee were very much in contact with "the pagan, and hence Greek-speaking west, with its more cosmopolitan atmosphere and multilingual population," Meyers argued.<sup>28</sup> Though Greco-Roman influences were nowhere more visible than in Lower Galilee's principal cities, Sepphoris and Tiberias, they were not limited to the larger communities. The interaction between city and village assured that the cities' cosmopolitan influence was felt throughout the smaller communities of Lower Galilee.

Meyers revised aspects of his thesis in light of subsequent discoveries. Further excavations revealed much more continuity between the pottery of Upper Galilee and Lower Galilee than initially supposed. Imported wares from as far away as Cyprus and Africa and coins from a variety of cities demonstrated that Upper Galilee was also less isolated than originally believed, though still less integrated into trade networks than Lower Galilee.<sup>29</sup> Meyers's basic thesis, however, remained unchanged: far from being a cultural backwater, Lower Galilee exhibited a "cosmopolitan" atmosphere and an exciting synthesis of Jewish and Greco-Roman cultures. This new understanding of Galilee was to have a dramatic

<sup>28</sup> Meyers, "Cultural Setting," 697–698.

<sup>29</sup> See "Galilean Regionalism: A Reappraisal," "Archaeological Response," and "Jesus and His Galilean Context," in Douglas R. Edwards and C. Thomas McCollough, eds., *Archaeology and the Galilee: Texts and Contexts in the Graeco-Roman and Byzantine Periods* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 57–66.

impact on studies of the Historical Jesus, early Christianity, and rabbinic literature.

In the mid-1980s, excavations began at Sepphoris, and the finds there dramatically attested to the extent of Greco-Roman influence in Galilee in the early centuries of the common era.<sup>30</sup> A triclinium mosaic, dated to the early third century CE, or the approximate time of the redaction of the Mishnah, depicted a procession of the deity Dionysos riding a donkey and a symposium (drinking contest) between Dionysos and Heracles. A market weight bearing an inscription naming the city's *agoranomos* attested to the use of Greek titles for city officials. Numerous other finds also reflected Greco-Roman influence – the Nile mosaic, Roman roads, and lamps decorated with Hellenistic motifs. The theater, partially excavated earlier in the century, received new attention. If built by Antipas, it stood during the time of Jesus, providing popular entertainment for the surrounding villages. Stone vessels and mikvaot (ritual baths), combined with a substantial number of rabbinic traditions, indicated the presence of Jews at Sepphoris, but new evidence indicated that pagans dwelled there, as well. Bronze figurines, possibly of Pan and Prometheus, as well as that of a bull, were discovered; considering them in conjunction with the images of deities, emperors, and temples on the city coins of Sepphoris, some New Testament scholars spoke of the thriving pagan cults within the city. James F. Strange, another of the principal excavators of Sepphoris, described it as a “Roman city” with a “mixed population.”<sup>31</sup> “By the second century,” Meyers wrote, “Sepphoris had become the home of pagans, Jews, and Jewish-Christians.”<sup>32</sup> In short, the excavations at Sepphoris revealed the urban aspects of Lower Galilee and provided proof of its cosmopolitan atmosphere and diverse inhabitants.

As excavated sites multiplied in Galilee, David Adan-Bayewitz and Isadore Perlman took advantage of the newly available data to study ancient pottery production and trade networks. They demonstrated that the pottery of the village Kefar Ḥananyah, at the border of Upper Galilee and Lower Galilee, dominated the ceramics industry in both Galilees. Trade of the Kefar Ḥananyah ware extended beyond the borders of Galilee, however, into the gentile communities in the surrounding areas – Acco-Ptolemais on the coast, Tel Anafa to the north, villages of the Golan, and the cities of the Decapolis. The wide distribution of Kefar

<sup>30</sup> See the treatment of Sepphoris in chapter 3.

<sup>31</sup> James F. Strange, “Sepphoris,” *ABD*, vol. v, 1090–1093.

<sup>32</sup> Eric M. Meyers, “Roman Sepphoris in Light of New Archaeological Evidence and Recent Research,” in Levine, ed., *Galilee in Late Antiquity*, 321–338; quote from 329. See also Eric M. Meyers, Ehud Netzer, and Carol L. Meyers, “Sepphoris: Ornament of All Galilee,” *BA* 49 (1989): 4–19.

Hananyah's pottery seemed to prove that a well-developed trade network linked Galilee with its neighbors.<sup>33</sup>

“Hellenized” and “urbanized” Galilee

Whereas in previous scholarship, one could find a variety of images of Galilee, in the wake of recent excavations, a dominant view has developed, that of a “Hellenized” and “urbanized” Galilee. Debate continues about the extent and rate of this Hellenization and urbanization, but few scholars reject this terminology entirely. J. Andrew Overman provides a classic expression for “urbanized” Galilee. He argues that Lower Galilee's economic contacts with the coastal cities and the Decapolis “would have resulted in a certain cosmopolitan flavor to the rather small region, and the presence of a variety of influences from the wider Greco-Roman world, and additional toll and tax for the region from this constant flow of goods.”<sup>34</sup> His consideration of communities in and around Galilee concludes that the area's cities were “regional centers of Roman power and culture.”<sup>35</sup> Overman emphasizes that Jesus's references to scribes, courts, and the *agora* reflect his familiarity with urban life,<sup>36</sup> though his complete lack of any activity in the cities reflects the rural–urban tension which existed in Galilean (and ancient) society as a whole.<sup>37</sup> Overman summarizes, “Life in Lower Galilee in the first century was as urbanized and urbane as anywhere else in the empire.”<sup>38</sup>

<sup>33</sup> David Adan-Bayewitz and Isadore Perlman, “Local Pottery Provenience Studies: A Role for Clay Analysis,” *Archaeometry* 27 (1985): 203–217; David Adan-Bayewitz and Isadore Perlman, “The Local Trade of Sepphoris in the Roman Period,” *IEJ* 40 (1990): 153–172.

<sup>34</sup> J. Andrew Overman, “Who Were the First Urban Christians? Urbanization in Galilee in the First Century,” in J. David Lull, ed., *Society of Biblical Literature 1988 Seminar Papers* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 161. <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>36</sup> Matt. 5:21–26/Luke 12:57–59; Matt. 11:16–17/Luke 7:32.

<sup>37</sup> On urbanization, see several studies by Freyne (“Urban-Rural Relations,” “Herodian Economics,” “Jesus and the Urban Culture,” *Galilee, Jesus, and the Gospels*, 143–155; and “Geography, Politics and Economics”) as well as Richard A. Horsley, *Archaeology*, 43–87 and “The Historical Jesus and Archaeology of the Galilee: Questions from Historical Jesus Research to Archaeologists,” in Eugene H. Lovering, Jr., ed., *Society of Biblical Literature 1994 Seminar Papers* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 91–135; John S. Kloppenborg Verbin, *Excavating Q: The History and Setting of the Sayings Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 214–261; and Jonathan L. Reed, “Population Numbers, Urbanization, and Economics: Galilean Archaeology and the Historical Jesus,” in *Society of Biblical Literature 1994 Seminar Papers*, 203–221; Meyers, “Jesus and His Galilean Context,” 59–63; Douglas R. Edwards, “The Socio-Economic and Cultural Ethos of the Lower Galilee in the First Century: Implications for the Nascent Jesus Movement,” in Levine, ed., *Galilee in Late Antiquity*, 53–73; and Douglas R. Edwards, “First-Century Urban/Rural Relations in Lower Galilee: Exploring the Archaeological and Literary Evidence,” in D. J. Lull, ed., *Society of Biblical Literature 1988 Seminar Papers* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 169–182.

<sup>38</sup> Overman, “Who Were the First Urban Christians?” 168.

For many New Testament scholars, the “urbanization” and “Hellenization” of Galilee indicate that large numbers of pagans – indigenous gentiles as well as Romans and Greeks – lived there. For Strange, the presence of Galilean cities explains not only Jesus’s references to institutions like the courts and the *agora*, but also his references to gentiles in such passages as Matthew 5:48 and 6:7. Strange argues that Jews would have met gentiles at “Sepphoris, Tiberias, and above all, Acco-Ptolemais (but also in Hammath, Magdala, and possibly Gennosaur)” as well as on market roads.<sup>39</sup> In addition to the gentiles living in cities and larger communities, Strange suggests that Roman troops were stationed in Galilee. The story of the centurion’s servant (Matthew 8:5–13/Luke 7:1–10), he argues, implies that a contingent of Roman soldiers was stationed at Capernaum, perhaps as a border patrol or to assist with customs collections.<sup>40</sup>

Like Strange, Howard Clark Kee also argues that the reference to the centurion in Matthew 8:5/Luke 7:2 reflects the “despised Roman occupying forces,” but, also like Strange, Kee suggests that these were not the only gentiles in Galilee. He argues that “careful analysis of the archaeological sites and remains in the Galilee” suggests that Jesus was likely to have encountered gentiles in his ministry. In his view, Sepphoris was an “important Roman cultural and administrative center” with “all the features of a Hellenistic city . . . including a theater, hippodrome, and temples.” Tiberias was a city of “gentile name and origin,” though its population had “a predominance of Jews.”<sup>41</sup>

Richard Batey also emphasizes the Hellenistic flavor of Sepphoris’s culture.<sup>42</sup> Updating Case’s earlier argument in light of archaeological discoveries, Batey notes the possibility that Jesus, as a *tekton*, worked at Sepphoris during Antipas’s building programs. In his view, Jesus would

<sup>39</sup> James F. Strange, “Some Implications of Archaeology for New Testament Studies,” in James. H. Charlesworth and Walter P. Weaver, eds., *What has Archaeology to do with Faith?* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992), 43–44; cf. Anne Hennessy, *The Galilee of Jesus* (Roma: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1994), 9–10. Bernard J. Lee (*The Galilean Jewishness of Jesus* [New York and Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1988], 53–95) and Bösen (*Galiläa*, 146–148) depict Galilee as primarily Jewish but with gentile minorities in the cities.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. James F. Strange, “First-Century Galilee from Archaeology and from the Texts,” in Eugene H. Lovering, Jr., ed., *Society of Biblical Literature 1994 Seminar Papers*, 89–90. See also the frequent references to “Roman occupation” in Sawicki, *Crossing Galilee*, 82–85, 88, 92–96, 178–179.

<sup>41</sup> Kee, “Early Christianity,” quotes from 18, 14, 15, and 17.

<sup>42</sup> Richard A. Batey, “Jesus and the Theatre,” *NTS* 30 (1984): 563–574; Richard A. Batey, “Is not this the Carpenter?” *NTS* 30 (1984): 249–258; Richard A. Batey, “Sepphoris: An Urban Portrait of Jesus,” *BAR* 18:3 (1992): 50–63; Batey, *Jesus and the Forgotten City*; cf. Thomas R. W. Longstaff, “Nazareth and Sepphoris: Insights into Christian Origins,” *Anglican Theological Review Supplementary Series* 11 (1990): 8–15. See Stuart Miller’s rejoinder to Batey’s work in “Sepphoris, the Well-Remembered City,” *BA* 55 (1992): 74–83.

have frequently visited the theater at Sepphoris and probably learned the word “hypocrite” – “actor” there.<sup>43</sup> He suggests in one publication that its population was primarily Jewish<sup>44</sup> but elsewhere states that it included Jews, Arabs, Greeks, and Romans.<sup>45</sup> Antipas’s Sepphoris had Roman baths as well as a temple to Augustus,<sup>46</sup> and one would have encountered on Galilee’s highways pigs “raised for Roman appetites and sacrificial rites.”<sup>47</sup>

The impact of the “new Galilee” has been felt elsewhere in Gospels research, such as in provenience studies. Anthony J. Saldarini, for example, argues that given Galilee’s “complex and cosmopolitan society,” it is as likely a candidate as any for the home of Matthew’s audience. “Good-sized cities, such as Sepphoris, Tiberias, Capernaum, and Bethsaida, would have had Jewish and gentile Greek speakers as well as the community resources to educate and support a leader and writer such as the author of Matthew.”<sup>48</sup> Likewise, Q has increasingly been placed in Galilee, largely on the basis of references to Galilean communities – Capernaum, Chorazin, and Bethsaida – and to the nearby cities of Tyre and Sidon.<sup>49</sup> Given this Galilean setting, some argue, the Q community must have been made up of both Jews and gentiles.<sup>50</sup>

### Jewish Galilee

Despite the frequency with which one encounters the view that large numbers of pagans lived in Galilee, major studies, both pre-dating and post-dating recent excavations, have depicted a primarily Jewish population. In *Jesus the Jew*, Geza Vermes described a Jewish Galilee, though

<sup>43</sup> Batey, “Jesus and the Theatre,” 563–565. Cf. Borg’s suggestion that Greek and Roman plays were performed at Sepphoris (*Meeting Jesus*, 25–26).

<sup>44</sup> Batey, “Is not this the Carpenter?” 255.

<sup>45</sup> Batey, *Jesus and the Forgotten City*, 14. <sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 81. <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>48</sup> Anthony J. Saldarini, “The Gospel of Matthew and Jewish–Christian Conflict in the Galilee,” in *Galilee in Late Antiquity*, ed., 26–27.

<sup>49</sup> Matt. 8:5/Luke 7:1; Matt. 11:20–24/Luke 10:13–15; see Kloppenborg Verbin, *Excavating Q*, as well as John S. Kloppenborg, “The Sayings Gospel Q: Recent Opinion on the People Behind the Document,” *Currents in Research: Biblical Studies* 1 (1993): 9–34; Christopher M. Tuckett, *Q and the History of Early Christianity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 102–103; Jonathan L. Reed, “The Social Map of Q,” in John S. Kloppenborg, ed., *Conflict and Invention* (Valley Forge, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1995), 17–36; Jonathan L. Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus: A Re-examination of the Evidence* (Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 2000), 170–196; and Jonathan L. Reed, “Places in Early Christianity: Galilee, Archaeology, Urbanization, and Q” (Ph.D. Diss., Claremont Graduate School, 1994).

<sup>50</sup> Mack (*Lost Gospel*) is one proponent of this view. For one recent discussion of this issue, see Tuckett, *Q and the History*, 393–424.



“its overwhelming Jewishness was a relatively recent phenomenon.” His understanding of the region’s history was similar to the schema outlined above: the region originally had contained many Gentiles, as evidenced by the reference in Isaiah 8:23 to “Galilee of the Gentiles”; the Assyrian conquest resulted in the deportation of most Israelites, though some remained behind to co-exist with the foreign colonists the Assyrians imported. For Vermes, though, the Hasmonean conquest marked the shift of the region back into the Jewish sphere; Aristobulus’s “Judaization” had been successful.<sup>51</sup> Galilee’s annexation into Hasmonean territory and its position surrounded by gentile neighbors had resulted in a unique Judaism, one marked by Jewish pride despite its geographical separation from Jerusalem. Far from arguing that Galilee’s mixed population explained Jesus’s openness toward gentiles, Vermes suggested that “it may have been Galilean chauvinism that was responsible for Jesus’s apparent antipathy towards Gentiles.”<sup>52</sup>

Martin Goodman’s analysis of rabbinic texts found a primarily Jewish community in the post-revolts, second-century CE Galilee.<sup>53</sup> His search of early rabbinic traditions for reports of specific encounters between Jews and gentiles in Galilee discovered few examples. Goodman suggests that while generalized rabbinic discussions about appropriate behavior in such meetings may reflect regular contact with non-Jews, more likely they reflect a theoretical concern. He does believe that some interaction between Jews and gentiles occurred, arguing that “social contact with gentiles is . . . probable, at least in some parts of Galilee; commercial contacts are certain,”<sup>54</sup> but he concludes that these contacts were more frequent in the border regions, where Galileans would have encountered pagans from the surrounding cities and villages. The strongest possible evidence for gentiles, according to Goodman, is the presence of pagan symbols on the coins of Sepphoris and Tiberias, but he argues that such images may have been adopted in the wake of the two revolts by Jewish leaders eager to placate the sensibilities of the Roman authorities. If that is the case, then they reflect the political acumen of Galilee’s Jewish leadership, not a pagan population.<sup>55</sup>

Sean Freyne’s *Galilee from Alexander the Great to Hadrian: 323 B.C.E. to 135 C.E.* also rejected the theory of a gentile Galilee, as evidenced in its subtitle: “A Study of Second Temple Judaism.” In contrast to Vermes, Freyne argued for the continuity of the first-century CE population with

<sup>51</sup> Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), 44.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 49; cf. Geza Vermes, *Jesus and the World of Judaism* (London: SCM Press, 1983), 1–14.

<sup>53</sup> Goodman, *State and Society*, esp. 41–53.    <sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.    <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

the pre-Assyrian conquest Israelites. Though the Assyrians had depopulated and resettled Samaria, he suggested, they had not removed the inhabitants of Galilee.<sup>56</sup> Thus, the Jewish character of the region was largely undisturbed throughout the centuries. Jewish–gentile conflicts during the Maccabean campaigns occurred primarily near the gentile coastal cities.<sup>57</sup> Aristobulus “Judaized” the Itureans who had moved into the region as the Seleucid empire crumbled, but no forcible conversion was necessary for most Galileans, who already considered themselves Jews. The first-century CE population, therefore, was predominantly Jewish, just as the populations in the preceding centuries had been.

Freyne wrote *Galilee from Alexander the Great to Hadrian* before much of the archaeological work in Galilee had been executed and published, so his arguments there are based primarily on literary sources. In *Galilee, Jesus, and the Gospels*, he incorporates recent archaeological data in his effort to situate Jesus within a specifically Galilean context. As in his earlier study, Freyne notes the lack of evidence for participation of Galileans at the pagan shrines at Dan or Gerizim and concludes that Galileans were loyal to the Jerusalem temple, though their participation was limited because of distance and some suspicions toward the Jerusalem authorities. Jesus would have encountered gentiles on his travels to surrounding regions, Freyne argues, and he exhibited a universal perspective which emphasized God’s care for Jews and gentiles alike.

Freyne has also updated his reconstruction of Galilee’s historical development. In recent articles, he acknowledges that the lack of archaeological evidence for settlement between the eighth century BCE and the Hellenistic period suggests that less continuity existed between first-century CE Galilee’s Jewish population and the pre-Assyrian deportation Israelites than he originally supposed. Noting a multiplication of Galilean sites in the Late Hellenistic period, he argues that the population grew through colonization after the Hasmonean conquest.<sup>58</sup> In his most recent publications, Freyne allows for a gentile presence in Galilee but places it mostly at the region’s margins.

<sup>56</sup> A similar position was held by Albrecht Alt, “Galiläische Probleme,” in *Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte des Volkes Israel* (Munich: C.H. Beck’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1953), vol. II, 363–435.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. 1 Macc. 5:9–23.

<sup>58</sup> Freyne, *Galilee, Jesus, and the Gospels*, 169–170; see also Sean Freyne, “Behind the Names: Galileans, Samaritans, Ioudaioi,” in Eric M. Meyers, ed., *Galilee through the Centuries: Confluence of Cultures* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 39–56; “Galilee,” *OEANE*, vol. II, 370–376; “Galilee,” *ABD*, vol. II, 895–899; “Geography, Politics, and Economics”; and “Archaeology and the Historical Jesus,” in John R. Bartlett, ed., *Archaeology and Biblical Interpretation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 122–138.

Richard A. Horsley also rejects the idea of a mostly gentile Galilee, though the image he offers in its stead is especially controversial.<sup>59</sup> Horsley dismisses the possibility that Galilee was largely uninhabited after the Assyrian invasion, noting that this view is based primarily on surface surveys, which are often inaccurate. The literary sources, he posits, depict neither a widespread depopulation of the region of Galilee by the Assyrians, nor any massive recolonization by the Assyrian, Persian, Ptolemaic, or Seleucid rulers. Thus, the first-century CE Galileans were descendants of the ancient Israelites. Galilee's distinct history, marked by long-term political separation from Judea and Jerusalem, resulted in a unique culture. Galileans shared a "common Israelite cultural heritage" with the Judeans, but their traditions and customs differed substantially from those of their southern neighbors. Thus, Horsley argues, Galileans were not, properly speaking, "Jews." He proposes that the underlying Greek term Ἰουδαίος, when used in Palestinian contexts, should be taken quite literally as "Judean," thus excluding Galileans. The Hasmonean "conversion" of the inhabitants of Galilee resulted in their introduction into Jerusalem's sphere of influence and control, not their mass conversion to Judean religion. "Subjection of the Galileans and others to 'the laws of the Judeans' meant, in effect, subordination to the Hasmonean temple-state in a political-economic way inseparable from its religious dimension." Because of the shared Israelite heritage of Galileans and Judeans, the transition to Hasmonean rule of Galilee was not as problematic as it could have been, but the inhabitants were not integrated into the Judean *ethnos*; they remained a distinct people, having "undergone more than eight centuries of separate development."<sup>60</sup> To understand Galilee as a primarily gentile region would be to misunderstand it, but to regard it as "Jewish" would likewise be to remain blind to its own distinctive history and culture.

Meyers's observations of the differences in the material cultures of Upper and Lower Galilee and his work at Sepphoris prompted much of the subsequent discussion of Hellenistic Galilee by New Testament scholars. Even in his earlier articles, however, despite his vigorous call for the recognition of the strong influence of Hellenism in Lower Galilee, Meyers never claimed that the first-century CE population contained many Gentiles. His argument had been that first-century Galilee was in contact with its gentile neighbors, but that its population – including Sepphoris and Tiberias – was predominantly Jewish. He now stresses that

<sup>59</sup> Richard A. Horsley, *Galilee: History, Politics, People* (Valley Forge, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1995) and *Archaeology*.

<sup>60</sup> Horsley, *Galilee*, 50–51. Sawicki (*Crossing Galilee*) follows Horsley in this regard.

changes in the population occurred within the second century CE, when thousands of Roman troops were stationed a few miles to the south at Legio. Meyers's more recent statements leave no doubt that, in his view, the first-century CE population was almost entirely Jewish. He writes, "On the basis of Galilean regionalism, archaeology, the gospels, and Josephus, it is the inescapable and unavoidable conclusion that Jesus's Galilean context was first and foremost a Jewish one both in content and in its political, administrative form."<sup>61</sup>

E. P. Sanders grants the presence of Hellenism in Galilee, though he is skeptical of its extent since evidence for the major institutions of Hellenism, especially the gymnasium, the agent of education and socialization in the Greek world, is noticeably absent. Sanders questions whether mere proximity to cities would have created a common culture shared by both city and village, and he is not convinced that trade between Galilee and surrounding areas indicates that the inhabitants had regular contact with each other. As for the idea that Galilee had large numbers of gentiles, Sanders rejects it entirely, contrasting the extensive evidence for Judaism (particularly in Josephus) with the lack of evidence for paganism. In particular, he dismisses the notion that Roman troops were stationed in first-century CE Galilee, pointing out the irregularity that Roman troops in a client king's territory would have posed and emphasizing the abundance of evidence demonstrating that Roman troops were stationed there only in the second century. He summarizes: "On the whole, in Antipas's Galilee, which was Jesus's Galilee, the law was Jewish, the courts were Jewish, the education was Jewish."<sup>62</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Meyers, "Jesus and His Galilean Context," 64.

<sup>62</sup> Sanders, "Jesus in Historical Context," 429–448, quote from 440; see also Sanders, *Historical Figure*, 20–22 and "Jesus' Galilee," in Ismo Dunderberg, Kari Syreeni, and Christopher Tuckett, eds., *Pluralism and Conflicts: Festschrift Heikki Räsänen* (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming). For examples of other scholars who have argued that Galilee was primarily Jewish, see Martin Goodman, "Galilean Judaism and Judaean Judaism," in William Horbury, W. D. Davies, and John Sturdy, eds., *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, vol. III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 596–617; Frances Xavier Malinowski, "Galilean Judaism in the Writings of Flavius Josephus" (Ph.D. Diss., Duke University, 1973), esp. 66–71; Louis H. Feldman, "How Much Hellenism in Jewish Palestine?" *Hebrew Union College Annual* 57 (1986): 83–111; Louis H. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World: Attitudes and Interactions from Alexander to Justinian* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 24–25; Fergus Millar, *The Roman Near East: 31 B.C.–A.D. 337* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1993), 347; Ben Witherington, III, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 38; Anthony J. Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 75–76; Augustine Stock, *The Method and Message of Matthew* (Collegeville, Minn.: A Michael Glazier Book published by The Liturgical Press, 1989), 57; Bösen, *Galiläa*, 146–148.

**Conclusion**

Scholarly opinions on how to characterize Galilee's populations depend largely on their interpretation of Galilee's complex political history and material culture. Indeed, one wonders if some scholars have started with the view that Galilee's population was mixed and then searched for reasons to explain why this was so. To clarify the nature of Jewish–gentile interaction there in the first century CE, it is necessary to examine more closely key moments in its prior historical development as well as the available evidence from the first century itself.