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Shikhin remains

Talmudic village
found near Tzipori

Shikhin, Talmudic village home to many potters, found near Tzipori

• By SAMMY HUDES

Archeologists say they have found remains of the ancient Jewish village of Shikhin, located in the central Galilee, which could be instrumental in the study of Jewish life in the region and the origins of Christianity.

Dr. Mordechai Aviam of Kinneret College's Institute for Galilean Archeology and co-director of the Shikhin expedition, said on Sunday the findings so far include evidence of an ancient synagogue and remnants of pottery production.

The expedition is a joint project led by Aviam, Samford University Religion Professor James Riley Strange and Kentucky Christian University Biblical Studies Professor David Fiensy.

Aviam said the project, which has included two years of excavations thus far, would help to answer crucial historical questions surrounding the identity of the Galileans.

"Who were the Galileans?"



STUDENTS EVACUATE Shikhin village in the Galilee.
(Courtesy Shikhin Expedition)

he asked. "Where they remnants from the First Temple period? Were they people who came from Judea? Were they people who converted [to Judaism]?"

Aviam noted that the village is mentioned along with neighboring city Sepphoris (modern Tzipori) by first-century historian Flavius Josephus, and in the Talmud as a village home to many potters.

"Shikhin is one of the two earliest names that we have in the Second Temple period,"

he said. "The Galilee is an Israelite kingdom that was destroyed by the Assyrians in the eighth century BC. Since then, and until the dynasty of the Hasmoneans [in the second century BCE], we have almost no historical information about the Galilee."

Pottery production is an important aspect of archaeological research, and Aviam said this was especially true at Shikhin. He noted that seven molds of oil lamps have been discovered during the excavation,

a high number that rivals large excavated cities such as Caesarea.

"According to what I know today, [it is] the largest amount of molds ever found in a village," Aviam said. "The fact that we have seven molds already tells us very clearly that the production of oil lamps was very important to the potters in Shikhin."

The archeologists plan to continue excavations in the village, hoping "to find evidence of the Jewish settlement in the Galilee until the place was abandoned in the fourth century."

"Our future excavation has to do with studying the cultural heritage of the village Shikhin," he said. "What's very important here is the proximity between this little village and the capital of Galilee in Sepphoris, so studying the material culture of the village will tell us a lot about the relationship and the sociological connection between villagers and people in the big city."