

The Eerdmans Encyclopedia of Early Christian Art and Archaeology

Paul Corby Finney, *General Editor*

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Slipcase illustration: Ivory panel (416 × 143 mm) with an archangel (probably Michael); right panel of a diptych (left panel lost). In his right hand the figure holds a globe surmounted by a Greek cross; in his left, a long staff, perhaps a scepter. The architectural setting consists in an arch supported by fluted columns, capped with Corinthian capitals; there are steps beneath the plinths below left and right. Beneath the arch is a wreath enclosing a Greek cross; a scalloped shell frames the wreath. Above the arch, within a long narrow rectangular tabula, is written: +ΔΕΧΟΥ ΠΑΡΟΝΤΑ ΚΑΙ ΜΑΘΩΝ ΤΗΝ ΑΙΤΙΑΝ (“Receive the suppliant, although you know his guilt”); London.BM, OA.9999. (Photo courtesy Trustees of the British Museum)

G

Galilee

The northernmost region of Palestine. In approximate terms, the ancient northern border corresponds to the border between modern Israel and → Lebanon; the eastern border is constituted by the Upper Jordan valley (with some overlap into Transjordan; → Decapolis); the southern border corresponds to the Galilee-Samaria border; the western border follows the Syro-Phoenician littoral from Ptolemais-Acco (*TIR.IP*, s.v.) northward in the direction of → Tyre, which was the main emporium of western Galilee in late antiquity (see Freyne, 1997; see map 15, J5 and map 22, C1).

G. was important to Christians in late antiquity because this was the land where Jesus was raised. He must have spent his early life in south-central G.: in → Nazareth, where he was raised, and in the neighboring Jewish hamlets and villages of south-central G. According to NT tradition, during his adult life he traveled outside of south-central G., esp. to eastern G.

It appears that, before the 4th c., Christianity left little or no mark on the material culture of G. But this is a controversial subject. Some have argued vigorously to support the existence of pre-Constantinian, Galilean-Christian material evidence (e.g., B. Bagatti); others have argued, just as vigorously, against its existence (e.g., Taylor, 1993, 221ff.). There is still no consensus on this issue.

There are signs of Galilean-Christian influence on material culture beginning in the late 4th c. By this latter date, two spheres of influence were beginning to assert themselves, both in southern G. One is at the eastern end of Lower G. along the shores of the Sea of G. (e.g., → Capernaum, Chorsia-Kursi, et-Tabgha/→ Hep-tapegon, → Hippos-Susita, Magdala, Philoteria, and → Tiberias); this eastern sphere of influence extended eastward into parts of Transjordan. The second sphere of Galilean-Christian influence was centered at Nazareth. Based solely on extant material evidence, it is clear that the period in which Christianity made the greatest strides in developing a Galilean material infrastructure (e.g., baptisteries, churches, monasteries) began in the late 400s and continued until the late 500s.

Western Galilee

The western sector of G. was divided in late antiquity into two sectors: Upper (mountainous) and Lower (hilly uplands leading into the mountainous north). Upper Galilee was known as Tetrakomia

(four villages). The territory in Upper Galilee controlled by Christians lies west of a line that extends from Mafsheta-Fassuta (*TIR.IP*, s.v.) to Baca (*ibid.*) to Rama (*ibid.*). East of that line, the land extending to the Jordan valley appears to have been controlled by Jews. Excavators and surveyors have identified about 20 synagogues in this eastern territory and no churches. In 1980-90 a survey of western G. was undertaken for the purpose of identifying churches and Christian settlements dating to the pre-Islamic period (Aviam, 1994). Approx. 140 settlement sites were identified, and in 51 of them there was material evidence of churches. A dozen monastic sites also were identified; this is particularly important, since before 1980 early Christian monasticism in western G. was very poorly understood.

We know that coastal → Ptolemais was an episcopal see in western G., probably at an early date, but we have no material evidence to corroborate this fact. In the 6th c. John Moschus mentions two places as pilgrimage destinations: Ptolemais and a village he calls Perisima. Based on a 5th-c. inscription (Tzaferis, 1987), the church at 'Evron (*TIR.IP*, s.v.), 10 km north of Ptolemais, is one of the earliest dated Christian buildings in coastal northwestern G.

The church at Shavei-Zion (*TIR.IP*, s.v.), 8 km north of Ptolemais, exhibits crosses on the mosaic floors (Prausnitz, 1967), a fact that has prompted an early dating of the building — i.e., before 427, the year of the well-known edict (*Cod. Just.* 1.8.1) forbidding the representation of the “sign of Christ” on church floors; see E. Kitzinger, in *Kyriakon* [1970], 2:639-47). However, this is not a reliable chronological guideline. There are multiple examples of 5th- and 6th-c. church floors marked with crosses, both in Palestine and elsewhere; two well-known Galilean examples are the 6th-c. church floor at Nea Come-Nahariya (*TIR.IP*, s.v.) and the 6th/7th-c. mosaic floor of the monastic church at Shubeika (Avshalom-Gorni et al., 1997), on the road that heads east and uphill from Nahariya into the mountainous interior of Upper G. The church at Shavei-Zion should be dated to a late 5th- or early 6th-c. context. North of Shavei-Zion is the church at Nahariya (Dauphin & Edelstein, 1984), with marble interior furnishings and a polychromatic tessellated floor featuring → inhabited scrolls and hunt scenes.

An abbreviated checklist of early Christian churches in western G. includes:

- 'Arabe (Tzaferis, 1971);
- Bethlehem ha-Galit (in lower southwestern G., west of Sepphoris; see Oshri, 1997; “Bethlehem II,” *TIR.IP*, s.v.);
- 'Evron (*TIR.IP*, s.v.);
- Ḥanotha (*TIR.IP*, s.v.), 10 km northeast of Nahariya (see Prausnitz, 1961);
- Ḥorvat Bata (*TIR.IP*, s.v.), small fortified settlement 12 km east of Ptolemais, with two churches, possibly a monastic community;

- Ḥorvat Gov (west of Mafsheta), church within a complex probably to be interpreted as a monastery;
- Ḥorvat Hesheq-Mahoz (*TIR.IP*, s.v.), 10-12 km east of Ptolemais; small church in the Tephén (ibid., s.v.) region (see Aviam, 2002); the epigraphy indicates this was a private (→ Space) family → chapel dating to the early 6th c. (Segni, 1993);
- Ḥorvat Kenes/Khirbet el-Kanayis (*TIR.IP*, s.v.), at Karmiel in the Beit ha-Kerem valley, 12 km east of Ptolemais, adjacent to the fortified village of Ḥorvat Bata. The large church (25 × 50 m), with an adjoining baptistery at Ḥorvat Kenes, is probably part of an early Christian monastery (Avshalom-Gorni & Aviam, 1994); five tessellated donor inscriptions were recovered (→ Patronage);
- Ḥorvat Ma'ar, probably a monastery;
- Ḥorvat Zaggag, a monastery;
- Khirbet Qseir, probably a monastery;
- Ḥorvat Ureib (on the property of Kibbutz Matzuva, northeast of Nahariya); church mosaic floor exhibiting plant and animal motifs (Aviam, 2002);
- Khirbet 'Iribbin (Ḥorvat 'Erav: *TIR.IP*, s.v.), 10 km northeast of Nahariya (see Ilan, 1986);
- Khirbet Waziya, 5 km east of Ptolemais; the church here is one of the largest (47 × 42 m) in the entire region; its floors were covered with polychromatic mosaics, featuring animals and hunt scenes (Aviam, 2002);
- Nahariya-Nea Come (*TIR.IP*, s.v.), port city 10 km north of Ptolemais; large church, richly embellished with marble furnishings and a polychromatic tessellated floor featuring inhabited scrolls and hunt scenes (see Dauphin & Edelstein);
- Pi Masoba (*TIR.IP*, s.v.), 4 km north/northeast of Nahariya; church of St. Zecharius (*SEG* 8 [1937]: no. 18), with a marble → chancel screen and a marble table (see Conder & Kitchener, 1881); salvage excavations revealed some pieces of colorful mosaic floor (Syon & Porat, 2010)
- Rama (*TIR.IP*, s.v.), approx. 15 km east of Ptolemais, on the Acco-Beth Saida road: technically this is Upper Central Galilee (see Tzaferis, 1976); it is possible that this was a Jewish village taken over by Christians in the 6th c.;
- Ramat Yishai (*TIR.IP*, s.v., east of Beth Shearim [Jezreel Valley], southwest of Sepphoris; see Oshri, 1998: probably a monastic church);
- Shavei-Zion (*TIR.IP*, s.v.; see Prausnitz, 1967);
- Shubeika (on the road that ascends east of Nahariya into the mountains of Upper G.), monastery church (Avshalom-Gorni et al.);
- Suhmata (*TIR.IP*, s.v.), 20 km east of Nahariya (see Avi-Yonah & Makhoul, 1934);
- Tell Keisan (*TIR.IP*, s.v.), 9 km southeast of Ptolemais (see Briend, 1980).

Approx. 50 percent of the early Christian churches in western G. had triple apses; the rest had a single apse. Only two examples have → pastophories flanking the main apse. Throughout western G. there are similarities in the choice of mosaic motifs and compositions; the location of the mosaic → workshop(s) that laid the floors in western G. is not known. → Ambos are mostly conspicuous by their absence, and the siting of chancel screens is typically forward of the → bema. There is some similarity between the churches of western G. and those of southern Lebanon.

South-Central Galilee

The main focus in this region is Nazareth. The village was small and typical of Jewish rural settlements in lower central G. What we know about the early Christian cult center at Nazareth comes

from pilgrims (Egeria, Paula) who visited the place in the late 4th c. (Wilkinson, 1977). It seems improbable that we have material evidence of Christianity at Nazareth predating the 5th c. There are meager remains of a small church (apse, fragmentary walls, and mosaic floors) that traditionally has been associated with the → Annunciation (see Bagatti, 1969; Wilkinson, 81, 109). The site on which this church is located consists of rock-cut chambers; there are multiple parallels in the chalky soils of Palestine (see Aviam, 2004). Graffiti honoring → Mary the mother of Jesus were found carved on the walls of this structure, suggesting that the site was a cult center devoted to Marian piety in late antiquity. No other Christian remains have been found at the site. Recently, another suggestion was made in identifying a small underground chapel in the modern church of the Sisters of Nazareth convent (Dark, 2012).

The material evidence is similar at → Cana and at Mt. Tabor (*TIR.IP*, s.v.), 15 km southeast of Nazareth; in both places the earliest material evidence of Christianity dates to the late 5th or early 6th c., but the documentary record of Christians in these places is earlier (Wilkinson, 52, 81). On the summit of Tabor, one of the traditional sites of Jesus' → Transfiguration, there are remains of a Byzantine church along with hermit caves (→ Laura). Around the base of the mountain, several churches have been surveyed and excavated, including two at Kfar Kama-Helenoupolis (*TIR.IP*, s.v.; see Saarisalo & Palva, 1964), one at Dabaritta-Dabburiye (*TIR.IP*, s.v.; see Ovadiah, 1970, no. 29), one at Tamra (*TIR.IP*, s.v.), and another at Nain (ibid., s.v.) where Jesus (Lk. 7.11-17) miraculously restored life to the son of a widow (→ Miracle).

Sepphoris-Diocaesarea (*TIR.IP*, s.v.), the main city in south-central G., was an episcopal see in the 6th c. Christian remains were identified in an episcopal inscription and a tomb east of the city in the mid-20th c. (Avi-Yonah, 1961). But more recent excavations have revealed two tessellated Christian inscriptions on the city's *cardo*, along with evidence of two early Christian basilicas adjacent to the *cardo* (Weiss & Netzer, 1997, 14-15). In other words, Christians occupied a prominent place in this city, at least by the 6th c. and possibly earlier.

South-Eastern Galilee

The villages (listed above) along the shore of Lake Tiberias (Sea of G.) constitute the primary focus of Christian material evidence in eastern G. There is no early Christian evidence at the northern end of the lake (Beth Saida: *TIR.IP*, s.v.); however on the other end, at Philoteria-Beth Yerah (ibid., s.v.) there is an early Christian church and a monastery (Delougaz & Haines, 1960). The now-famous octagonal church (and its adjoining baptistery: Ristow, 1998, no. 323) at Capernaum (*TIP.IP*, s.v.), west of Beth Saida, and the church at et-Tabgha, southwest of Capernaum, are both 5th c., with late 4th-c. stages below them. Continuing south along the western shoreline, there was an early Christian monastery at Magdala-Taricheae (*TIR.IP*, s.v.; see Corbo, 1974). Hirschfeld (1993) identified a monastery with a church building at the summit of Mt. Bernike adjacent to Tiberias (*TIR.IP*, s.v.). In 1994 Hirschfeld suggested that the balsam → anchor found beneath the altar in the monastery church was intended to symbolize Jesus' activity on the lake. In salvage excavations within the walled city of Tiberias, remains of a large church were discovered, including a Greek inscription (personal information from the PI, M. Hartal). On the eastern shore of the lake there are remains of an early Christian basilica and monastery (surrounded by a defensive perimeter wall) at Chorasias-Kursi (Tzaferis, 1993). At Hippos-Susita, one of the cities in the → Decapolis, there are remains of the episcopal

basilica and its baptistery (Ristow, no. 322; see Epstein & Tzaferis, 1991).

Galilean Asceticism

Material evidence of anchoritic ascetics has been identified in caves at Har Haqfitza (the Mount of Precipitation), south of Nazareth. There are both a small cave and a building in front of it, suggesting perhaps the existence of a laura, as was the common form of modified anchoritism in Judea to the south. Within the cave there was late Roman/early Byzantine ceramic evidence. Another hermit cave (2 × 3 m), with crosses painted onto its walls and a cistern, was found in the cliffs of Nahal Beit Ha'Ermeq in the Tephren region (*TIR.IP*, s.v.). A large group of hermit caves was surveyed in the cliffs of Nahal Aviv in Upper G. close to the Lebanese border.

But most of the Galilean material evidence that has been linked to early Christian forms of asceticism reflects the coenobitic rather than the anchorite life (→ Koinobion). Coenobitic monasteries have been identified (or their existence suggested) at Beit Yerah, Ḥorvat Bata, Ḥorvat Kenes, Khirbet 'Irribbin, Kursi, Magdala, Mt. Bernike (next to Tiberias), Ramat Yishai, and Shubeika. In the discovery of small plots of land, 0.2–0.3 ha (½–¾ acre) in extent, laid out on a square plan and featuring a church and an oil press, excavators have identified the laura form, again based on Judean parallels. Ḥorvat Gov, Ḥorvat Ma'ar, and Ḥorvat Qseir fall under this type.

The walled monastery on Mt. Bernike, built on the summit overlooking Tiberias, has prompted speculation about the demography of G. in late antiquity. This could possibly be interpreted as a fortified Christian enclave set within an unfriendly (predominantly Jewish) environment. The same may be true for the walled monastery at Kursi and possibly for the walled (or monastic) settlement at Ḥorvat Bata.

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M.A.