

NOT FOR CIRCULATION

MAGDALA: A PERSONAL INVESTIGATION

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Introduction

A Summary of Magdala

Magdala is a city located on the North West shore of the Sea of Galilee approximately two miles north of Tiberius and three miles south of Capernaum. It was founded sometime in the 2nd Century B.C.E. and abandoned in 363 C.E. after a major earthquake. “Magdala” is a literal transliteration of the Aramaic word for the site. The Hebrew name for Magdala is “Migdal.” In Arabic it is “Migdal.” The Talmud calls Magdala “Migdal Nunnaya” or “tower of fish.” Josephus refers to it by the Greek *taricheaea* which means “salted fish.”¹ Josephus describes Tarichaeae as having 40,000 people, 230 boats and a hippodrome.² The city probably received its name from a fish tower that was later discovered at the site. Interestingly, Magdala is relatively famous in Christian tradition for being where Mary Magdalene was from. However, it is only mentioned in the New Testament as being part of Mary Magdalene’s last name which literally means “woman from Magdala” (Mt. 27:46).

Archaeological Excavations of Magdala

Before recent discoveries, it is interesting to read early dictionary entries on Magdala from the early part of the 20th century and note that some scholars suspected that there were

¹ Mordechai Aviam, “Magdala,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, vol. 3, ed. Eric M. Meyers (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 399.

² David M. Scholer, “Magdala/Magdalene,” in *Mercer Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Watson E. Mills (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1990), 539.

ruins in the vicinity, but were not exactly sure what these ruins were. In 1902, two scholars note, “On the Lake, in the SE corner of the plain of Genessaret, 3 m. NW of Tiberias, near a stream which comes down from the Wady el-Hamam, el-Mejdel is a miserable little village, with ‘some indications of ancient ruins both of walls and foundations.’”³ In 1971, the first team of Franciscan archaeologists pierced the darkness and began excavating at Magdala. They discovered a number of remarkable facts about the town including a springhouse, main east-west street, a plaza, bath houses, and more, all underscoring the very Greco-Roman nature of the town. Their excavations continued until 1976.⁴ Unfortunately, all of their publications of the finds at Magdala were written in Italian and they are rarely noticed by the scholarly community today.⁵

Anyhow, in 2007, the next wave of archaeologists began excavating the site. They have discovered a number of remarkable items at the site including an undisputed Synagogue that probably dates to the first century C.E. Led by Israeli Antiquities Authority archaeologists Dina Avshalom-Gorni and Arfan Najar along with Marcela Zapata from MeUniversidad Anáhuac México Sur, the team is still excavating in the present. Their discoveries also underscore the very Greco-Roman nature of the city.

My Experience

In late June through early July 2012, I had the privilege of spending three weeks digging at Magdala with a team of international students under the direct supervision of Arfan Najar and Marcela Zapata. Before starting the three weeks of excavation, I had little knowledge of Magdala

³ T.K. Cheyne and J. Sutherland Black, eds. *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, vol. 3 (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1902), 2895.

⁴ Aviam, 399.

⁵ Hershel Shanks, “Major New Excavation Planned for Mary Magdalene's Hometown,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 33 (2007): 52.

other than that it was on the Sea of Galilee and Mary Magdalene was born there. After spending three weeks at Magdala and in the months since while researching as many sources that I could find, I have gained a vast appreciation for the historical questions related to Magdala which I will discuss below.

My Approach

An important insight to make regarding Magdala is that much of the most recent excavations since late 2007 have not been published. One can find scattered references to Magdala in archaeological dictionaries and journal articles, but there has been little published on Magdala specifically in English. Due to these limitations, some of my material and information will obviously need to be updated in light of forthcoming publications.⁶ As a result, my approach will be two fold. First, I will analyze Magdala via the lens of textual sources and archeology via published materials. Second, I will use my own personal interactions with individuals who have excavated at Magdala including my own experience in the summer of 2012. Therefore, I argue that Magdala is a unique contribution to the understanding of Galilee via its Hellenistic influence, first century Synagogue, and unique mikwa'ot.

Textual Sources on Magdala

The Talmud

Our first approach will be to analyze some of our earliest textual sources dating from the first to second century C.E. A few first to second century ancient sources mention Magdala.⁷ First, the Talmud only briefly mentions Magdala as a tower of fish or “Migdal Nunnaya” (*b.*

⁶ For example, cf. Jens Schroter, Jurgen K Zangenberg, and Philipp von Zubern *Bauern, Fischer und Propheten: Galilaa zur Zeit Jesu*. Germany: AW-Sonderband, February 28, 2013. According to Amazon.com the title will be released in February 28th of 2013.

⁷ One could also add Philo to the list, but he only briefly mentions Magdala (*HN* 5.15).

Pesah. 46b; *y. Ta'an*. 69a). This identification is possible because fish where fish were dried was near the tower. Salted fish was exported from the Sea of Galilee to around the Roman world.⁸ Interestingly, the Talmud indicates that Magdala had a small harbor and a boat building industry. It even refers to the city as a place of “wealth and depravity.”⁹ These few passing references indicate the sociological impact of the city as a place of industry and wealth. In light of later discoveries, it appears that from the archaeological evidence that a number of the houses that were excavated had mikwa’ot. It would appear that due to the large size of some of these houses with numerous mikwa’ot that some Magdala citizens definitely were wealthy.

The New Testament

In addition to the Talmud, the New Testament mentions Magdala indirectly. The New Testament does not specifically mention the town of Magdala at all other than as part of the proper name for Mary Magdalene whose last name means “woman from Magdala.” Anyhow, in some New Testament manuscripts, Magdala occurs as a variant reading for Dalmanutha in Mark 8:10 and for Magadan, the parallel text, in Matthew 15:39. However, these are most likely later scribal additions.¹⁰ Regardless, Mary Magdalene figures prominently in the New Testament as one of the earliest followers of Jesus who is allegedly witness to many of his teachings, exorcisms, death, burial, and resurrection (Matt. 15:39; 27:56, 61; 28:1; Mark 8:10; 15:40, 47; 16:1; Luke 8:2; 24:10; John 19:25; 20:1, 18). In fact, many Gnostic and non-canonical literature attach special prominence to Mary Magdalene. Anyhow, sociologically speaking, Mary Magdalene may have been a wealthy individual who was able to contribute either financially or via her resources to help Jesus and his followers. She may have obtained her high economic

⁸ Leslie J. Hoppe, “New Excavations at Magdala,” *Bible Today* 47 (2009): 51.

⁹ John J. Rousseau and Rami Arav, *Jesus and His World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 189.

¹⁰ Scholer, 539.

status as a result of the booming fishing and ship building industry in Magdala which is supported by the Talmud and modern archaeology. However, there is no direct evidence of this in the New Testament.¹¹

Josephus on Magdala

In addition to the Talmud and the New Testament, the main source for our understanding of Magdala (or *Taricheaea*) from a textual standpoint comes from the writings of Josephus.¹² As the leader of the Jewish resistance forces, Josephus used Magdala as the center for his operations for the Jewish War against Rome. In preparation for a Roman siege, Josephus helped the rebels fortify the city against a Roman attack.¹³

The Naval Battle

However, the Romans lead by Titus attacked the city not by land, but by sea.¹⁴ This resulted in the greatest recorded naval battle of the Jewish War occurred near Magdala in which the Jews failed miserably against the superior technology of the Roman warships. As the Romans assaulted the village by the sea the Jews met them with their meager boats in an effort to quench the thrust of the Roman advance. However, the Roman ships would just ram the small Jewish vessels sending the rebels into the sea. Josephus notes that whoever did not drown was killed by the Roman archers. However, in a desperate attempt to win the naval battle the small Jewish vessels would aggressively attack suicide style into the Roman warships which lead to

¹¹ Hoppe, 51.

¹² Among the many references in Josephus include *Antiquities of the Jews* XX 159; *Life* 32.157; *Jewish War*, 2.21.8; 3.9.7 – 3.10.6.

¹³ *Life* 18, 32 in Rousseau and Arav, 189.

¹⁴ *War* 3.10.3 in Aviam, 399.

even greater disaster as the Romans destroyed the Jewish fighters. After the fighting, eventually the city was captured by the Romans.¹⁵

The Capturing of Magdala

The remaining inhabitants of the city that survived the naval battle and the Roman advance fled to Tiberius. After Rome finally took Tiberius, 12,000 of the remaining Jewish prisoners were executed in the stadium at Magdala. The remaining 6,000 were sold as slaves specifically to help the Roman construction project of building a canal in Greece across the Isthmus of Corinth for commerce.¹⁶ The remaining numbers that were left on top of this were sold as slaves. In his exquisite style, Josephus mentions in grave detail about the stench of the bodies as a result of the Jewish loss in the battle against Rome.

Archaeological Excavations of Magdala

1971-76 Excavations

Major Discoveries

In addition to textual sources, there is a plethora of information about Magdala from archaeology. From 1971 to 1976, two Franciscan archaeologists named Y. Corbo and V. Loffreda excavated at Magdala. Their many discoveries include town's *cardo* or main north-south street, an urban villa, a water reservoir, and a structure that they erroneously thought was a first century B.C.E. synagogue.¹⁷ All of these characteristics indicate a well-designed small town from the Roman period.¹⁸

A Synagogue?

¹⁵ *War* 3.10.1-6/462-705.

¹⁶ Hoppe, 52.

¹⁷ Rousseau and Arav, 189; Hoppe, 50. Though not directly related to the first century, the excavators also discovered Byzantine mosaic pavements and a fourth century C.E. monastery.

¹⁸ Aviam, 399.

Of their many discoveries, their alleged small synagogue has caused the most discussion. They originally called the structure a “mini synagoga” due to the one-room interior being only 18 x 21 feet.¹⁹ In this building, there were doric columns with heart shaped columns at each corner with a water channel running along three sides of the building.²⁰ The excavators argued that the building was originally used as a synagogue, but was later changed into a *nymphaeum* or city fountain house during the first century C.E. In support of this synagogue contention, the scholars argued that there were rows of what appeared to be benches.

However, other scholars argue that the building was a *nymphaeum* from the beginning. They give a number of reasons in support of their arguments. First, they argue that the benches were actually steps into the springhouse due to the water canals that were found around the walls of the structure.²¹ For example, Ehud Netzer, a renowned archaeologist argues that the architecture of this building does not fit a synagogue since the columns are only three feet from the wall which would not have allowed it to be accessible.²² Second, the main argument in support of Netzer’s claim is that the water channels on three sides of the hall were actually part of the earliest building and were not later additions.²³ Third, the size and dimensions of the alleged benches conform to those of a stairway not benches for a synagogue.²⁴ Fourth, the

¹⁹ Hershel Shanks, “Is it or Isn’t It – A Synagogue,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 27 (2001): 55.

²⁰ Shanks, “Major New Excavation ,” 54.

²¹ Rousseau and Arav, 189; Aviam, 399. Not all scholars seem to support the synagogue or springhouse dichotomy. Jurgen K. Zangenberg, “Archaeological News from the Galilee: Tiberias, Magdala and Rural Galilee,” *Early Christianity* 1 (2010): 46, argues that the “mini synagoga” actually was a latrine. It is possible that Zangenberg is referring to a different structure, but there appears to be only one “mini synagoga” in the published literature.

²² Ehud Netzer, “Did the Water Installation in Magdala Serve As a Synagogue?” in *Synagogues in Antiquity*, Aryeh Kasher, et al., eds. (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben Zvi, 1987), in Hebrew, in Hershel Shanks, “Is it?” 57.

²³ Anders Runesson, Donald D. Binder, and Birger Olsson, *The Ancient Synagogue from its Origins to 200 C.E.: A Source Book* (London: Brill, 2010), 55.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

renovation of the building in the first century C.E. which included raising and replacing the basalt slab floor was prompted by flooding.²⁵ Finally, the undisputed synagogue discovered in 2009 seems to support the idea of this being a springhouse unless there were two synagogues which may not have been improbable given a town of about 40,000 inhabitants.²⁶ Anyway, Anders Runesson, an expert on Synagogues, concludes, “While some studies still include the Magdala building as a first-century synagogue, the authors of this volume believe this identification should be abandoned.”²⁷

In spite of the disagreement, there were actually two floors one on top of the other with a fill of about 30 cm deep that the archaeologists identified as part of this small building. The first floor they dated to the first century B.C.E. and the second floor to the first century C.E.²⁸ Regardless of some of the lingering questions about Magdala, the excavations in the 1970s indicate that the town was founded around the second century B.C.E. in the late Hellenistic period.²⁹

Pools and a Water Tower

In addition to the springhouse, there was a water tower and a group of pools that was discovered by the Franciscans. These installations were connected to the spring that actually supplied water to the town.³⁰ Another impressive structure is 20 feet high with walls 7 feet thick.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Scholer, 539.

²⁷ Runesson, 55.

²⁸ Aviam, 399.

²⁹ Shanks, “Major New,” 55.

³⁰ Aviam, 399.

It probably was a water tower which siphoned water to the town from the springs in the west.³¹

There is a 13 feet wide street that passes in front of the tower. This indicates a highly functioning town in antiquity.

High Degree of Hellenization

In addition to the springhouse and other discoveries, the 1971-1976 excavations of Magdala showed a high degree of Hellenization for it being one of the larger cities in the Galilee region. Commenting on the Hellenistic character of the town, Jurgen Zangenberg states, “It more and more becomes apparent how ‘urban’ and ‘Mediterranean’ this site has been since its foundation in the 2nd century BCE.”³² In support of this date for the founding of the city, a hoard of 188 bronze coins were found at Magdala in 1973 dating from the time of Nero to the reign of Elgabalos (54-122 C.E.).³³ Interestingly, the coins were minted in the following cities: Tyre, Gadara, Acre, Beth-Shan, Tiberias, Hippos, Sepphoris, Geba, Dium, Abila, and Biblos. However, the earliest coins found by the excavators date to the Hasmonean period. This indicates at least that the *terminus a quo* for the founding of the city would be sometime in the second century.

The End of Magdala

In spite of its magnificent accomplishments, Magdala was most likely abandoned as a result of an earthquake that struck the area in 363 C.E. Work nearby at Wadi Haman shows remains of a large synagogue which suffered a similar fate as the Magdala monastery.³⁴ This abandonment is also confirmed by the fact that most of the ceramic vessels found are from the

³¹ Shanks, “Major New,” 54.

³² Zangenberg, 475.

³³ Rousseau and Arav, 189; Hoppe, 53.

³⁴ Hoppe, 54.

Hellenistic to the Roman period (2nd Century B.C.E. to 350 C.E.). Furthermore, this general dating is also supported by the hoard of 250 coins found during the excavation.³⁵

Late 2007 – Summer 2012 Excavations

Michelle Piccirillo and Stephano De Luca of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum began excavating Magdala in 2007. It took six months to prepare the site for excavation. Many years of accumulation of dirt and debris including more than fifty palm trees had to be cleared before the site could be excavated.³⁶

Hellenism Reinforced

Like the earlier excavations, the post 2007 excavations confirmed the Hellenistic nature of Magdala. In fact, it is best to see Magdala as quite Hellenistic even in the same category as the large Hellenistic cities in Greece or Asia Minor. In support of this thesis, there are a few observations. First, scholars note that Magdala followed the Hippodamic model and was spread out over large areas of the neighboring plane. Second, there was a paved urban boulevard called a *cardo maximus* with a perpendicular *decumanus* which was quite common in Greco Roman cities.³⁷ Underneath these streets there were numerous wells and fountains that fed the cities sophisticated water infrastructure. Third, there was a public bath complex that was connected to the water system. Unfortunately, the Franciscans mistakenly thought that the courtyard of the bath complex was the main piazza. Instead, it was a *quadriportus* which is a peristyle that surrounded an open courtyard which gave access to separate bathrooms, pools, and basins.³⁸ Anyhow, De Luca correctly identified basically two phases of the bath complex with the first

³⁵ Ibid., 54.

³⁶ Ibid., 50.

³⁷ Zangenberg, 475.

³⁸ Ibid.

having been erected in the 1st century CE and it was refurbished in the 3rd/4th centuries only to be destroyed by an earthquake in 363 CE.³⁹

The Harbor

De Luca also found a number of other important objects in the harbor which was separated from the city by a plastered wall. First, he found the massive foundations of a tower with casemates. Second, they found a quay with a large L-shaped harbour basin with breakwater and six mooring stones.⁴⁰ Zangenberg states that Magdala has “. . . the largest and best preserved harbour on the Lake of Galilee discovered so far.”⁴¹ Anyhow, the wealth from the city came from its thriving fishing economy along with trading with the Decapolis on the eastern shore of the Lake in addition to their ship manufacturing. It is possible that the harbour was built during the Hasmonean time period and was in competition with other Hellenistic settlements like Philoteria, et-Tell, Hippos, and Gadara.

A City at War

In addition to the developed nature of Magdala as a highly functioning Hellenized Jewish town, Magdala was a city at war. Zangenberg notes, “Everywhere in his excavations De Luca encountered damage caused by the First Jewish Revolt”⁴² There are a number of clues that support this contention. First, there were arrowheads found on the shore.⁴³ Second, in 2011, a student from Italy found a Roman sword in the main plaza. Though this could have simply been remnants of merely Roman occupation, it is possible that it was part of the war. Third, though

³⁹ Ibid., 476.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Shelley Wachsmann, *The Sea of Galilee Boat: An Extraordinary 2000 Year Old Discovery* (New York: Plenum Press, 1995).

not elaborating much in detail, the excavators noted that the eastern side of the town was damaged by the Jewish Revolt. Finally, it is possible that the shipwreck found in the Sea of Galilee is a remnant of the Jewish War.⁴⁴

The Synagogue

After a few years of work, in 2009, Magdala received much publicity due to a synagogue that was discovered at the site. There has been very little published about the discovery other than a few press releases. Most scholars seem to date the synagogue at Magdala to the first century C.E. In fact, some do not even question the dating of the synagogue to the first century C.E. Corbett states matter of frankly, “The Magdala synagogue is dated to the first century C.E. or earlier, making it one of the oldest synagogues ever found. It was in use while the Jerusalem Temple still stood.”⁴⁵ Remarkably, Jodi Magness has been reported as stating that she does not think that the Magdala synagogue should be conclusively dated to the first century C.E. However, in personal dialogue with a knowledgeable friend, Magness has stated that Dina Avshalom-Gorni’s final report will be good enough for her.

Synagogues in Israel

Prior to some of the more recent archaeological discoveries, many archaeologists were skeptical if the synagogue existed pre-70 C.E. However, as a result of the Magdala finds and others, Craig Evans, in a recent book states, “Most archaeologists now speak of eight or nine synagogues that date to the pre-70 era. These include Capernaum, Gamla, and Herodium, Jericho, Magdala, Masada, Modi‘in, Qiryat Sefer and Shuafat.”⁴⁶ Evans later states, “Two

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ J. Corbett, “New Synagogue Excavations in Israel and Beyond,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 37 (2011): 52.

⁴⁶ Craig Evans, *Jesus and His World: The Archaeological Evidence* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 45.

buildings – Capernaum and Shuafat – are in doubt; the other seven are not.”⁴⁷ Like Evans, Corbett earlier notes that Magdala synagogue is one of only seven discovered in Israel that are dated to before the destruction of the Second Temple (Corbett, 54). It appears that Evans listing is a more updated one given the later date of his publication. Anyhow, the other undoubted examples include Masada, Herodium, and Gamla. Other possible ones include Herodian Jericho, Qiryat Sefer and Modi‘in.

The Magdala Stone

Though there is some disagreement regarding the exact number of synagogues, a roughly 3-foot long engraved stone with a depiction of a seven branched menorah was discovered in the central hall of the Magdala synagogue. Some have thought that the stone would have served as a table on which Torah scrolls were rolled out.⁴⁸ Dina Avshalom-Gorni, the Israeli archaeologist who excavated the site on behalf of the IAA, thinks that the artist who carved the menorah may have modeled the depiction based on the actual seven-branch menorah that stood in the Temple. This would make it an extremely rare representation of the candelabra before the temple was destroyed in 70 C.E.⁴⁹ Furthermore, as I will discuss later, a stone for reading the Torah could indicate a higher level of literacy in the Galilean area.

Anyhow, flanking the menorah on the stone is a pair of long-handled amphorae, and a pair of fluted columns.⁵⁰ On the top of the stone are various floral patterns including two palm trees that flank a large rosette with a circumscribed petal design. Interestingly, there are at least two replicas of the actual stone which is housed in an Israeli official’s house. One of the replicas

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Corbett, 52.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 56.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

is located at Magdala in the visitor's area. Another replica is in the Catholic Notre Dame center in Jerusalem. However, various functions offered for the menorah stone include being a stone upon which the Torah scrolls would have been read during the service or a stand upon which an actual menorah was used during the service. Nevertheless, the exact function is uncertain.⁵¹

Magdala Stone – Interpretations

In addition to the function of the stone, scholars have offered interpretations of the inscriptions on the stone. Ronny Reich argues that the two leaves on the Magdala stone are actually *strigili* or scrapers which were used in Hellenistic and Roman bath-houses and gymnasiums. These *strigili* looked like elongated and curved ladles which were used to scrape off the anointing oil and dust that the body accumulated during the gymnasium activities. He sees the parallel depiction of the objects as being descriptive of real *strigili*.⁵² Furthermore, the object that was originally identified as a flower or bud should be understood as an *aryballos* or anointing bottle that was connected via a chain to the ring.⁵³

Finally, Reich also argues that there might be a *patera*, which was a pan-shaped plate upon which oil was poured for anointing, that was depicted on the mosaic. Unfortunately, the mosaic is damaged so it is impossible to know if the plate was depicted there.⁵⁴ However, he notes the contemporary background of the combination of *strigili*, *aryballos*, and *patera* that are depicted on contemporary mosaics and other decorated objects.⁵⁵ Reich also attempts to identify two other items on the lower right side of the mosaic as a *kantharos* and below it a fish with

⁵¹ Ibid., 56.

⁵² Reich, 455.

⁵³ Ibid., 456.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

seaweed in its mouth.⁵⁶ In spite of his solution, Reich notes that we do not know the precise meaning of two of the six objects depicted in the mosaic at Magdala.⁵⁷

June to Early July 2012

The Main Plaza

In late June to early July 2012, I spent three weeks at Magdala helping with the excavations of the town. There was quite a bit of a language barrier with the predominantly Spanish speaking crew that lead the team, but I attempted to get an overall feel for the place. During the three weeks that I was there, our team spent time excavating the town plaza area of Magdala.

The grids that I primarily worked with included little shops where merchants would sell various items and stone walls to these shops which were later destroyed. I spent much of my time removing rocks from the plaza walls that had collapsed. Remarkably, we were actually digging at the first century layer. In broken English, Arfan Najar, whom I later learned works with the Israeli Antiquities Authority, informed me of the basic structure and dynamic of the walls including where the walls fell in the city streets, the function of the shops for merchants to sell their items nearby the streets, and a basic overview of the larger scope of the corridor we were studying.

Cleaning House

Though I spent most of my time digging in the main plaza, our group did spend a few days cleaning off some of the previously excavated houses or dwelling for the IAA to take aerial photographs shortly thereafter. The archaeologists are not exactly certain if these dwellings were houses or some sort of communal dwelling place. There was a mosaic discovered in these rooms

⁵⁶ Ibid., 457.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 458.

like in the synagogue. Interestingly, some have thought that this might even be the house of the synagogue leader.

Regardless, it appears that these houses had mikwa'ot in them with the walls relatively still intact at their base. In light of this, Ronny Reich recently wrote an unpublished article in which he argues that the mikwa'ot at Magdala where we were "cleaning house" are indeed mikwa'ot even though they do not have a sealed plaster since the water table was much higher at this location since it was near the Sea of Galilee.⁵⁸ This, he argues, shows the most unique type of mikwa'ot in Israel. All other mikwa'ot are created using rainwater (Jerusalem) or spring water diverted to the site via an aquaduct (Jericho), or with flood water that was also caught and diverted to the site by an aquaduct (Qumran). Further, in an attempt to protect the excavation, the excavators, Reich notes, at Magdala recently attempted to pump the water out of one installation with it resulting in the drainage of the other two installations. According to Reich this indicates that not only were the installations connected, but that they were dug to a level lower than the water table. This he thinks indicates that they are indeed mikwa'ot of a unique type not found in Israel.

Pottery, Pottery, and More Pottery

In addition to the mikwa'ot, even months after the houses had been excavated, there was still large amounts of finely crushed pottery still on the floor. I did not realize the vast extent of the pottery remains until spending time cleaning the houses. I would definitely need to spend more time learning about the types of pottery that we found including the location where they were manufactured or the clay originated.

All Finds are not Created Equal

⁵⁸ Ronny Reich, "Mikwa'ot at Migdal/Magdala," unpublished paper, University of Haifa (2012).

In my three week stay, it appears that there is almost an innate classification of the significance of our finds. From least popular to most popular it would be broken pottery, glass, odd makeup objects or bronze, coins, and anything beyond that is considered extraordinary such as a Roman sword, a synagogue stone, etc. In my short stay, unfortunately, I did not find any Roman swords or unique inscriptions, but instead a few coins, a small stick used for applying makeup to a woman, pieces of glass, and massive amounts of pottery. These various finds obviously indicate a town shop that was inhabited by people. Furthermore, like the early excavators, we did find a number of Hasmonean coins in our excavations which, again, would set the *terminus a quo* at sometime in the second century B.C.E.

Conclusion: Remaining Questions and Research

In conclusion, there needs to be an official report on the actual excavations at Magdala. As a result there are still a number of burning questions. First, what exactly is the significance of the Magdala synagogue? Does it date from the first century C.E. or earlier or even later? If it is from the first century, it is not improbable that Jesus visited the synagogue at some point and almost certain that some of Jesus' earliest followers would have set foot there also such as Mary Magdalene. Also, if the synagogue and the engraved stone with a floral pattern likewise date from the first century, we are talking about someone who carved a seven branch menorah who probably saw the one that was standing in the second Temple. This is an utterly remarkable discovery. Second, what is the significance of the stone with grooves found in the Synagogue? Does this indicate that the Torah was read in public for the attendees? This may indicate that there was a high level of literacy in the Galilean region. For students of the historical Jesus, this could influence our views on the literacy of Jesus and many of his first followers and the role of oral tradition in a somewhat literature culture. Also, in light of this literacy question, what is the

function of the adjoining room to the undisputed synagogue? Is it a *beit midrash* or house of study that is not found in other first century synagogues in Israel? If so, it may indicate that there were a number of highly literate individuals in Magdala at least from the more professional scholarly standpoint. However, exactly how many individuals would have been part of this *beit midrash* or what their age and socioeconomic status would have been would have to be debated. However, these questions and many more must wait until Dina Avshalom-Gorni representing the IAA produces the final excavation report on Magdala. Nevertheless, the basic argument of this paper still seems sound that Magdala was founded in the second century B.C.E., was a highly Hellenized city, with a first century Synagogue, and mikwa'ot of a unique variety.

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