

THE EARLY CENTURIES

Jewish Believers  
in **JESUS**

OSKAR SKARSAUNE

*and*

REIDAR HVALVIK, *Editors*

 **HENDRICKSON**  
**PUBLISHERS**

## Archaeological Evidence of Jewish Believers?

James F. Strange

### 1. Previous Studies

One of the first names to gain international recognition for research into archaeological remains understood to be "Jewish Christian" was that of Charles Clermont-Ganneau. In 1883 Clermont-Ganneau published a brief article in the *Revue Archéologique* on the discovery of inscribed ossuaries from the Hill of Offence (Bâtn el-Hawa) in Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> These ossuaries were inscribed with proper names in Hebrew and Greek (e.g., *Yehuda*, *Shim'on*, *Yeshua*, *Shlomsion*, *Hedea*, *Jesous*, etc.), but some were also inscribed with equal armed crosses. Clermont-Ganneau interpreted the remains as evidence that an ancient Jewish family had embraced Christianity. Henri Leclercq popularized this interpretation among many scholars in the *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie chrétienne et de Liturgie* (1937).<sup>2</sup>

The subject matter continued to receive attention from a few scholars from time to time. For example in 1919 K. Schmalz wrote a description of the sacred caves of Bethlehem (birth), Nazareth (youth), and Jerusalem (burial), associating them with the earliest Christian (Jewish) generations.<sup>3</sup> Albrecht Alt reported on an inscription from Tafas across the Jordan in 1929 (which mentioned a synagogue), calling it "a monument of Judeo-Christianity."<sup>4</sup> Others contributed studies of certain archaeological remains, such as Jean-Baptiste Frey in the *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaicarum*, but without connecting them explicitly with something called "Jewish Christianity."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>C. Clermont-Ganneau, "Epigraphes hébraïques et grecques sur des ossuaires juifs inédits," *Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale* 3 (1883): 257–68.

<sup>2</sup>H. Leclercq, "Ossuaires," *DACL* 13:1 (1937): 22–27.

<sup>3</sup>K. Schmalz, "Die drei 'mystischen' Christushöhlen der Geburt, der Jüngerweihe und des Grabes," *ZDPV* 42 (1919): 132–65.

<sup>4</sup>Albrecht Alt, "Ein Denkmal des Judenchristentums im Ostjordanland?" *PJ* 25 (1929): 89–95.

<sup>5</sup>Jean-Baptiste Frey, *Asie-Afrique* (vol. 2 of *Corpus inscriptionum Iudaicarum: recueil des inscriptions juives qui vont du IIIe siècle avant Jésus-Christ au VIIe siècle de notre ère*,

Thus the subject matter remained undeveloped for many years until the publications of Bellarmino Bagatti, OFM, of the Studium Franciscanum Biblicum in Jerusalem. Bagatti took up the task of publishing the putative remains of Judeo-Christianity in more than a dozen articles and books from 1950 to the late 1970s. He was joined by other scholars of the same institution such as Virgilio Corbo, Ignazio Mancini, Frédéric Manns, Sylvester Saller, but above all Emanuele Testa, and sometimes others.

Not everyone who examined archaeological evidences of ancient Judaism interpreted any of the remains as Jewish Christian. For example, in 1954 L.-H. Vincent reported on an ossuary decorated with a cross found while constructing L'Hôpital de St. Louis in Jerusalem. Vincent did not accept the conclusions of Clermont-Ganneau about the Jewish Christian origins of the ossuaries from The Hill of Offense, nor did he label his ossuary an instance of Jewish Christianity.<sup>6</sup> Yet the literature on the alleged remains of Jewish Christianity became voluminous.

The interpretation of "Jewish Christian" or "Judeo-Christian" archaeological remains took a new turn with the publications of Jack Finegan (1969), Bargil Pixner (from 1976) and Joan E. Taylor (from 1987) treated below.<sup>7</sup> Finegan's work appeared to stand in a middle ground between skepticism and belief, accepting the possibility that some of these remains represented Christians of Jewish birth. Taylor's work mainly took all the previous publications of these archeological remains to task and demanded new rigor in interpretation and rejection of the Jewish Christian hypothesis to account for these remains. Pixner knew Bagatti's and Testa's publications well, but he engaged in critical and historical analyses and broke new ground with his considerations of a possible Essene Quarter in Jerusalem and its possible connection with early Jewish Christianity.

### 2. Ossuary Inscriptions

#### 2.1. The Ossuaries of Bâtn el-Hawa, Bethphage, Talpioth, and Dominus Flevit

Ossuaries are small boxes carved from soft limestone for the storage of human bones one year after Jewish inhumation. They range in length from 45–75 cm. These are well attested from the first century B.C.E. to the middle of the second century C.E. Many of them are inscribed with the name of the deceased in

Vatican: Pontificio istituto di archeologia cristiana, 1952); especially the remarks to nos. 1305–6, 1327, and 1325.

<sup>6</sup>L.-H. Vincent, *Archéologie de la ville* (vol. 1 of *Jérusalem de l'ancien testament: recherches d'archéologie et d'histoire*; Paris: Gabalda, 1954), 32.

<sup>7</sup>J. Finegan, *The Archeology of the New Testament*; Bargil Pixner, *Wege des Messias und Stätten der Urkirche: Jesus und das Judenchristentum im Licht neuer archäologischer Erkenntnisse* (ed. Rainer Riesner; Giessen: Brunnen, 1991); Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places*.



Greek, Hebrew, or Aramaic. Other symbols appear such as rosettes, palm trees, circles, columns, and so forth.<sup>8</sup>

2.1.1. *Bâtn el-Hawa*

Several of the ossuaries from the Hill of Offense or Le Mont du Scandale (Bâtn el-Hawa) in Jerusalem, which were discovered in 1873, bear names in Hebrew: Shlomzion daughter of Shim'on the Priest, Yehudah the Scribe, Yehudah bar El'azar the scribe, Shim'on bar Yeshua', El'azar bar Natai, Marta daughter of Pashai, and Salome wife of Yehudah.<sup>9</sup> One Greek name was written in Hebrew characters: Kyrikos. Others bear names in Greek characters: Hēdēa, Iēsous, Kyrthas, Moschas, Mariados, and Nathaniolos. There are also symbols that have seemed suggestive of Christianity, though some are simply enigmatic.<sup>10</sup> One symbol advanced as likely Christian is a cross with two horizontal bars. An alternative interpretation is that this is a poorly executed menorah (fig. 1). Others less transparent to the interpreter include the six-pointed star (\*) and something rather like a mushroom or parasol (twice, but once upside down to the other. For the parasol see coins of Agrippa I) (fig. 1). The least suggestive are the +s and x's that really seem to show how to replace the lid correctly<sup>11</sup> or indicate the center of the side panel, perhaps for expected later decoration that was never added.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand the single ornament that caused the most comment is the deeply cut Latin cross above an equally deeply cut Greek *Eta* and *Delta* (fig. 1). Clermont-Ganneau proposed that, since another ossuary in the same group was engraved deeply in Greek ΗΔΗΑ (Hēdēa), the two letters on this ossuary may be an abbreviation for the same name (a name otherwise unattested).<sup>13</sup> Clermont-Ganneau was convinced that this particular cross and the names from early Christian history were evidence that the owner of the ossuary was a

<sup>8</sup> Pau Figueras, *Decorated Jewish Ossuaries* (Documenta et monumenta orientis antiqui 20, Leiden: Brill, 1983); Ruth Jacoby, *The Synagogues of Bar'am: Jerusalem Ossuaries* (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1987); L. Y. Rahmani, *A Catalogue of Jewish Ossuaries* (Jerusalem: The Israel Antiquities Authority, 1994). For a rebuttal, see Shimon Gibson and Gideon Avni, "The 'Jewish-Christian' Tomb from the Mount of Offense (Batn Al-Hawa) in Jerusalem Reconsidered," *RB* 115 (1998): 161-75.

<sup>9</sup> In Rahmani's *Catalogue of Jewish Ossuaries*, the name Jesus appears ten times as Hebrew "Yeshu" and "Yeshua bar Yehoseph" (ישוע בר יהוסף, No. 9), "Yeshua bar Dostas" (ישוע בר דוסתס No. 121), "Yeshua" (ישוע, No. 140), "Yehuda bar Yeshua" (יהודה בר ישוע, No. 702), "Yeshua bar Yehoseph" (ישוע בר יהוסף, No. 704), Greek "Iēsous" (Ἰησοῦς, No. 56), "Iēsous [son of] Ioudas" (Ἰησοῦς τοῦ Ἰουδά, No. 113), Iēsous Aloth (Ἰησοῦς Ἀλώθ, No. 114), and "Iēsous father of Simonides" (Ἰησοῦς πατὴρ Σιμωνίδου, No. 751).

<sup>10</sup> These can be found in Ignazio Mancini, *L'archéologie judéo-chrétienne: Notices Historiques* (trans. A. Storme; Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1977), 712.

<sup>11</sup> R. H. Smith, "The Cross Marks on Jewish Ossuaries," *PEQ* 106 (1974): 53-66; Jack Finegan, "Crosses in the Dead Sea Scrolls," *BAR* 5 (1979): 40-49.

<sup>12</sup> Rahmani, *A Catalogue of Jewish Ossuaries*, 107, Ossuary 114.B.3.

<sup>13</sup> Clermont-Ganneau, "Epigraphes," 267; Finegan, *The Archeology of the New Testament*, 239-40.

Christian.<sup>14</sup> Others have asserted to the contrary, namely, that the deeply engraved cross is a Byzantine Christian addition to an early Roman period ossuary.<sup>15</sup> The question remains open. Under what conditions would a Byzantine Christian engrave a Latin cross and a name on an earlier ossuary?

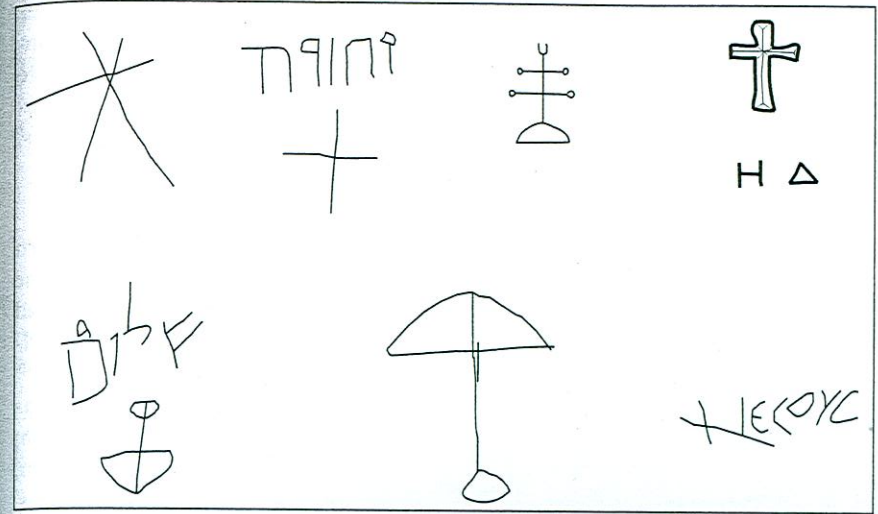


Figure 1: Inscriptions on Ossuaries from Bâtn el-Hawa, from Clermont-Ganneau, 1883.<sup>16</sup>

2.1.2. *Bethphage*

In 1910 a tomb was found at Kfar et-Tur east of Jerusalem. The site is often identified with the Bethphage of the Gospel of John. An ossuary lid found in the tomb contained a list of twenty-seven names inscribed on the underside in Hebrew. Each name was followed by a number in Nabatean.<sup>17</sup> The names are popular names mostly formed on the name of the person's father: Ben Ya'ir, ben Timna, ben Adda, ben Joseph Nazir, Ha-Gelili, ben Uria, ben Madar, Shim'on ben Shalom, ben Jehohanan, etc. Although Testa interpreted this list as one read aloud in a Jewish Christian ceremony of remembrance (as in the later Coptic

<sup>14</sup> Clermont-Ganneau, "Epigraphes," 259: "[Les inscriptions] représentent une série de generations, parmi lesquelles nous voyons, à un moment donné, apparaître et se développer le christianisme."

<sup>15</sup> Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places*; J. P. Kane, "By No Means 'The Earliest Records of Christianity'—with an Emended Reading of the Talpioth Inscription ΙΕΣΟΥΣ ΙΟΥ," *PEQ* 103 (1971): 103-8; J. P. Kane, "The Ossuary Inscriptions of Jerusalem," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 23 (1978): 268-82.

<sup>16</sup> All figures in this chapter, except figure 7, are drawn by James F. Strange.

<sup>17</sup> G. Orfali, "Un hypogée juif à Bethphagé," *RB* 32 (1923): 253-60; B. Bagatti, *The Church from the Circumcision: History and Archaeology of the Judaeo-Christians* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1971), 277-78 and fig. 138.



Church in Egypt), few other scholars have accepted this interpretation.<sup>18</sup> The simplest interpretation may be that this is a list of tomb workers and their wages.

### 2.1.3. Talpioth

In 1945 fourteen ossuaries were brought to light from a tomb with loculi in the Talpioth neighborhood of Jerusalem. The archaeologist interpreted the Greek inscription in charcoal on the back of one as "Jesus, Woe!" and a second Greek inscription as another lamentation for Jesus (*Iēsou Aloth!*). He understood these to be Jewish Christian lamentations over the death of Jesus of Nazareth. This interpretation has not gained acceptance. Now the two are read as "Jesus son of Judas" and "Jesus [nicknamed] Aloe."<sup>19</sup>

### 2.1.4. Dominus Flevit

In 1953 the monks at the Latin property of Dominus Flevit on the western slopes of the Mt. of Olives discovered a hitherto unknown Roman and Byzantine cemetery when building a cloister wall. Excavations commenced immediately, and tombs dating to the first and second century C.E. were found. Beside them lay additional tombs of the third and fourth centuries C.E. (but used as late as 626 C.E.).<sup>20</sup>

Names of the deceased appeared on the ossuaries from the early tombs, familiar names such as Judah, El'azar (Lazarus), John, Jonathan, Joseph, Judah, Martha, Miriam, Mattia (Matthew), Menahem, Sapphira, Simeon, Shlomzion, and Zechariah. But ornaments drawn on the ossuaries raised more questions. The parade example was a clear Chi-Rho on ossuary 21 from tomb 79, where fourteen ossuaries had been stored (fig. 2).

This Chi-Rho is accompanied on the left by an  $\times$  superimposed on a  $\dagger$ , forming a kind of monogram, an eight-pointed asterisk (\*). Another monogram appears as a  $\dagger$  with a B in the lower right quadrant and a stroke from upper right to lower left nearly through the intersection in the middle of the  $\dagger$ .<sup>21</sup> These are the only three monograms on the Dominus Flevit ossuaries, though there are also  $\dagger$  and  $\times$  signs on some of the sides or ends of the ossuaries and on the lids.

<sup>18</sup>Emmanuele Testa, *Il Simbolismo dei giudeo-Cristiani* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1962; repr., 1981), 211–22. Contra Testa, for example, R. Dussaud, "Comptes d'ouvriers d'une entreprise funéraire juive," *Syria* 4 (1923): 241–49. See discussion and bibliography in S. Saller, and E. Testa, eds., *The Archaeological Setting of the Shrine of Bethphage* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1961), 42–44 and n. 51.

<sup>19</sup>E. L. Sukenik, "The Earliest Records of Christianity," *AJA* 51 (1947): 351–65. Alternative reading: Rahmani, *A Catalogue of Jewish Ossuaries*, 106–7, notes 113–14. Summary in Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places*, 9; Jacoby, *The Synagogues of Bar'am*, 168; Kane, "The Ossuary Inscriptions of Jerusalem," 271–73.

<sup>20</sup>B. Bagatti, "Scoperta di un cimitero giudeo-cristiano al 'Dominus Flevit' (Monte Olivetto-Gerusalemme)," *Liber Annuus* 3 (1953): 149–84; B. Bagatti and J. Milik, *Gli Scavi del 'Dominus Flevit', I: La necropolis del periodo romano* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1958); Jacoby, *The Synagogues of Bar'am*, 74.

<sup>21</sup>Finegan, *Archaeology of the New Testament*, 249.

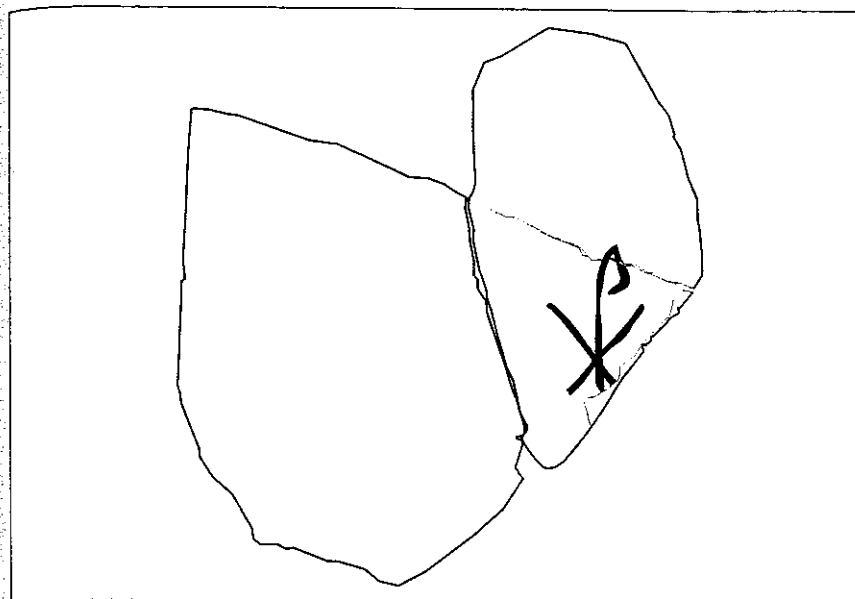


Figure 2: The "Chi-Rho" from an Ossuary of Dominus Flevit, from Bagatti, 1953.

From what we know of the development of Christian epigraphy, the chi-rho has no history as a uniquely Christian symbol before the fourth century C.E.<sup>22</sup> In 1940 Avi-Yonah pointed out that the chi-rho is known in one inscription of 63 C.E. as an abbreviation for χρυσός or "gold." His next example dated about 177–180 C.E. is a chi-rho as an abbreviation for ἑκατονάρχης or "Centurion."<sup>23</sup> Colella has suggested that the chi-rho on an ossuary is an abbreviation for χαράσσω or one of its derivatives meaning "sealed."<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, no ossuaries were actually sealed. Figueras has pointed out that the XP could be any Greek word that features a *chi* and a *rho* prominently.<sup>25</sup>

The question arises how to interpret monograms and crosses as necessarily Christian, since the widespread and unequivocal use of the cross as a Christian symbol or of the Christogram as a Christian symbol is not clearly attested until the fourth century C.E. A second question is how to integrate names as Jewish *Christian* into the argument.

<sup>22</sup>H. R. Seeliger, "Die Verwendung des Christogramms durch Konstantin im Jahre 312," *ZKG* 100 (1989): 149–68; Kurt Aland, "Neutestamentliche Papyri II (NT Papyri II)," *NTS* 10 (1963): 62–79.

<sup>23</sup>M. Avi-Yonah, *Abbreviations in Greek Inscriptions (The Near East, 200 B.C.–A.D. 1100)* (Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine Supplement 9; London: Oxford University Press, 1940), 112.

<sup>24</sup>P. Colella, "Les abréviations è et [chi-rho] XP," *RB* 80 (1973): 547–58.

<sup>25</sup>Figueras, *Decorated Jewish Ossuaries*, 49; Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places*, 11.

## 2.2. *The Tombs of the Sanhedriya, Dominus Flevit, Bethphage, Gethsemane (the Tomb of the Virgin Mary), and the Painted Tomb on the Mt. of Olives*

### 2.2.1. *Sanhedriya*

These twenty-one underground chambers hewn from the Jerusalem hills are attributed to the "Sanhedrin" only in popular imagination. J. Jotham-Rothschild published these tombs in 1952 and 1954.<sup>26</sup> The arrangement, cutting, and general morphology of the tombs are clearly the same as other Jewish tombs of the early centuries C.E. A splendid façade decorated with pomegranates, citrons, and acanthus leaves invites entry from the forecourt into the underground vestibule of the tomb complex. The only items that might signal early Christianity are three crosses cut into the rock to the left of the entrance of tomb X—one above the door of tomb XIII, and one above the door of tomb V, which leads to the central chamber.<sup>27</sup> There is as yet no satisfactory explanation for the crosses, and even a Christian explanation seems the less likely on the grounds that what we know of the development of the cross as a Christian symbol to date would seem to preclude this conclusion. Jotham-Rothschild accepts the crosses as Christian, not of Byzantine hermits, but of early "Hebrew-Christians."

"... Early Christians, descendants of the Jewish owners of Tombs V, X, and XIII, and in possession of a title-deed inherited from their forefathers, had been buried in the family tomb, that the two (or more, now obliterated by weathering) crosses at the left of the portal of Tomb X mean that two (or more) Hebrew-Christians were laid to rest in the two (or more) *kokhim* at the left of the tomb-chamber and that, where a cross was carved in the center of the portal, as on Tombs XIII and V, all *kokhim* were occupied by Neo-Christians. A find which corroborates my assumption was made in Tomb V, where I found pieces of a small metal cross in one of the *kokhim*."<sup>28</sup>

On the other hand, they may also be Byzantine Christian additions. If so, how are we to interpret them? How would Byzantine Christians know where to mark crosses? What would be the purpose in doing so?

### 2.2.2. *Dominus Flevit*

This extensive Roman and Byzantine cemetery delivered up about 500 burial places. The cutting, arrangement, and lack of decoration of these tombs are exactly what one would expect of tombs of the period anywhere in Jerusalem. The only data that might suggest Jewish Christianity are the names and ornaments found on some of the ossuaries (see above).<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup>J. Jotham-Rothschild, "The Tombs of Sanhedria," *PEQ* 84 (1952): 23–38 and 86 (1954): 16–22.

<sup>27</sup>J. Jotham-Rothschild, "The Tombs of Sanhedria," *PEQ* 86 (1954): pl. IV.1 (Crosses on Tomb X) and pl. IV.2 (cross on Tomb XIII) and p. 18.

<sup>28</sup>Jotham-Rothschild, "The Tombs of Sanhedria" (1954), 20.

<sup>29</sup>For other Jewish tombs in Jerusalem see G. Avni and Z. Greenhut, *The Akeldama Tombs: Three Burial Caves in the Kidron Valley, Jerusalem* (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 1996).

### 2.2.3. *Bethphage*

The finds at Kfar et-Tur on the east flank of the Mount of Olives, otherwise known as Bethphage, include much more than the one tomb mentioned above. In all, about ten tombs have been reported from the Franciscan property, and there are likely others. The tombs represent four types, all represented in the repertory of tombs from Jerusalem: the bench-type (one tomb), the slot or *kokh*-type (three tombs), the trough-grave or single-inhumation graves cut into the floors of tombs, each of which originally had a stone cover (six examples), and the shaft grave, which also bore a stone slab cover (three graves together).<sup>30</sup>

As in the case of the tombs found at Dominus Flevit, the cutting and arrangement of these tombs are precisely what one would expect of tombs of the period anywhere in Jerusalem. The data that Saller and Testa reported as Jewish Christian were the graffiti found in tomb 21 (see below). Other names and ornaments found on some of the ossuaries were also suggestive to them (see above).<sup>31</sup>

### 2.2.4. *Gethsemane*

The Tomb of the Virgin Mary, a site built and rebuilt over many generations, contains some tombs which possibly date to the first century C.E. The crypt of the modern church encloses a rock-cut chamber some 17 meters long that isolates centrally three benches from a putative first century tomb. In the middle of the crypt's north wall is an entrance into another tomb that is likely from the first century also. That the first tomb was isolated in the center of the Byzantine crypt suggests that Christians from the fourth or fifth century had a local tradition of the burial of Mary (or of a Mary) that accords well with the archaeological evidence of first century tombs. Yet there is nothing in the morphology of the tomb that suggests earlier Christian veneration. On the other hand, there is nothing to the cutting or arrangement of the tomb that forbids its fit with the tradition.<sup>32</sup>

### 2.2.5. *The Painted Tomb on the Mount of Olives*

In 1974 municipal workers on the Mount of Olives accidentally opened an arcosolium-type tomb that was plastered and painted. There is little to say of the form and function of the tomb, which was completely ordinary. The paintings also, which featured realistically modeled birds in color, were relatively common in painted tombs. On the other hand, one decoration seemed to have two crosses. Their presence lead Bagatti to attribute the use of this tomb to Jewish Christians.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup>Saller and Testa, *The Archaeological Setting of the Shrine of Bethphage*, 41.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 84–120.

<sup>32</sup>Bellarmino Bagatti, "Nuove scoperte all Tomba della Vergine a Getsemani," *Liber Annus* 22 (1972): 236–90 and elsewhere; rebuttal in Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places*, 202–5.

<sup>33</sup>Bellarmino Bagatti, "Ritrovamento di una tomba pitturata sull-Olivetto," *Liber Annus* 24 (1974): 170–87.

The crosses depicted are indeed enigmatic and do not betray the same skill in execution as do the birds and floral motifs. For example, in figure 3 the plant stem with flower and leaves is more or less expertly executed with a fine brush, but the widow-like feature with the cross is applied with a broad brush and no special care. The partial cross above has even less to commend it aesthetically. It is tempting to interpret these roughly vertical and horizontal strokes as more like graffiti in art from the day of their application.



Figure 3: The Putative Crosses from the Painted Tomb on the Mount of Olives, from Finegan, 1978.

3. Inscriptions, Amulets, and the Bethphage Graffiti

This essay omits the curious stelae or stone amulets from Khirbet Kilkish, which recently have been reputed to be fraudulent.<sup>34</sup>

Inscriptions

The inscription from Tafas in southern Syria has been mentioned already above. Alt opined that the inscription dated from the founding of a synagogue: Jacob and Samuel and Clematios, their father, built [this] synagogue": Ἰάκωβος καὶ Σεμούηλος καὶ Κλημάτιος πατὴρ αὐτῶν τὴν συναγωγὴν οἰκοδόμησ(αν).<sup>35</sup> Alt noted that the father's name, Clematios, contrasted with the "genuinely Jewish" names of the sons. Clematios seemed to be a Byzantine Greek name, but Alt

<sup>34</sup> Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places*, 12–16.

<sup>35</sup> Alt cites the finder as Fossey, *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique* 21 (1897), 46f. No photograph without photograph or "originalgetreue Reproduktion," Alt, "Ein Denkmal," The text appeared in S. Klein, *Jüdisch-palästinisches Corpus Inscriptionum* (1920), 104.

concluded that the father began the building and the sons completed it, rather like the generations of the inscription of Theodotus in Jerusalem. The building may well have been used by Jewish Christians because Tafas is only 20 km south-east of Kaukab, which Epiphanius knew as an Ebionite village (*Pan.* 30.2 and 18, PG 41:408, 436). The Ebionites were known to call their assemblies "synagogues" and not "churches."<sup>36</sup> This construction may be borne by the data, but it is not required.

3.2. Farj

The site of Farj in the Golan Heights has provided researchers with a reservoir of data indicating occupation by Christians and Jews, but not necessarily Jewish Christians. Dauphin has interpreted the epigraphic remains to mean that Jews lived in Farj and that Jewish and Christian populations interpenetrated during the early Byzantine period. In fact, she wonders whether the Christians might have been descendants of the Jews that first occupied the village.<sup>37</sup> Taylor, on the

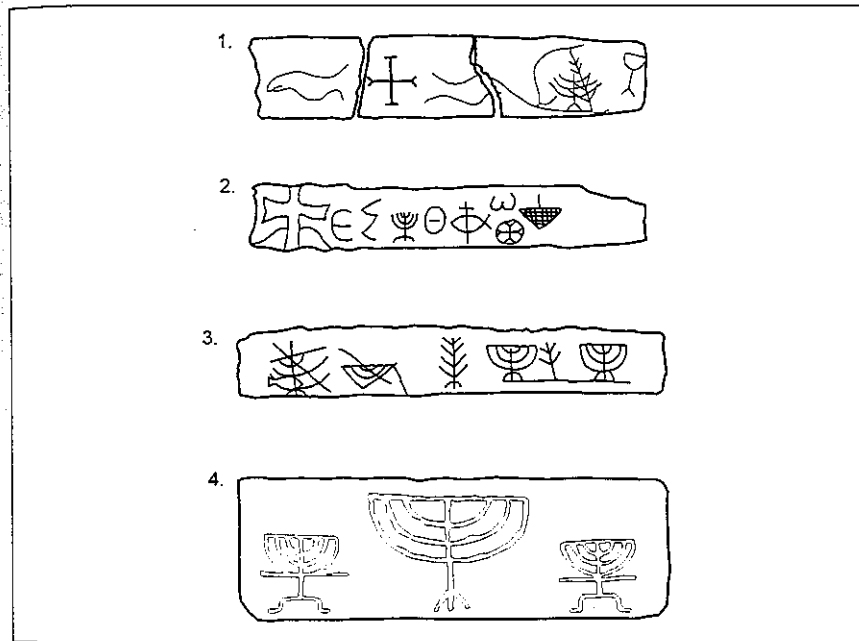


Figure 4: Four Menorahs from Farj in the Golan Heights, from Taylor, 1993.

<sup>36</sup> Alt, "Ein Denkmal," 93; Ray Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity: From the End of the New Testament Period until its Disappearance in the Fourth Century* (StPB 37; Leiden: Brill, 1988).

<sup>37</sup> C. M. Dauphin, "Jewish and Christian Communities: A Study of Evidence from Archaeological Surveys," *PEQ* 114 (1982): 129–42; C. M. Dauphin and J. J. Schonfield, "Settlements of the Roman and Byzantine Periods on the Golan Heights: Preliminary Report on Three Seasons of Survey (1979–1981)," *IEJ* 33 (1983): 189–206; C. M. Dauphin, "Farj en

other hand, concludes that at least those who cut the inscriptions in figure 4 had been "ethnic Jews" (sic) who converted to Christianity.<sup>38</sup>

The evidence in question is comprised of lintel stones, apparently from synagogues and churches. In figure 4 one sees from top to bottom, and reading each stone from left to right: (1) a cross between wing-like forms, then a menorah with a palm branch superimposed, and perhaps a chalice, (2) from the church, a cross on a hill (Calvary?), ΕΣ, then a Menorah, a Θ, a Latin cross superimposed over a fish, Ω above a cross in a circle,<sup>39</sup> and a hatched triangle with a stem which resembles one of the icons from Bâtn el-Hawa (fig. 1), (3) a monogram formed of a menorah with an upper bar, a fish, and a superimposed stroke down and to the right, followed by a second similar but simplified monogram of a menorah without the vertical bar but with a similar stroke from upper left to lower right, then a palm branch, and finally two menorahs flanking a palm branch, and (4) two smaller menorahs with top bars flanking a large central menorah with a bar across the top.<sup>40</sup> The two smaller menorahs have a horizontal bar beneath the arms of the menorah. The second example is from a lintel of a Byzantine church that replaced an earlier synagogue.

Some of the Greek inscriptions of Farj have been published by Robert Gregg. These are unremarkable tombstones in Greek, except that at least three of the names are Greek forms of Hebrew and Aramaic names: John, Barnabas, and Alpha.<sup>41</sup> Gregg comments that the evidence of the inscriptions of Farj is that Jews resided in villages in both the western and eastern Golan. Furthermore, Jews were willing to live alongside Christians at Farj.<sup>42</sup> Whether these Christians were Ebionites, Nazoraeans, or Orthodox remains to be seen.

### 3.3. Inscriptions from East of the Jordan

Mancini has summarized some of the research by Franciscans and others who have understood certain inscriptions to be Judeo-Christian. For example, he records an inscription from Kerak in Jordan which records the first line as

Gaulanitide: refuge judéo-Chrétien?," *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 34 (1984): 233–45. Dauphin cites Bagatti, *The Church from the Circumcision*, 25. Dauphin's interpretation is rejected by Z. Ma'oz, "Comments on Jewish and Christian Communities in Byzantine Palestine," *PEQ* 117 (1985): 59–68.

<sup>38</sup>Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places*, 41.

<sup>39</sup>Is the Greek to be read as one Greek word, perhaps ἐσθῶ or "I eat"?

<sup>40</sup>Dauphin points out that G. Schumacher reported in 1888 on a menorah rather similar to that of Fig 4.4 found at Breikah. It has a horizontal bar below the branches, but not on top. See G. Schumacher, *The Jaulân: Surveyed for the German Society for the Exploration of the Holy Land* (London, 1888), 115. Schumacher also reports on two menorahs with horizontal bars on top carved on a lintel from Khan Bandâk on p. 183.

<sup>41</sup>R. C. Gregg and D. Urman, *Jews, Pagans, and Christians in the Golan Heights: Greek and Other Inscriptions of the Roman and Byzantine Eras* (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1996), 166–71.

<sup>42</sup>Gregg and Urman, *Jews, Pagans, and Christians*, 299.

follows: ΕΝΥΘΑ. In other words, an oversized Upsilon was inserted in the middle of the first line, which is part of the Greek word ἐνθάδε or "here." The speculation is that for those "in the know," the upsilon would stand for a Christian cross, signaling that the deceased was a Christian. According to Mancini, one of the features of these epitaphs is the insertion of letters and numbers, even in the text proper, that seem to have no rationale. Yet for certain "followers" ("adeptes") these are recognizable and rich with theological meaning.<sup>43</sup> Recognizing the evidence, in other words, rests upon proper interpretation of letters and numbers (which are also letters) that otherwise seem strange or oversized or out of place. That would seem to exclude modern scholars, who do not have said knowledge.

### 3.4. Lamellae or Laminae as Amulets

Lamellae or Laminae, thin sheets of copper, silver, or gold upon which one wrote magical formulas and symbols, are well known in the ancient world. They serve as magical amulets against disease and harm, to keep away evil spirits, and invoke the blessings of angels, demons, or God on the bearer. A few amulets of this type have appeared in the literature cited as archaeological material in support of the Judeo-Christian hypothesis.

For example, an instance in silver is known from Maccabean Emmaus (Amwas) and published in 1908.<sup>44</sup> Vincent classified this amulet as Jewish. In a later study E. Testa identified it as possibly Jewish Christian on the grounds that the amulet protects the bearer from the snares of the demon "Shamadel," just as in the later Roman Rite one prayed for protection from the snares of demons.<sup>45</sup> Another amulet in silver found in Aleppo and inscribed in Aramaic is located in the Flagellation Museum in Jerusalem. Bagatti points out, following Testa, that line 8 mentions three seals, that of El (אֵל), that of Ḥay (חַי), and that of Jeshe (יֵשׁוּעַ).<sup>46</sup> It seems to follow for Bagatti that these names establish the Jewish Christian character of the amulet.

The best example of such Jewish Christian amulets,<sup>47</sup> at least according to the publishers, is a silver sheet upon which the text appears in Aramaic in *repoussé* technique. According to the Bedouin who found it, it came from the desert south of Jerusalem and was found with Herodian lamps, which may make it first or second century C.E. This amulet opens with words translated as "the Oil of Faith" or

<sup>43</sup>Mancini, *L'archéologie judéo-chrétienne*, 32–33. Mancini cites A. Canova, *Iscrizioni e monumenti protocristiani nel paese di Moab* (Sussidi allo studio delle antichità cristiane 4; Vatican: Pontificio istituto di archeologia cristiana, 1954).

<sup>44</sup>L.-H. Vincent, "Amulette judéo-araméenne," *RB* 5 (1908): 382–94.

<sup>45</sup>Testa, *Il Simbolismo dei Giudeo-cristiani*, 64–66.

<sup>46</sup>Bagatti, *The Church from the Circumcision*, 272 and fig. 136; Testa, *Il Simbolismo dei Giudeo-cristiani*, 52–59.

<sup>47</sup>Mancini, *L'archéologie judéo-chrétienne*, 72–77. Other scholarly readings are given pp. 75–77.

“Oil of the Faithful” (שמן דתנין).<sup>48</sup> The line that is critical for interpreting the whole, according to Testa, is line 8. This line contains from left to right a +, a ligature of a + and an IH (which must be read from left to right, contrary to the rest of the amulet, which is read from right to left) as a kind of monogram, and a final +. The result is ++IH++. Testa believes that the monogram and the two equal-armed crosses establish that Jesus Christ is under discussion. In his commentary he calls the + a “cruciform tau” and explains the IH as the “seal of Yahweh” adopted by Christians from the saving *tau* of Ezekiel 9.4.<sup>49</sup>

An alternative reading of the central monogram of line 8 is ++. That is, while it may bear the interpretation of a Greek Iota and Eta, it is not a necessary interpretation. This is an Aramaic amulet, and we expect a detailed explanation that takes into account an *Aramaic monogram* in an Aramaic document instead of a Greek monogram in an Aramaic document.<sup>50</sup>

### 3.5. Graffiti

Certain putative Jewish Christian remains have already been mentioned at Bethphage. Bethphage tomb 21 contains sixteen graffiti incised into the wall near the entrance.<sup>51</sup> These contain four examples of the + sign, two examples of the X sign, two palm leaves, the Greek letter *Pi*, and several composite signs. In addition one sees a row of Greek Uncial letters that yield no sense: ΦΥΟΤΧΠ with a second row underneath: ΝΙ•ΣΗΝ, which also yields no sense. There is as well a sign that resembles the figure 8, a sign that may be formed of a T and Y together, perhaps a lyre, and a hatch formed of four horizontal lines and five vertical lines. (Testa reads this as a net with twelve squares or a “Dodecade” on p. 88. But the photograph on p. 91 shows 16 squares.)

Testa interprets these signs, letters, and ligatures as sure evidence for Jewish Christianity.<sup>52</sup> The literature he uses to support his arguments, however, consists

<sup>48</sup> E. Testa, *L'huile de la Foi: L'Oncion des maladies sur une lamelle du 1er siècle* (trans. Omer Englebert; Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1967); Bagatti, *The Church from the Circumcision*, 256.

<sup>49</sup> Testa, *L'huile de la Foi*, 39–40: “Les tau reproduisent le signe sauveur d’Ez 9,4, qui constituait une protection contre les six anges exterminateurs. Le Nom IH reproduit le ‘sceau de Yahvé’ qu’adoptèrent, en le christianisant, les chrétiens, dès le 1er siècle.” See also Finegan, *Archaeology of the New Testament*, 231.

<sup>50</sup> Other scholars have maintained a Jewish but not Jewish Christian interpretation of this amulet: J. T. Milik, “Une Amulette Judéo-araméenne,” *Bib* 48 (1967): 450–51; J. Starcky, “Le temple nabatéen de Khirbet Tannur: à propos d’un livre récent,” *RB* 75 (1968): 278–80. Other recent examples are in Roy Kotansky, “Two Inscribed Jewish Aramaic Amulets from Syria,” *IEJ* 41 (1991): 267–81, and Joseph Naveh, “An Ancient Amulet or a Modern Forgery?” *CBQ* 44 (1982): 282–84.

<sup>51</sup> E. Testa, “Excursus: The Graffiti of Tomb 21 at Bethphage,” in *The Archaeological Setting of the Shrine of Bethphage* (ed. S. Saller and E. Testa; Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1961), 84–119.

<sup>52</sup> See note 49. The same material appears in Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places*, 174–79.

mainly of ancient polemics of the church fathers against gnostic interpretations, not necessarily Jewish Christian, as Taylor has pointed out.<sup>53</sup> Although Testa outlines ancient millenarian views from 2 (Slavonic) Enoch, Jerome, Irenaeus, Justin, and others, these do not demonstrate a uniquely Jewish Christian view. Furthermore his interpretations of other signs seem to be mere speculation more than anything else and again raises the question of method. Finally, there is nothing in these graffiti that are distinctive except the old Hebrew “youth” (נער), which Testa read as “light” (נור).<sup>54</sup> That is not enough to conclude Jewish Christianity in spite of the + signs.

## 4. Architectural Remains: Nazareth, Capernaum, Beth Ha-Shittah

### 4.1. Nazareth

Probably some of the most hotly debated architectural remains alleged to be related to Jewish believers are those from Nazareth, specifically the mosaics, walls, and cut bedrock from beneath the modern Latin Church of the Annunciation.

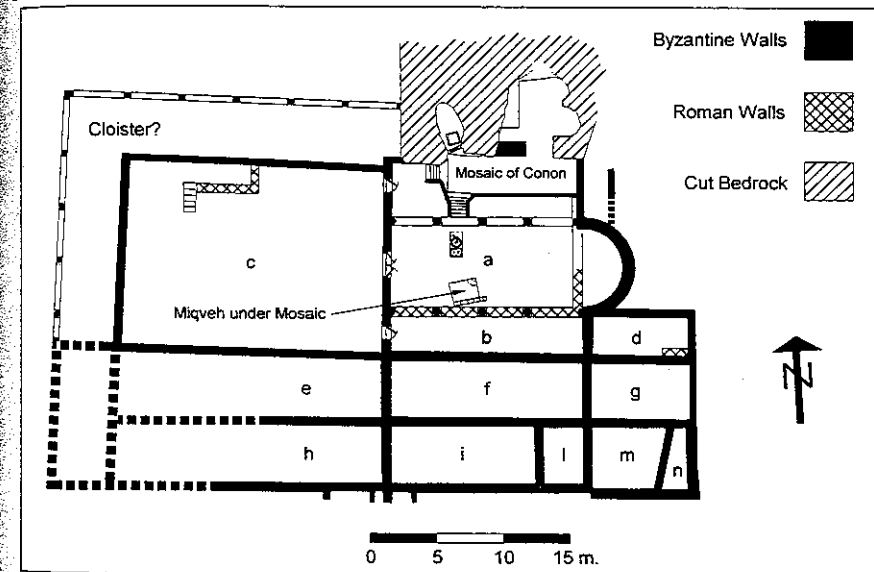


Figure 5: Nazareth Remains, Suggested Reconstruction. From Bagatti, 1969.

<sup>53</sup> Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places*, 174.

<sup>54</sup> Testa, “Excursus,” 97. Taylor detected the misreading: Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places*, 178.



The figure presents a proposed reconstruction of the floor plan of the fifth century basilica unearthed at Nazareth, which was part of a monastery.<sup>55</sup> The letter designations in the various rooms follow Bagatti. The proposed cloister is speculation, but enlarges on Bagatti's interpretation of certain remains. The north stylobate was not found in the excavations, but it is probably no accident that the staircase begins at the east-west line from the north end of the apse, which was found. The three doors from the atrium *c* into the nave and aisle of the basilica are based on parallels.<sup>56</sup> The worship space of the nave measures 6.2 x 13.6 m or about 85 sq. meters.

Two items of special interest in the plan are the caves to the north incorporated into the north aisle. The larger of the two is today termed the "Shrine of the Annunciation" and the smaller is called simply "the little grotto No. 29" or "the martyrium." The low area of the north aisle of the church is called "The Chapel of the Angel." One can see that part of the bedrock was hewn away to incorporate a hill and its two caves into the north aisle of a basilica church of the fifth century. The exact outlines of the hewn bedrock are today unclear on the west, north, and east sides, as the site was disturbed by extensive rock cutting for a Crusader Church of the Annunciation, which obscured much of the early remains.

The floor of the nave of the church was formed of a white mosaic of which only a small part remains. That small part includes a wreath in black tesserae, which the excavator called a "crown," within which is a cross monogram (or monogrammatic cross) formed of the Greek letter **P** and a superimposed Greek **T**. The same monogram appears at least seven times in the floors of the fifth century church at Evron north of Acco, but without the encircling wreath as at Nazareth.<sup>57</sup> A large cross in the floor is known from the sixth century Byzantine church at Shavei Zion near Evron, but not a cross-monogram.<sup>58</sup> However, what is more interesting is that the monogram is not centered on the nave on either axis, but its top points north toward a staircase down to the caves in the north aisle. Inside the smaller of the two caves or the martyrium northwest of the Mosaic of Conon lies a small, square mosaic. The same monogram appears in this mosaic inside and also points a little west of north.<sup>59</sup> That is, the orientation of these

<sup>55</sup>B. Bagatti, *From the Beginning Till the XII Century* (vol. 1 of *Excavations in Nazareth*; Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1969). For a rebuttal of Bagatti's interpretations see Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places*, 267.

<sup>56</sup>J. R. Strange, *The Emergence of the Christian Basilica in the Fourth Century* (Binghamton, N. Y.: International Studies in Formative Christianity and Judaism, 2000).

<sup>57</sup>V. Tzaferis, "The Greek Inscriptions from the Early Christian Church at 'Evron,'" *Eretz-Israel* 19 (1987): 36–53, the monogrammatic cross pp. 51–52. A summary of the excavations appears in Michael Avi-Yonah, "Churches," *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* (ed. E. Stern; 4 vols.; Jerusalem, 1993), 1:310.

<sup>58</sup>Moshe W. Prausnitz, M. Avi-Yonah, and D. Barag, *Excavations at Shavei Zion: The Early Christian Church. Report of the Excavations Carried out by the Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums* (Rome, 1967).

<sup>59</sup>Bagatti, *Excavations in Nazareth*, 187, fig. 146.

crosses shows that the orientation of the worshipper is to the north when the caves are the objects of veneration.

Bagatti unearthed mosaics in the south aisle of the church (*b*) and rooms *d*, *i*, and *l*. Bedding for mosaics also appeared in rooms *h*, *m*, and *n*. This suggests that the other rooms of the "convent" were also similarly paved. Bagatti terms room *d* the "sacistry" on the model of other Byzantine convents.<sup>60</sup> He also suggests that rooms *e*, *f*, and *g* may have been part of a cloister, since on the south side of rooms *f* and *g* the foundations were reinforced.<sup>61</sup> West of the western wall of atrium *c* was a small fragment of a mosaic of very large tesserae. Bagatti calls the mosaic fragment "the fragment of the cloister."<sup>62</sup> Beneath the mosaics of the south aisle and room *h* were found coins of the fourth and fifth century C.E., confirming the date of the building from pottery remains.

Bagatti reported that finds of marble and hard limestone architectural fragments from time to time have given an idea of some of the furniture of the church. These include column bases and Byzantine capitals with crosses in relief and incised on the echinus, small marble posts for the altar, marble chancel screens, a small capital for a column 26 cm. in diameter, and a small column 22 cm. in diameter with straight fluting for 60 cm, then spiral fluting for more than 37 cm. (where it is broken), perhaps from an altar, and fragments of carefully-cut, Greek inscriptions.

Bagatti noticed that there were apparently earlier walls re-used in the Byzantine church. This is particularly the south stylobate, which separates the nave from the south aisle. Attached to the wall re-used as a stylobate was a wall turning north at the juncture of the later apse. Another short fragment of a pre-Byzantine wall appeared while excavating room *d*. Finally, a corner of a pre-Byzantine room or structure appeared in atrium *c*.

Furthermore, beneath the mosaics of room *i-h* were found a series of architectural fragments that appear to pre-date the Byzantine church. In form they resemble fragments from synagogue structures of the second to the fourth centuries C.E. The fragments included six column drums about 54–57 cm. in diameter, five column bases with plinths 56–60 cm. in diameter (two of them slotted for screens or transennae), two capitals 49 and 47 cm. in diameter at the bottom (but with scotias in place of toruses below the abacus), three imposts or springers for arches with a span of about 2.24 m., rounded and square cornices, two thresholds, four doorjambs, and several mouldings and building stones.<sup>63</sup> Some of these architectural fragments featured graffiti in Greek and one in unreadable Armenian. One small marble fragment bears Aramaic words on both sides.<sup>64</sup> Other

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 93.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 105.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 140–46.

<sup>64</sup>E. Testa, *Nazaret Giudeo-Cristiana: Riti, Iscrizioni, Simboli* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1969), 78–110 (Ch. III: "Il Targum di Isaia 55,1.13 e la teologia sui pozzi dell'acqua viva").

adornments on the stones were crosses, a figure of a man in profile, and a figure of a man standing with a spear or standard and wearing scale armor.<sup>65</sup> Bagatti took the architectural fragments and graffiti as evidence that a Jewish Christian synagogue once stood on this site, which was demolished by the Byzantine engineers to build the church.

Bagatti argued that the builders of the pre-Byzantine building had to be Jewish Christians in part because a square basin found beneath the mosaic in nave *a*.<sup>66</sup> The basin measures 2.00 x 1.95 m. and is about 1.6 m. deep. A staircase of five steps inside the basin descends from the southeast. Two more steps appear on the outside of the basin, which suggests that the ancient ground level was about 20 cm. higher than the top of bedrock at the rim of the basin. On the floor outside the basin and next to the wall stood a heap of plaster fragments, many of which contained graffiti scratched into red or green paint. Other graffiti appeared on plaster fill in the basin. Presumably these plaster fragments found their way here in the destruction of the pre-church structures by the Byzantine builders. The graffiti are written mainly in Greek, but three are in Syriac. In addition were found representations of boats, ladders, possible nets, and other shapes, which Testa interpreted as without doubt Jewish Christian.<sup>67</sup> Bagatti therefore interpreted this basin as a Jewish Christian baptismal basin.<sup>68</sup>

Taylor has argued that this basin is most satisfactorily interpreted as a vat for squeezing grapes. She points out that Bagatti found a knife for grape harvesting in a niche on the north side of the basin. Such knives are most economically interpreted as simple agricultural instruments not of cultic character.<sup>69</sup> On the other hand, one searches the published literature in vain for an oil vat or wine vat into which a stair has been cut.<sup>70</sup> The first century C.E. synagogue at Jericho also has a ritual bath equipped with an *otser* or collecting vat on its south side. The pool identified as a *miqveh* or ritual bath has a narrow stairway down on the north side. There is no stair in the vat used for collection of rain water, the *otser*.<sup>71</sup> It is therefore not out of the question at all that this pool found beneath the mosaic of the Byzantine church (and the similar one found beneath the Church of St. Joseph in Nazareth) is in fact a ritual bath.

<sup>65</sup> Bagatti interpreted this as John the Baptist: Bagatti, *Excavations in Nazareth*, 164. Taylor re-interprets the graffito as a Roman soldier: Joan E. Taylor, "A Graffito Depicting John the Baptist in Nazareth?" *PEQ* 119 (1987): 142–48.

<sup>66</sup> Bagatti, *Excavations in Nazareth*, 119–23.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 123–31.

<sup>68</sup> Bagatti, *Excavations in Nazareth*, 123. Testa, *Nazaret Giudeo-Cristiana*, 56–78.

<sup>69</sup> Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places*, 244–53; Bagatti, *Excavations in Nazareth*, fig. 79, no. 31.

<sup>70</sup> R. Frankel, *Wine and Oil Production in Antiquity in Israel and Other Mediterranean Countries* (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament/American Schools of Oriental Research Monograph Series 10; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999).

<sup>71</sup> See the plan in E. Netzer, "Le Scoperte sotto il Palazzo di Erode," *Archeo* 14/7 (1998): 33.

It is true that the graffiti are so fragmentary and difficult to decipher that they hardly have definitive readings. For example, the famous graffito XE MAPIA in two lines may be scratched by two different hands. If so, then XE may be read plausibly as an abbreviation "Christ" (Χρίστε) not "Hai" (χαίρε).

On the other hand we must give an account of the architectural fragments that resemble those from synagogues and the marble fragment with Aramaic on both sides. That these items and the vats are fragments of the Jewish material culture of Nazareth hardly seems necessary to defend.

When Egeria (381–384 C.E.) spoke of "a big and very splendid cave in which [Mary] lived" at Nazareth she mentions no building, nor the Judaism of the inhabitants. She may have been speaking of today's "Shrine of the Annunciation."<sup>72</sup> In like manner one cannot easily deduce the religious identity of those who visited the caves cut into bedrock before the advent of the monks and their building program in the fifth century C.E. It is a possible, but not necessary conclusion that they were Judeo-Christians.

#### 4.2. Capernaum

Egeria reported also, "Moreover, in Capernaum the house of the prince of the apostles has been made into a church, with its original walls still standing."<sup>73</sup> It appears that her statement tends to be corroborated by the excavations of Corbo and others beneath the floor of the octagonal church at Capernaum, which appears to have been built at the same time as the basilica church and the monastery at Nazareth.

The figure shows the plan of the pre-Byzantine stratum of Insula I at Capernaum as adapted from Corbo, that is, the fourth century building.<sup>74</sup> The figure shows vertical hatching over the parts that this reconstruction proposes to have been roofed and follows Corbo's terminology (the "Venerated Room" etc.). One sees that this is a roughly square area enclosed by a thick wall. One entered either from the north door or south door and proceeded to the atrium of a building which bore two stories over room 1 (also called the "domus ecclesia" and the "Venerated Room"). Room 1 was converted to public usage from an earlier room. The builders added an arch resting on two added piers to the north and south sides of room 1 so that it became as high as two stories. The interior was plastered with a thick, white plaster. Artists then painted the plastered walls with red panels, flowers, and other figures. Frequent visitors scratched names and other brief graffiti, mainly in Greek and Syriac, but also in Latin and Hebrew.

<sup>72</sup> John Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels to the Holy Land* (London: SPCK, 1971), 193. Egeria thought there was an altar inside the cave and that Mary's Well flowed there. Wilkinson points out a possible confusion with the spring at St. Gabriel's Church.

<sup>73</sup> Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels*, 194.

<sup>74</sup> Virgilio Corbo, *Cafarnao I: Gli Edifici Della Città* (Publications of the studium biblicum Franciscanum 19; Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1975), Pl. VII.

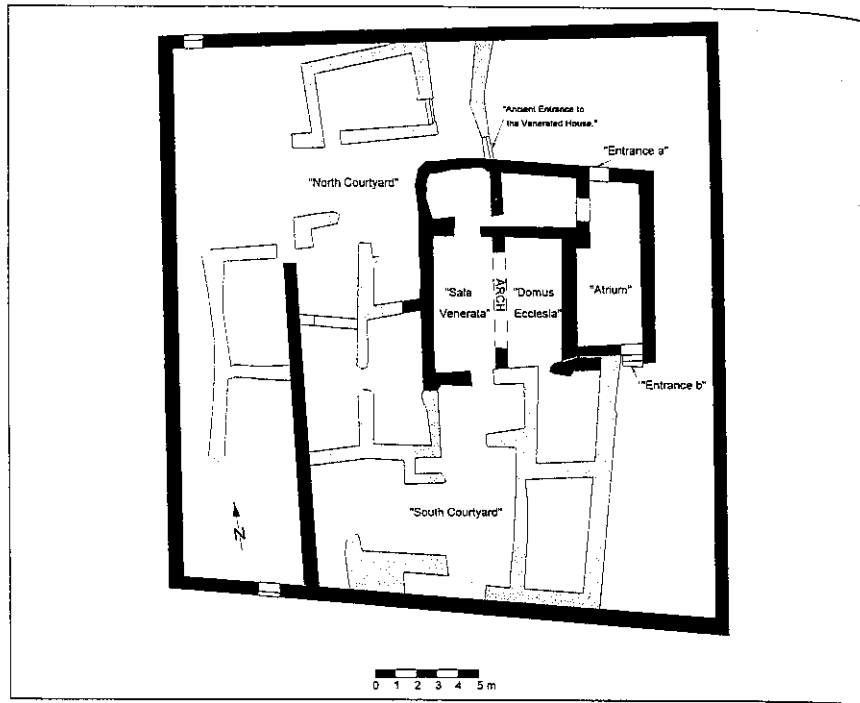


Figure 6: Plan of the “Domus Ecclesia” at Capernaum in its Precinct, from Corbo, 1975.

When one entered the north door, one turned east to walk between room 15 and the main building. One then turned into entrance “a” and found himself in an “atrium,” which the builders had added to the earlier room mentioned above. The pilgrim or worshipper then walked through rooms 4 and 5 to get to room 1, which occupied 37.8 sq. meters. From room 1 the pilgrim had entry into unroofed space 8 and the “South Court,” which was about 253 sq. meters (areas 8, 19, and 20). This is nearly seven times larger than the original room 1. Room 1, in its fourth century configuration, is therefore less than half the space of the nave of the Nazareth church of 85 sq. meters.

In the figure we see that Insula I, as reconstructed here, features a very large room (Room 1, or the “venerated room.”), which is the particular room reconstructed as a church in the fourth century. This room measures about 6.1 x 6.7 m. or about 41 sq. meters. This is quite large by ancient standards, but otherwise there is little to distinguish this particular room or this set of rooms from any others at Capernaum.<sup>75</sup> Roofing for the room is most easily reconstructed as the

<sup>75</sup>Room 46/47 in the center of Insula 2 is divided into two spaces by a “pass through” or a series of windows set low in a dividing wall. The room is square, measuring 6.7 x 6.7 m. or about 47 sq. meters. Corbo, *Cafarnao I*, Pl. XIII.

usual Middle Eastern flat roof formed of logs or cut beams spanning the whole upon which were laid bundles of reeds and the whole covered liberally with a mixture of lime plaster and clay—more plaster than clay.<sup>76</sup>

The argument that the house was St. Peter’s House is based mainly upon an interpretation of the graffiti found in room 1 after construction of the “domus ecclesia.” Yet there are two other archaeological discoveries to consider: (1) the pottery wares in the house changed from normal house wares (cooking pots, plates, cups, bowls, pitchers, juglets, lamps, and jars) to primarily storage jars. (2) The whole of room 1 was improved by plastering the floor, walls, and ceilings. The two changes occur in the second half of the first century C.E. and combine to suggest that the use of the room changed from that of an ordinary house to a public use, perhaps for assemblies. If so, it is not unreasonable to hypothesize that this may be the earliest Christian sanctuary known for the Jesus movement, and that it may indeed have been of Jewish Christian usage.<sup>77</sup>

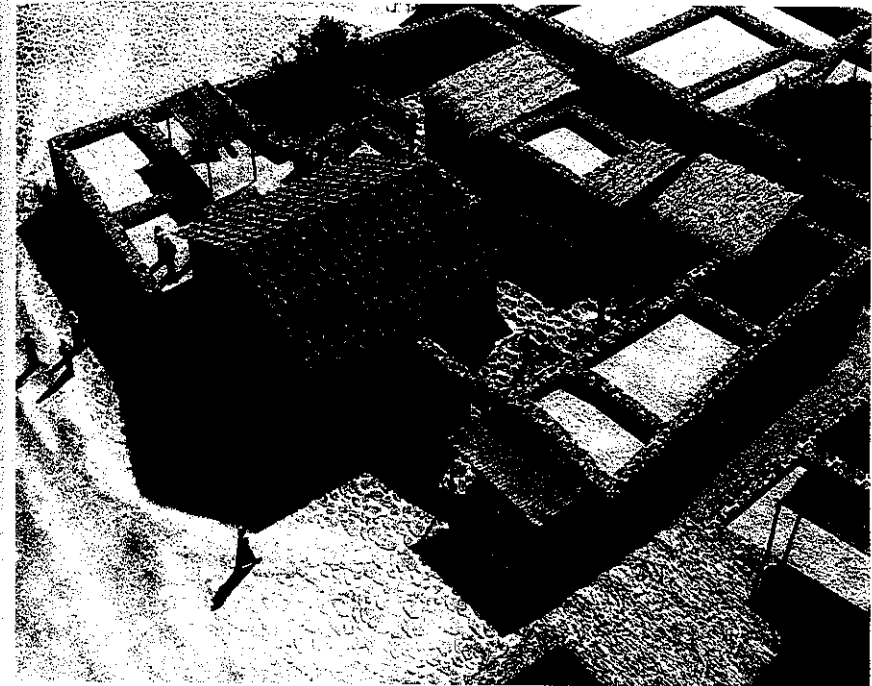


Figure 7: Reconstruction of Capernaum, Insula I, view to north, courtesy of The Virtual Bible, Inc. Used with permission.

<sup>76</sup>If this is the room referenced by Luke 5:19, it must be roofed with tiles: διὰ τῶν κεράμων καθήκαν αὐτόν.

<sup>77</sup>Corbo’s argument depends on datable contents from the plaster floors, which he calls “beaten lime” floors (“battuto de calce”); Corbo, *Cafarnao I*, 97–98. Taylor argues

We now turn to the painted plaster fragments found in room 1 and the graffiti incised upon them. The excavators chose Emmanuele Testa to write the volume on the graffiti, which appeared in 1972.<sup>78</sup> A detailed review appeared in *BASOR* in 1977 and another in *Biblica* that same year.<sup>79</sup> Joan E. Taylor reconsidered all the evidence for the Franciscan excavations at Capernaum in 1990 and later.<sup>80</sup>

There seems to be strong evidence that the site of the church of the fourth century was an object of pilgrimage, even if some of the graffiti in Greek are very fragmentary and difficult to combine into sense units. But one, for example, contains an ordinary Byzantine Greek invocation (no. 89): "Lord Jesus Christ, help [your servant . . . ] ion and Zi [ . . . ]" (ΚΕ ΙΣ ΧΕ ΒΟΗΘΙ[ΤΟΝ ΔΟΥΛΟΝ ΣΟΥ] . . . ΙΟΝ ΚΑΙ ΖΙ . . .). Another Greek prayer, No. 88, reads, "Christ have mercy!" (ΧΡΙΣΤΕ ΕΛΕΗΣ[ΟΝ]). One graffito is fascinating as a possible allusion to Paul, namely, No. 85, which appears to read, "a clashing cymbal" (ΚΥΜΒ[ΑΛΟΝ ΕΛΑ[ΛΑΖΟΝ, sic, ἀλαλάζον], a phrase that appears in 1 Corinthians 13:1. Furthermore no. 47 appears to mention a certain Peter in the Genitive case: ΠΙΕΤΡΟΥ. (Is this a prayer addressed to Peter the Apostle or a visitor named Peter? The genitive case implies the latter.)

The graffiti in Syriac appear in the Estrangelo alphabet, but they are quite enigmatic and difficult to decipher. No. 110 in four lines yields little sense, but line 3 is "in the garden" (*bg̃n*) and line 4 reads "the spirit" (*ruh*). No. 105 appears to be the word for "officer" (*pqyā*). That Syriac-speaking Christians were at Capernaum as pilgrims is no surprise, as various ancient authors mention Syrian Christians on pilgrimage, including Egeria:

"In this province there are some people who know both Greek and Syriac, but others know only one or the other. The bishop may know Syriac, but he never uses it. He always speaks in Greek and has a presbyter beside him who translates the Greek into Syriac, so that everyone can understand what he means. Similarly the lessons read in church have to be read in Greek, but there is always someone in attendance to translate into Syriac so that the people understand."<sup>81</sup>

that the lime floors may be as late as the fourth century C.E., despite the dozens of tiny fragments of Herodian lamps found in the plaster: Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places*, 282–83. Taylor's argument seems odd. It is simpler to argue that the lamp fragments date the plaster than to argue that the lamp fragments were kept around for two or even three centuries and then used in plaster.

<sup>78</sup>E. Testa, *Cafarnaon IV: I graffiti della casa de S. Pietro* (Publications of the studium biblicum Franciscanum 19; Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1972).

<sup>79</sup>J. F. Strange, "The Capernaum and Herodium Publications (Part I)," *BASOR* 226 (1977): 65–73; R. North, "Discoveries at Capernaum," *Bib* 58 (1977): 424–31.

<sup>80</sup>Joan E. Taylor, "Capernaum and its 'Jewish Christians': A Re-Examination of the Franciscan Excavations," *Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society* 10 (1990–1991): 7–28; Joan E. Taylor, "The Bagatti-Testa Hypothesis and Alleged Jewish-Christian Archaeological Remains," *Mishkan* 13 (1990): 1–26; Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places*, 268–94.

<sup>81</sup>Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels*, 146 (47.3–4).

More to the point are the few words in Hebrew letters. Testa understood these to be Aramaic, even when they were quotations from the Hebrew Bible. For example, Testa reads No. 103 as "Come near [and] I may touch you" (בָּשֵׁב אִמְשֶׁךָ), or Gen 27:21. Other words may identify the origin of a pilgrim, such as No. 100, which identifies someone as a "Sepphorean" (צִפְרַיִת).<sup>82</sup> Taylor dismisses most of the Aramaic as mis-read Greek. That is possibly true—maybe even certainly true in a very few cases, but not for Nos. 100 and 103.

One must ask why Hebrew letters appear *at all*. The simplest response is that these are a few people for whom Hebrew and perhaps Aramaic are mother tongues. The presence of Hebrew or Aramaic graffiti tends to confirm the hypothesis of a Jewish Christian presence among the pilgrims at Capernaum. Therefore it seems premature to reject the hypothesis that Jewish Christians made pilgrimage to Capernaum in the Byzantine period.

#### 4.3. Beth Ha-Shitta

In 1952 Israeli archaeologists discovered a Byzantine agricultural installation at Kibbutz Beth Ha-Shitta west of Beth Shean.<sup>83</sup> Two of the eight chambers of the installation were paved with mosaics. In the published plan one entered a small vestibule on its narrow side. This room measured only 4 x 4.9 m. and was paved with a mosaic showing a red Greek cross in a circle. A circle in the east corner and another in the west showed designs: an eight pointed asterisk (\*) and something indecipherable. Four small crosses adorned the corners. This room opened to the southwest into a second room 3.25 x 4.9 m. in extent. This room was furnished with a mosaic 2.8 x 3.8 m. divided into a grid of squares, seven in the narrow dimension and ten in the long dimension for a total of seventy squares. The small squares contained simple geometric designs such as (☒, ○, an ✕, concentric circles, and so forth. The two margins on opposite ends of the mosaic also included signs and symbols. One square contained Greek letters: ΚΟ-Σ, which Bagatti understood to be an abbreviation for κύριε σωτήρ (Lord, Savior). Other squares contained the letters Π, Μ, and perhaps a superimposition of Ι and C. These he understood to be abbreviations for πνεῦμα (Spirit), Μαρία (Mary), Ἰησοῦς (Jesus), and Χριστός (Christ). It is possible, of course, that these represent other Greek words.

Testa interpreted the whole in terms of a "sacred ladder" representing ten heavens and seven squares for each heaven. Testa used the Ascension of Isaiah, the

<sup>82</sup>Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places*, 284–88 where she treats the graffiti. Pixner, *Wege des Messias*.

<sup>83</sup>Y. Aharoni, "Excavations at Beth-Hashittah," *Bulletin of the Israel Exploration Society* (= *Yediot*) 18 (1954): 209–15. Aharoni gives the date as fifth or sixth century C.E. Avi-Yonah dates the complex after the Arab conquest: M. Avi-Yonah, "Christian Archaeology in Israel, 1948–54," in *Actes du V<sup>e</sup> Congrès international d'archéologie chrétienne, Aix-en-Provence 13–19 septembre 1954* (Studi di antichità cristiana 22; The Vatican: Pontificio istituto di archeologia cristiana, 1957), 122.



Testament of Levi, the Second Book of Enoch, the Third Book of Baruch, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and others as sources for his interpretations. He also appealed to certain representations in Mesopotamian art.<sup>84</sup>

As one may readily see, whether this mosaic floor is “Jewish Christian” or not depends on the correct interpretation of the symbols in the floor. There is nothing in the architecture to help in the interpretation. Furthermore, as yet there is no agreed upon methodology for interpreting such finds. The floor might represent any number of magical cults that were represented in the Byzantine Christian world. Magical practices in the nature of the case borrowed from one another, and borrowing from the Jewish world would not be impossible at all.<sup>85</sup> On the other hand, none of these symbols are unambiguously Jewish. No Hebrew or Aramaic words appear in the floor.

### 5. “Venerated Caves” in Nazareth and Bethany

Bagatti and Testa both take the position that Jewish Christians liked to engage in ritual in caves or “grottos.”<sup>86</sup> This is understood to be a continuation of a Jewish tradition, for example, praying at the grave site of a sage or saint.<sup>87</sup> Since certain scholars adduce a great deal of archaeological evidence to support this hypothesis, it seems appropriate to review some of the evidence here.<sup>88</sup>

#### 5.1. Nazareth

We have already seen that caves play an important role in the finds at Nazareth. The Byzantine Christian community went to some trouble to include the caves within the plan of the basilica of the fifth century. It is also reasonable to assume that these caves were isolated for veneration before that period. It needs to be said that nothing in the architecture built around the caves nor anything in the cutting of the caves suggest a Jewish Christian presence. That is, although Bagatti thought that the decoration on two marble columns found near the Byzantine convent revealed Jewish Christian motifs, nowhere does he justify such an interpretation.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>84</sup> Testa, *Il Simbolismo dei Giudeo-cristiani*, 84–92. Taylor refers to Beth Ha-Shittah only to document the use of crosses in floors: Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places*, 241. See also Varda Sussmann, “The Beth Ha-Shittah Mosaic Floor: A New Perspective in the Light of Samaritan Lamps,” *Liber Annuus* 54 (2004): 351–68.

<sup>85</sup> H. Maguire, ed., *Byzantine Magic* (Washington D. C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1955).

<sup>86</sup> I. Testa, “Le grotte mistiche dei Nazareni e i loro riti battesimali,” *Liber Annuus* 12 (1962): 5–45; E. Testa, “Le ‘Grotte dei Misteri’ giudeo-cristiane,” *Liber Annuus* 14 (1964): 65–144; Bagatti, *Church from the Circumcision*, 133–36.

<sup>87</sup> J. F. Strange, “Archaeology and the Religion of Judaism in Palestine,” *ANRW* II.19.1: 646–85; Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places*, 1993:166–67.

<sup>88</sup> Eric M. Meyers and James F. Strange, eds., *Archaeology, the Rabbis, and Early Christianity* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1981), 137–39.

<sup>89</sup> Bagatti, *Excavations in Nazareth*, 169; Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places*, 257.

The small cave, the “martyrium” or No. 29 was first excavated and planned by Vlaininck in 1910.<sup>90</sup> Bagatti interpreted the cave as a martyrium dedicated to the memory of the Conon of the “Mosaic of Conon” just outside cave No. 29. The mosaic contains a Greek inscription at the entrance to the cave No. 29 which reads, “Gift (?) of Conon, Dea[con] of Jerusalem.” Bagatti understood this Conon to be either someone named for the early Martyr or the Martyr of Nazareth himself.<sup>91</sup> Bagatti’s method of interpretation of the cave was to examine the graffiti in the several coats of plaster on the west and east walls. He was able to show that pilgrims visited the site very regularly and sometimes incised or painted Greek graffiti on some of the six coats of plaster.

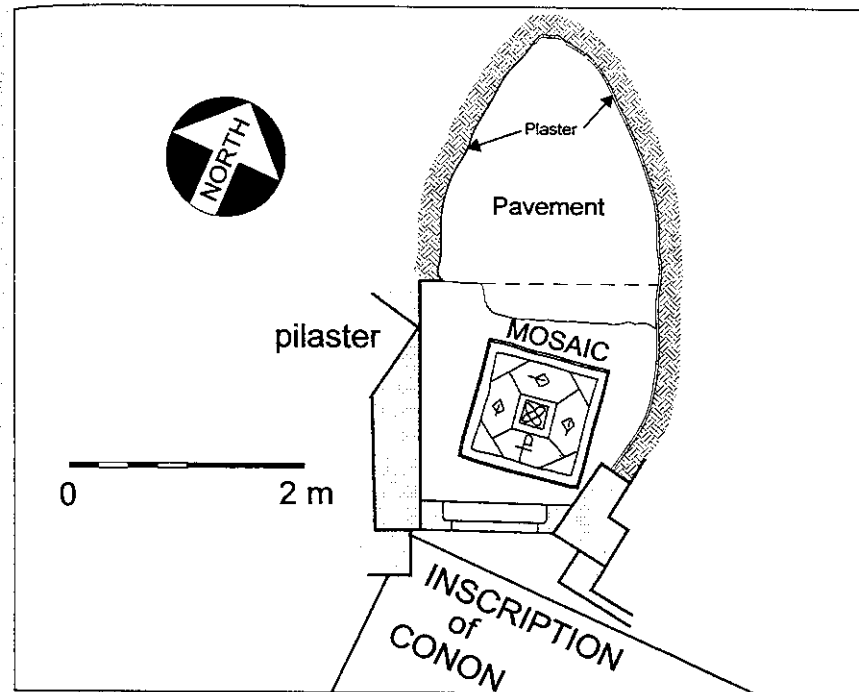


Figure 8: Plan of Cave 29 of the Shrine of the Annunciation, from Bagatti, 1969.

The earliest coat of plaster was painted with flowers on the east wall. A Greek dipinto in red occupied the center of the flowers. Testa called the flowers a

<sup>90</sup> Bagatti, *Excavations in Nazareth*, 2, note 1 cites B. Vlaininck, *A Report of the Recent Excavations and Explorations Conducted at the Sanctuary of Nazareth* (Washington, 1900) as a report of five pages of text and three of illustrations.

<sup>91</sup> Bagatti, *Excavations in Nazareth*, 16, 198–99, 218. Taylor thinks a Nazareth legend may have grown up because of the notices of this Conon in Africanus, the stories of the

representation of "Paradise."<sup>92</sup> The inscription contains a Greek cross with an Ω twice in line 3. Otherwise it contains a typical formula in lines 4–5: "Lord Christ, save your se[rvan]t Valeria" (ΚΥΡ ΧΡ ΣΩΣΟΝ [ΤΟΝ] ΔΟ[ΥΛΟ]Ν ΣΟΥ ΟΥΛΕΡΙΑΝ) followed by more words difficult to decipher, but including "I said" (ΕΙΠΑ). Bagatti thought Valeria was the one who built the original cave.<sup>93</sup> Line 5 reads, "And give her [unreadable]" (ΚΑΙ ΔΟΣ ΑΥΤΗ ΦΑ.ΟΝΦ.). It ends with the abbreviated words "in Christ" and adds "Amen" (Ν ΧΡΙΣ ΑΜΗΝ).<sup>94</sup>

To the right of the flowers and plants of the "Paradise" is a wreath in red and black, to the left of which are graffiti scratched into the plaster: "Jesus Christ, Son of God, help Genos and Elpisis, [save] the servants of Jesus . . . and Remember . . ." (ΙΗΣΟΥ ΧΡΙΣΤΕ ΥΙΕ ΘΕΟΥ ΒΟΗΘΟ ΓΕΝΟΥ ΚΑΙ ΕΛΠΙΣΟΥ [ΣΩΣΟΝ] ΔΟΥΛΟΥΣ ΤΟΥ [Ι]ΗΣΟΥΜ ΚΑΙ ΜΝΗΣΘΗΤΙ . . .). Personal names follow at this point, four of which can be read: Achilles, Elpidius, Paulus, and Antonis.<sup>95</sup> The earliest plaster was covered by three more coats in successive renovations. The third coat contained a coin of Constantius II, so that particular coat could not have been applied before 337 C.E.<sup>96</sup>

These Greek inscriptions reveal no particular interest in Jewish Christianity, nor do they bring to expression Jewish motifs or ideas. The cave itself is enigmatic at best and has been interpreted variously as a tomb,<sup>97</sup> a memorial to the martyr Conon,<sup>98</sup> and the tomb of Mary.<sup>99</sup> Taylor reports that Daniel the Abbot identified the cave as the tomb of Joseph, but contributes no interpretation of her own.<sup>100</sup> Therefore it seems simplest to interpret the cave and its paintings and graffiti as remnants of a Gentile Christian pilgrim presence, perhaps of the early fourth century or later, at least in its published form.<sup>101</sup>

grand-nephews of Jesus in Hagesippus, and this inscription. Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places*, 243.

<sup>92</sup> Testa, *Nazaret Giudeo-Cristiana*, 112–23.

<sup>93</sup> Bagatti, *Excavations in Nazareth*, 196–99.

<sup>94</sup> Different translations as follows: Testa, *Nazaret Giudeo-Cristiana*, 64–70; Bagatti, *Excavations in Nazareth*, 197; Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places*, 260–61.

<sup>95</sup> Bagatti, *Excavations in Nazareth*, 201.

<sup>96</sup> The coin is 15 mm. in diameter, therefore Æ4 in type (Æ4 means less than 17 mm in diameter, a modern Roman coin convention). The obverse shows a head facing right with no inscription. The reverse shows Victory striding left. Bagatti read the mintmark of Antioch. See his illustration in *Excavations in Nazareth*, 210, though he identified the coin as one of Constantine. Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places*, 255.

<sup>97</sup> There is room for one or more bodies to the west of the mosaic floor of the cave, which occupies about half the available space. We do not know what existed to the west, as it was cut away for a modern floor in 1895. That is, the data may bear this interpretation, but it is not a necessary interpretation.

<sup>98</sup> See note 89.

<sup>99</sup> Clemens Kopp, *The Holy Places of the Gospels* (trans. R. Walls; New York: Herder, 1963), 64–65.

<sup>100</sup> Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places*, 255.

<sup>101</sup> A possible hypothesis is that Conon gave not only the mosaic that bears his name, but also the mosaic inside cave 29 and possibly its first plastering and decoration.

The other major cave at Nazareth is the "Shrine of the Annunciation," otherwise designated No. 31 (see fig. 5). It betrays its ritual purpose by an apse cut into the bedrock on its east wall. The whole measures about 6.14 m. long and about 3.0 m. across, or barely 18.6 m<sup>2</sup>. The full width of the cave is 5.5 m. from north to south. The ceiling is quite high at about 3.8 m.

Recovery of the morphology of the cave and certainly its decoration is a matter highly complicated by the renovations of the Byzantine, Crusader, and modern periods. We can probably hypothesize with some security that the Byzantine form of the cave included an apse with a mosaic, as Vlaininck reported. But does he mean that the Byzantines installed a mosaic on the floor, or actually a vertical mosaic within the apse itself? His prose seems ambiguous. In any case there is reason to believe that the whole was plastered, and it is probable that Greek inscriptions and perhaps other motifs adorned the walls. All that can be read now is ΦΕ in charcoal on the north and an incised XT on the third of four plaster layers.

It is impossible now to deduce any more than the apsidal form of the cave was a re-cutting of an underground room originally cut for ordinary domestic purposes. Presumably the Byzantine Christians were the first to re-cut and plaster the cave. There is no trace of a confirmed Jewish Christian presence.

## 5.2. Bethany

In 1951 Benoit and Boismard published a cistern from Bethany which had been reused as some kind of cultic site in the Byzantine period.<sup>102</sup> According to Benoit and Boismard, the installation was at first simply a large, underground cavity for the storage of water measuring about 4.0 x 5.2 m. The floor was flat, and the ceiling extended upwards about 3.2 m. Sometime in the early Byzantine period workmen cut away the broad staircase that led down to the bottom in five steps from the door. This necessitated removing nearly seven cubic meters of limestone. Visitors to the cave left their names and Byzantine Christian invocations scratched into the plaster on the interior. Some of the inscriptions are dipinti in red paint.

Benoit and Boismard recorded sixty-seven Greek graffiti. In addition they recorded two in Latin, one in Syriac, and one they could not read, but guessed it was early Arabic or Syriac. Perhaps the most suggestive was found on the north wall in Greek and yields the following English: "Lord God, who raised Lazarus from the dead, think of your servant Asklepios and your [female] servant Chionion" (ΚΕ Ο ΘΣ Ο ΕΓΙΡΑΣ ΤΟΝ ΛΑΖΑΡΟΝ ΕΚ ΝΕΚΡΩΝ ΑΝΗΣΘΗΤΙ ΤΟΥ ΔΟΥΛΟΥ ΣΟΥ ΑΣΚΛΕΠΙΟΥ ΚΕ ΧΙΟΝΙΟΥ ΤΗΣ ΔΟΥΛΗΣ ΣΟΥ). The other names are derived from Greek, Arabic, Aramaic, and perhaps Syriac, but the

<sup>102</sup> P. Benoit and M. E. Boismard, "Un ancien sanctuaire chrétien à Bethanie," *RB* (1951): 200–251. Joan E. Taylor, "The Bethany Cave: A Jewish-Christian Cult Site?" *RB* 97 (1990): 453–65.

reference to Lazarus suggests that this might be the Lazarus known by Egeria in the late fourth century to be at the second milestone from Jerusalem.<sup>103</sup>

Yet, the morphology of the cavity resembles that of a Jewish ritual bath. (1) Originally there were two doors side by side, which suggests that one was for entrance and the other for egress. (2) An original staircase 5.4 m. broad beneath the water-line took up seven cubic meters better dedicated to water, if the cavity was intended to be a cistern. (3) There was a low divider on the stairs separating one side from the other exactly as one would expect in a *miqveh*, but not in a cistern. (4) There was no hole in the roof of the putative cistern for lowering a vessel to dip out water. (5) There was a small decanting basin near the steps that drained clean water into the staircase. And (6) this water originated in a cistern some eleven meters to the southwest which was connected to the decanting basin by a small canal, exactly as required.<sup>104</sup>

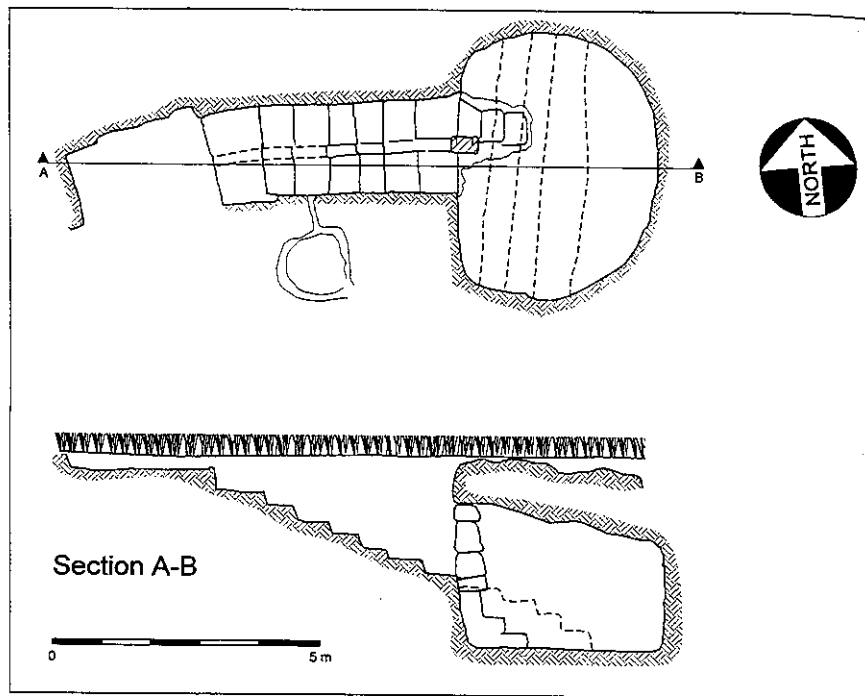


Figure 9: Plan and Section of the Bethany Cave. Adapted from Benoit and Boismard, 1951, with corrections from Taylor, 1987, and Pixner, 1991.

If this cavity at Bethany were a ritual bath or *miqveh*, it would tend to support the Jewish Christian hypothesis. That is, the water installation was origi-

<sup>103</sup> Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels*, 55, 63.

<sup>104</sup> Pixner, *Wege des Messias*, 216–18.

nally simply Jewish, and eventually may have come into Jewish Christian hands. Over time, the site was passed to a clearly Byzantine Greek, Christian community, where it was altered for pilgrim usage. After this period it was abandoned, perhaps after the Muslim entry in 640 C.E. This scenario presupposes a local memory or oral tradition connecting this *miqveh* to the gospel stories of Bethany (Mark 11:11, 12 = Matt 21:17; cf. Luke 19:29; Mark 14:3 = Matt 26:6; John 11:1–44; John 12:1–8).

## 6. Jerusalem's "Essene Quarter" and Mt. Zion

A major advance in the discussion of archaeological remains that might connect us with Jewish Christianity came with the publications of Bargil Pixner, late of the Dormition Abbey in Jerusalem. Pixner was more open to the analyses of Bagatti et al., but not as skeptical as Taylor. On the other hand Pixner practiced controlled critical method and had some field experience in archaeology. Yet much of Pixner's contribution are hypotheses that can and will be properly tested in field archeology and textual studies.

In 1976 Pixner published an essay on the possibility of an Essene Quarter on Mt. Zion in Jerusalem.<sup>105</sup> This essay appeared again in slightly revised version in 1991.<sup>106</sup> Pixner relied on a well known paragraph in Josephus that there was an Essene Gate in Jerusalem (*J.W.* 5.145). "But if we go the other way westward [from the west cloister of the temple], it [the first wall] began at the same place, and extended through a place called 'Bethso' to the gate of the Essenes . . ." [διὰ δὲ τοῦ Βησοῦ καλουμένου χώρου κατατείνον ἐπὶ τὴν Ἑσσηνῶν πύλην]. The wall continued to the Pool of Siloam. Pixner appeals to the Dead Sea Scrolls, specifically to 2QPs<sup>a</sup> 22:1–4 to show that the Essenes had a strong love for Zion in Jerusalem. In addition he noted that CD 12.1 forbids a man to lie with a woman in the "Holy City." This and the phrase in 1QM 3.10 ("the Congregation of Jerusalem") imply that Essenes lived in the city of Jerusalem. Such a hypothesis tends to be confirmed, he believed, by 1 *En.* 26:1–5 and 27:1–3, which locates a "holy mountain" at the center of the earth, therefore in Jerusalem.<sup>107</sup>

In any case the archaeological evidence he wishes to adduce as that of the "Essene Gate" is a gate first excavated by Bliss and Dickey between 1894–1897. It lay near the foot of the southwestern hill of Jerusalem known today as "Mt. Zion" or to archaeologists as "Zion 3." Bliss and Dickey reported that this gate had four

<sup>105</sup> B. Pixner, "An Essene Quarter on Mt. Zion?" in *Studi archeologici* (vol. 1 of *Studia Hierosolymitana: in onore de P. Bellarmino Bagatti*; Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, collection major 22; Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1976), 245–85.

<sup>106</sup> Pixner, *Wege des Messias*, 180–207.

<sup>107</sup> Pixner, *Wege des Messias*, 185. The "holy mountain" would be today's Mt. Zion, or the southwest hill of Jerusalem, because there is flowing water "to the east," which he takes to be Siloah.

thresholds or sills, one upon the other, and each corresponded to a specific period in its history. The three earlier thresholds were 8 feet, 10 inches wide (2.65 m.), or 10 inches (25.4 cm) wider than the last threshold.<sup>108</sup> Pixner points out that this threshold is almost exactly nine Roman feet long.<sup>109</sup>

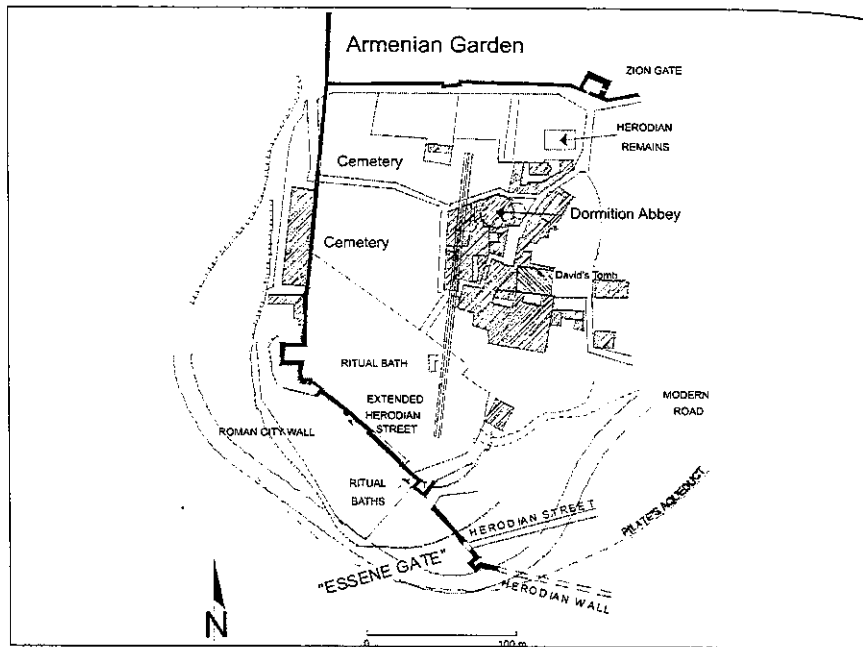


Figure 10: Plan of Mt. Zion and the "Essene Gate," from Pixner, 1991, and Conder, 1875.

In 1977 Pixner received permission to re-excavate this gate. Pixner excavated with S. Margalit and D. Chen and found a tower and the gate exactly as Bliss and Dickie had reported it. Furthermore they were able to excavate those layers in the fill near the gate that corresponded to the several thresholds. In the earliest layers associated with the founding of the nearby tower they found Iron 2 pottery. This fixed the first occupation of this part of the hill to the 8th-7th centuries B.C.E., perhaps during the reign of Hezekiah. The second occupation corresponded to the founding of the wall, which founding contained Hasmonean pottery. The period of the first threshold they found to be securely dated by Herodian pottery, fixing the date of the first threshold to the period 37 B.C.E. to 70 C.E.<sup>110</sup> The last threshold was of Byzantine date.

<sup>108</sup> F. J. Bliss and A. C. Dickey, *Excavations at Jerusalem 1894-1897* (London: Committee of the Palestine Exploration Fund, 1898), 19.

<sup>109</sup> Pixner, *Wege des Messias*, 192.

<sup>110</sup> B. Pixner, D. Chen, and S. Margalit, "Mount Zion: The 'Gate of the Essenes' Re-excavated," *ZDPV* 105 (1989): 85-95, pls. 6-16; Pixner, *Wege des Messias*, 189-97. This find

Pixner had also noticed that at least three ritual baths were to be found on Mt. Zion. Two of them are found beneath the tower just south of the extension of the Herodian street found beneath the Dormition Abbey. The other is today covered by a steel, roofed structure just west of that street in the Greek Orthodox property south of the Dormition. The presence of these ritual baths, the first two of which resemble those found at Qumran, tends to confirm, in Pixner's view, that Mt. Zion was an Essene quarter in the Herodian Period.<sup>111</sup> Pixner believes that the "Bethso" in *Wars* V.145 quoted above refers to an Essene toilet built on the wall so that human waste fell outside the wall (therefore outside the holy city). Conder reported a ruined cistern or rock-cut, rectangular trough about where figure 9 has an arrow pointing to the "Roman city wall." Pixner found this feature again in his own exploration.<sup>112</sup> Finally, Pixner believes that the first three columns of the Copper Scroll indicate an Essene collective settlement at the southwest wall of Jerusalem.<sup>113</sup>

Let the reader be aware that in the Bible the gates of Jerusalem were named in at least three ways: (1) for the commodity sold there, (2) for a nearby feature, and (3) for the eventual destination when exiting the city. For gates named for the commodity one reads of the Fish Gate (2 Chr 33:14; Neh 3:3; 12:39; Zeph 1:10), the Sheep Gate (Neh 3:1, 32; 12:39; John 5:2), and the Horse Gate (2 Chr 23:15; Jer 31:40). For gates named for a nearby feature, we read of the Valley Gate (2 Chr 26:9; Neh 2:13, 15), the Water Gate (Neh 3:26; 8:1, 3; 12:37), the Corner Gate (2 Kgs 14:13; 2 Chr 25:23; 26:9; Jer 31:38; Zech 14:10), the Dung Gate (Neh 2:13; 3:13, 14; 12:31) and the Fountain Gate (Neh 2:14; 3:15; 12:37). For gates named for the eventual destination of the traveler from Jerusalem we find the Gate of Ephraim (2 Kgs 14:13; 2 Chr 25:23; Neh 8:16; 12:39) and the Gate of Benjamin (Jer 37:13; 38:7; Zech 14:10). On analogy with the Gate of Ephraim and the Gate of Benjamin, it may be argued that the gate excavated by Bliss and Dickie and then by Pixner led to Essenes *outside* Jerusalem.

The possibility of an Essene Quarter on Mt. Zion lays the groundwork for contextualizing several apostolic events or persons. According to Pixner, they are to be placed on Mt. Zion, that is, in Essene Judaism. These apostolic persons/events are the four "pious" men cited by Luke (Simeon in Luke 2:25, those who

confirmed Yadin's hypothesis in "The Gate of the Essenes and the Temple Scroll," in *Jerusalem Revealed, Archaeology in the Holy City 1968-1974* (ed. Y. Yadin; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 90-91.

<sup>111</sup> Pixner, *Wege des Messias*, 197-204. The third miqveh has no published plan, to my knowledge. It has been adapted to special worship by the Greek Orthodox Church, which owns the property.

<sup>112</sup> Pixner, *Wege des Messias*, 203; C. R. Conder, "The Rock Scarp of Zion," *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement* (1875): 84. Pixner proposes that the "Bethso" of Josephus corresponds to Hebrew "Beth Soah" (בֵּית סוּאָה) or "House of Filth."

<sup>113</sup> Pixner, *Wege des Messias*, 204. The view that the hiding places of the Copper Scroll are in Jerusalem and elsewhere is repeated many times in the literature. G. Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (New York: Allen, 1997), 583-84.



buried Steven in Acts 8:2, Ananias of Damascus in Acts 22:12, and the Jews assembled in Jerusalem for Pentecost in Acts 2:5); the events of Acts 2:1–4; the social structure of the early congregation in Acts 2:45 and 4:35; and the obedient priests added to their number in Acts 6:7.<sup>114</sup>

As one can readily see, these interpretations might plausibly fit into the textual evidence of Acts and Luke, but in no way is such a contextualization in a hypothetical Essene quarter required. Pixner's arguments are perhaps testable hypotheses in some instances, and it may be that further excavation or chance finds may tend to confirm such hypotheses. In any case, Pixner's analyses are provocative and call for further investigation.

Other ideas of Pixner call for further excavation and testing of his hypotheses in the field. For example, Pixner has proposed that "Bethany beyond the Jordan" is to be located in Jordan near the Wadi Yabis and ancient Kokhaba, a site of John the Baptizer's activity.<sup>115</sup> Furthermore he proposes that today's Tomb of David on Mt. Zion was an ancient synagogue of Judeo-Christian usage, and that the traditions of a Christian presence on Mt. Zion can be traced with some plausibility to apostolic times. His argument is far too detailed to treat here in brief.<sup>116</sup>

In any case Pixner's publications are rich in detail and provocative in terms of their acceptance by a wider scholarly community.

## 7. Conclusion: The Problem of Method

The most vexing problem to face the researcher in this field is that of interpretation. By what criterion—or by what set of criteria—does one identify an element of material culture or archaeological evidence as an indicator for Jewish Christianity? One way would be to identify signs and symbols well known from the fourth century or later and attempt to work backwards chronologically to trace their ancestors in the archaeological evidence. The difficulty with this method is that there is no continuity, no chain of attestation in the material culture as one works backwards. In fact, no one can yet show with certainty that

<sup>114</sup>Pixner, *Wege des Messias*, 328–33. Pixner argues Luke's word εὐλαβεῖς (pious) is a word that the LXX uses to translate Hebrew "chasideim" (חסידים) and that the word "Essene" is therefore probably the Greek form of the Aramaic term "chassajja" (חסאי). The four "Pious" people or groups whom Luke describes fit an Essene *Gestalt* very well, according to Pixner. For further elaboration of the "Essene Quarter" thesis, see Rainer Riesner, *Essener und Urgemeinde in Jerusalem: Neue Funde und Quellen* (2d ed.; Giessen: Brunnen Verlag, 1998).

<sup>115</sup>Pixner, *Wege des Messias*, 166–79; Rainer Riesner, "Bethany and Beyond Jordan (John 1:28): Topography, Theology, and History in the Fourth Gospel," *Tyndale Bulletin* 38 (1987): 29–63.

<sup>116</sup>Pixner, *Wege des Messias*, 287–326. See also Bargil Pixner, "Archäologische Beobachtungen zum Jerusalemer Essener-Viertel und zur Urgemeinde," in *Christen und Christliches im Qumran?* (ed. B. F. Meyer; Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1992), 89–113.

Christianity, either in its early Gentile forms or its Jewish forms, developed a recognizable iconography before the fourth century.<sup>117</sup>

There has been a parallel problem in identifying certain remains as being Jewish or not. In this case we are fortunate that there is a kind of inchoate consensus that ritual baths and carved stone vessels in houses appear to identify the inhabitants as Jewish. In this case "Jewish" simply means those who practice ritual washing in *Miqvaoth* and who practice ritual purity with stone vessels.<sup>118</sup> But, once we have identified a family as practicing Jews, how do we then find those who were identified with the new Jewish movement? There is no single answer.

One can see that it is probably no accident that the researchers in the 1970s and 1980s turned to inscriptions, graffiti, and symbols as the most articulate expression of Jewish Christianity. Yet the building of consensus among scholars was not successful, as can be seen from perusal of the literature. For example, although names like Jesus, Jude (Judas, etc.), Joseph, Mary, Martha, Lazarus, and so on occur in the New Testament, there is nothing in the names recorded on ossuaries that makes them unambiguously the same people as the New Testament personages. That is why certain scholars have turned to symbols and other marks on ossuaries to provide evidence that the early followers of Jesus of Jewish birth scratched indicators for the family in addition to the name. These indicators were symbols or monograms or some other sign known to them and later recognizable as Jewish Christian, most noticeably various kinds of crosses. Yet, when presented with the signs and symbols that have been adduced as surely those very markers, closer examination presents us with two options: either they mean something else, or it is impossible to deduce precisely what they mean.

On the other hand there are evidences that Byzantine Christians developed shrines and even churches on sites where ritual baths have been found. This is true at Nazareth and Bethphage and perhaps elsewhere. There is also the case of Capernaum and its Hebrew graffiti, though no ritual baths were discovered there. In these cases we are left with working hypotheses more than developed theories, at least in part because of the failure of our methods in interpreting the evidence. On the other hand, that there is a continuity of veneration by Byzantine and likely Gentile Christians at sites with recognizably Jewish remains of the earliest centuries suggests that the hypothesized continuity of veneration tends to be confirmed. This is not to say that we are finished testing the hypotheses, and in the future more work will be done. It is probably critical to test the hypotheses of Bargil Pixner in the field first.

<sup>117</sup>G. F. Snyder, *Ante Pacem: Archaeological Evidence of Church Life before Constantine* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer, 1991; rev. ed. 2003).

<sup>118</sup>Of course in both cases we have voluminous ancient references to both practices in Jewish literature, as in the Mishnah, *Tractate Miqvaoth*.