

## Supporting Evidence for a First Century Bethsaida

The nature of the question of asking for evidence of a first century Bethsaida incorporates a lot of the surrounding presumption of what the first century looked like in the Galilee region. To quote Mark A. Chancey on the matter: "Indeed one wonders if some scholars have started with the view that Galilee's population was mixed and then searched for reasons to explain why it was so."<sup>1</sup> Chancey also makes the point that "the presence of Hellenism at a site does not necessarily indicate the presence of pagans, and the presence of pagans does not necessarily of Hellenism."<sup>2</sup> That observation contravenes many earlier studies that pick up on the language that F.E. Peters employs. Namely that "since the days of the Greek colonization in the wake of Alexander they lived in an atmosphere dominated by Hellenism and the Hellenized Syrians who ruled the cities."<sup>3</sup> Peters' comments are echoed or presaged in many studies that may fall into two basic categories, those of bucolic Galilee or those of urbanized Galilee. The varying views include a kind of "ghettoized" division between Urban Hellenism and rural Judaism, one which expects "Athens-on-the-Kinneret" nearby to Talmudic villages.<sup>4</sup>

These perspectives, albeit caricatured representations of them, represent the influence of religious and literary restorations of what life must have been like in the first century. I do not wish to take on this larger question, but simply to state that either pole does not come near to what we uncover at Bethsaida during the time period in question.

This chapter proposes to simply put out the evidence we have that there was an occupation of Et-Tell/Bethsaida throughout the Hellenistic period, beginning during the Ptolemaic and

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<sup>1</sup>Chancey, Mark A. *The Myth of a Gentile Galilee the Population of Galilee and New Testament Studies*, 27. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

<sup>2</sup>Chancey, *The Myth of a Gentile Galilee the Population of Galilee and New Testament Studies*, 7.

<sup>3</sup>Peters, F. E. *The Harvest of Hellenism a History of the Near East from Alexander the Great to the Triumph of Christianity*, 283. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971.

<sup>4</sup>Mordechai Aviam argues in his book that "no mixed communities existed in the rural areas. Unlike cities, where a diversity of beliefs and faiths was very common, small villages were closed societies, especially during periods when deep antagonism existed." Aviam, Mordechai. *Jews, Pagans, and Christians in the Galilee 25 Years of Archaeological Excavations and Surveys : Hellenistic to Byzantine Periods*. Land of Galilee, 20. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2004

Seleucid struggle for control of the region and ending sometime before the Byzantine empire's ascendancy. Challengers to the identification of Et-Tell as Bethsaida assert that its excavators appear to be reading too much into the material record. But they, in turn, are perhaps reading too much into the literary record. What Josephus actually says is very telling. He locates Bethsaida at the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee, alongside the Jordan River in lower Gaulanitis, that is, on the eastern side of the river (Ant. XVIII.28.<sup>5</sup>; War II.168<sup>6</sup>), nearby a marshy plain (Life 402<sup>7</sup>). Beyond the locating of the place he says little more than the likely poetic reference to the dignity of a city. Those who desire to find a romanticized Bethsaida, in which Jesus and his barefoot band walk amid Greco-Roman institutions enshrined in monumental architecture complete with columns and capitals, will be disappointed. All may have to accept another reality, that perhaps Philip Herod's "second city" was one filled with unrealized delusions of grandeur appearing only in imagination and not actualized in the humble basalt structures at et-Tell.

Yet, during this time period there was a first century occupation of which we can see evidence. So, I propose to give a "brief history of time" at Bethsaida, indicating a plausible reason for its reoccupation after destruction in the Iron Age II and showing that it is inhabited during the first century, leaving off a consideration of its eventual demise sometime before the Byzantine period.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> "When Philip also had built Paneas, a city at the fountains of Jordan, he named it Cesarea. He also advanced the village Bethsaida, situated at the lake of Gennesareth, unto the dignity of a city, both by the number of inhabitants it contained, and its other grandeur, and called it by the name of Julias, the same name with Caesar's daughter." Ant. XVIII.28

<sup>6</sup> "...and the latter of them [Philip] built the city Cesarea, at the fountains of Jordan, and in the region of Paneas; as also the city Julias, in the lower Gaulonitis. War II.168.

<sup>7</sup> "At the same time also there came forces, both horsemen and footmen, from the king, and Sylla their commander, who was the captain of his guard: this Sylla pitched his camp at five furlongs' distance from Julias, and set a guard upon the roads, both that which led to Cana, and that which led to the fortress Gamala, that he might hinder their inhabitants from getting provisions out of Galilee." Life 71 "As soon as I had gotten intelligence of this, I sent two thousand armed men, and a captain over them, whose name was Jeremiah, who raised a bank a furlong off Julias, near to the river Jordan" Life 72

<sup>8</sup>In most details, my proposed time line seems to mirror Chancey's larger proposal for the whole of the Galilean area. However, I would suggest that at some periods in its development Bethsaida did indeed have a significant "Greek" population. Chancey, *The Myth of a Gentile Galilee the Population of Galilee and New Testament Studies*, 28–62.

I wish to illustrate this with reference to key material indicators that we have found at Bethsaida: coins, stamped amphora handles, glassware, ceramics, stone ware, and architectural remains. All of these indicators taken singularly are not as compelling as seeing them in an interrelated whole, of course.

Before turning to the material finds, let me briefly state my proposed time line for the occupation of Bethsaida during the Hellenistic period.

Bethsaida was destroyed sometime during the Iron Age II ostensibly during the Assyrian conquest of the region in the late 8<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>9</sup> There is clear evidence of massive destruction at the huge Iron Age city-gate as well as little evidence of occupation for nearly 5 centuries following that catastrophic event. There have been only very fragmentary finds from the Iron Age III and Persian periods and no evidence of construction during these times.

What we see instead is a sudden period of construction and re-occupation beginning during the Hellenistic period in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE. I would suggest that based upon the coin evidence that this may have occurred during the reign of Ptolemy II, perhaps prior to the First Syrian War (274-271 BCE). Donald Ariel suggests a later date based upon the stamped handles and citing that coins remain in circulation well beyond their mint dates.<sup>10</sup> Jodi Magness at the recent conference at Yale on "The Ancient Galilee in Interaction - Religion, Ethnicity and Identity" issued the same caution when considering coinage for dating occupations and constructions<sup>11</sup>. Perhaps one could concede that reoccupation may have occurred later in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century but one must admit that there certainly was a Ptolemaic presence since coins of Ptolemy III are also present. However control seems to pass to the Seleucids under Antiochus III some time following the fourth Syrian War (217 BCE) perhaps as late as 200 BCE. Subsequent to this we find no later Ptolemaic coins. There is no

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<sup>9</sup>This is the current position of Dr. Rami Arav, directing archaeologist of the Bethsaida Excavations project, and others of the research team. See, Arav

<sup>10</sup>In a forthcoming article, "Stamped Amphora Handles From Bethsaida," Ariel states that "[t]he dates of the stamped handles suggest that Bethsaida was occupied beginning in the last third of the third century BCE." He notes for him the coin evidence of some Ptolemy I coins [there are only 4 clearly identified] and a larger number of Ptolemy II coins are not indicative of a possible earlier occupation as these coins were likely still in circulation.

<sup>11</sup>note this

evidence of destruction at the site merely a change in coinage that would indicate a change of governmental orientation. Seleucid control appears to be maintained until John Hyrcanus I's expansion into the Golan area in the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE. Again, control seems to be “peaceably” transferred. There is no evidence of destruction, although there is a more significant change in the total material culture and not just in the coinage. The ceramic finds seem to indicate an altered pattern of exchange. This change at Bethsaida seems to affirm Andrea Berlin's observation that the expansion of the Hasmonean Kingdom resulted in the the Mediterranean oriented culture of the earlier Hellenistic period being replaced by “material simplification and economic isolation.”<sup>12</sup> Likewise we see evidence of a transition to Herodian control as part of Herod's assuming the throne.

Thus, Bethsaida may have been established during a relatively peaceful time of expansion from the Phoenician coast. There is some thought to the possibility that the earliest resettlers were veterans. This comes in part from the presence of Rhodian wine amphoras which have been suggested by some as a marker for military presence (Finkielsztejn 2001b:191). Donald Ariel suggests that “there may be some cogency in suggesting that, in the last third of the third century BCE, there was a military outpost at Bethsaida.”<sup>13</sup> He notes the earliest settlement at Gamla has now also been explained on that basis by Syon and Yavor (2001:6). The fact that Bethsaida is located at the conjunction of two of the passes in the road system of the Golan that were among the 6 western entrances to the region creates a viable context for this possibility. Ariel notes that this notion of military outpost origin for Bethsaida would explain its sudden appearance. However, there are no obvious signs of Bethsaida having been a military outpost—in the form of towers, gates and fortifications or Hellenistic military artifacts—other than this amphorae connection<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup>Andrea M. Berlin. “The Hellenistic Period.” In *Near Eastern Archaeology*, Suzanne Richard, 428, 2003.

<sup>13</sup>Ariel, “Stamped Amphora Handles from Bethsaida” forthcoming .

<sup>14</sup>There may be one exception in the small find record. A military-style pick-axe, a doesn't, was found in an Hellenistic context in Area C in a building west of the large courtyard houses known as the “wine maker's house” and the “fisherman's house.” This area on the north end of the tell seems to be primary area of resettlement activity in the 3rd century BCE at Bethsaida.

Perhaps it may be better to suggest that veterans may have settled the site instead of active military. In any event the amphoras and coin evidence seem both to indicate a renewed presence at Bethsaida beginning in the mid to latter third century BCE.

## COINS

Over 200 coins from the relevant Hellenistic, Hasmonean, Herodian, and early Roman periods at Bethsaida have been recovered. While there are a few that predate the reconstructed history that I propose<sup>15</sup> the earlier coins, particularly because they tend to be large denomination silver coins, may have been still in circulation during the time of earliest reoccupation. One may argue to some extent about the precise terminus a quo for this reoccupation, but I would suggest that it did begin during the reign of Ptolemy II.

The coin data comes from a review of Arie Kindler's work on the coins of Bethsaida. Working from his individual coin reports and not his published reports, some suggested revisions by Donald Ariel and my own observations; I have developed the distribution patterns that you see in the appended charts.

Ilan Shachar graciously allowed me to see his unpublished master's thesis<sup>16</sup> in which he examines the Bethsaida coins in light of his contention that one may use the presence of Jannaeus Type 7 coins to establish continuous inhabitation during the late 2<sup>nd</sup> BCE into the 1<sup>st</sup> BCE. More precisely, he suggests that the absence of Jannaeus type 7 coins is indicative that a site was conquered and destroyed by Jannaeus. Under this theory, later Herodian or Roman imperial coinage would indicate a resettlement but not a continuous occupation. While this hypothesis sounds feasible to some extent, the facts that in the Bethsaida collection there are 8 Hasmonean coins and more than 40 Seleucid coins that are relatively unidentifiable coupled with the fact that type 7 coins are "degenerative, crude copies or imitations of Type 5" and negligently made (Meshorer 2001:38), may mean that there is the possibility that Type 7 Jannaeus coins are present

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<sup>15</sup>There have been 5 identifiable Ptolemy I coins and X earlier coins.

<sup>16</sup> Ilan Shachar, *The Later Coinage of Alexander Jannaeus and its Historical Implications*, MA thesis, Tel Aviv University, unpublished, 2002.

but unrecognized among those coins described as “uncertain.” Shachar states that he sees a numismatic gap of 40 years indicative of destruction similar to what he notes at Pella. However, while this may be theoretically possible, there is no destruction layer at Bethsaida and he may not take sufficiently into account the city coins whose dates would also occupy some of the gap that he sees in the numismatic record of Bethsaida. In any event, even according to Shachar’s theory, Bethsaida would be said to have been quickly resettled by the Herodians in the late 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE as indicated by the sequence of Herodian coins. So while I do not agree with his assessment of the occupation record based upon his theory in regard to Jannaeus type 7 coins, he would also confirm that Bethsaida was occupied during the first century CE.<sup>17</sup>

### **Rhodian Stamped Handles**

Fourteen stamped handles have been recovered in the material of the Bethsaida excavation through the 2004 season. All of these are of the Rhodian type which is the most common type found in the larger region. Large numbers of unstamped imported amphora handles<sup>18</sup> have also been found but do not contribute as much value to the chronological understanding of Bethsaida in the Hellenistic period. The stamped handles however do provide a second source of evidence to contribute to our understanding of the “founding” of Bethsaida during the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE. As seen above, many more coins were observed at Bethsaida than stamped handles but as noted coins generally remain in circulation much longer than amphoras and so the stamped handles may give us a closer look into the dating for Hellenistic Bethsaida. According to Donald Ariel, the stamped handles indicate that Bethsaida may have been established beginning in the last third of the third century BCE. He notes that ten out of the fourteen handles derive from that period “which was not

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<sup>17</sup>“The numismatic pattern at Bethsaida suggests that the city was abandoned towards the end of Jannaeus’ reign and resettled late in the 1st century BCE.” Ilan Shachar. “The Later Coinage of Alexander Jannaeus and Its Historical Implications,” 59. Tel Aviv University, 2002

<sup>18</sup>There are also significant numbers of indicative shards of amphora ware without handles being associated with them. These include both Rhodian and non-Rhodian type.

one of particularly high production in Rhodes, or of high importation into the southern Levant.”<sup>19</sup> He suggests that the Ptolemy II coins should be connected to the stamped handles rather than be looked at as an indicator of earlier occupation. That is, the Ptolemy II coins were still in current use during the period of use of the shorter lived amphoras.<sup>20</sup> Ariel goes on further to suggest that since the majority of stamped handles fall within a period before 205 BCE that might be indicative of a short lived occupation in preparation for the Fourth Syrian War. This suggestion of short-lived occupation at this time is based in part on his connection of Rhodian amphorae to military presence.<sup>21</sup> However, he notes that two of the handles date to the later peak production period of Rhodian amphoras during 190-160 BCE. Furthermore, the latest clearly datable handle may be as late as 140 BCE and other less well classified handles even beyond that to 108 BCE.<sup>22</sup> Here our numismatic evidence supplements and indicates, contra Ariel contention of a disrupted occupation, a clear Ptolemaic/Seleucid continuation of sequence until a much later period than the Fourth Syrian War.

So while the stamped handles do not add to our 1<sup>st</sup> century CE evidence directly, they do help to establish this time line of occupation that incorporates Bethsaida as a viable population center into the first century.

## GLASS

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<sup>19</sup>Donald T. Ariel, “Stamped Amphora Handles from Bethsaida.” In *Bethsaida Volume 4*, 2. Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, forthcoming.

<sup>20</sup>Donald T. Ariel, “Stamped Amphora Handles from Bethsaida,” 2.

<sup>21</sup>Ariel notes a connection made by Finkielestejn [Gérald Finkielestejn. “Politique et Commerce à Rhodes au IIe s. a.C.: Le Témoignage Des Exportations d’ Amphores.” In *Les Cités d’Asie Mineure Occidentale au IIe Siècle a.C.*, 181–96. Bordeaux: Ausonius-Publications, 2001] between the remains of (wine) amphoras and military presence. Thus, for him, the initial occupation could have been short-lived. He also bases this idea on the fact evidence at Bethsaida of the peak production period of Rhodian amphoras is nearly absent. Again citing Finkielestejn [Gérald Finkielestejn, “Politique et Commerce à Rhodes au IIe s. a.C.: Le Témoignage Des Exportations d’ Amphores,” 189–91], Ariel notes that this peak is present in other sites of the Southern Levant.

<sup>22</sup>Donald T. Ariel, “Stamped Amphora Handles from Bethsaida,” 4.

The glass map<sup>23</sup>, which is the work of Dr. Andrea Rottloff, serves mainly to indicate a continuation of occupation. The yellow and red circles are the areas in which Dr. Rottloff has identified characteristic Hellenistic and Roman glassware.

She notes in her initial report on the glass material finds from Bethsaida that there are clear indicative pieces from the Claudian (27 BCE-68CE) and Flavian (69-96CE) periods of the Roman Empire as well as a goodly number from the Hellenistic period. She observes that the “most common Hellenistic vessels at Bethsaida are conical or hemispherical molded bowls with incised horizontal lines on the interior surface...They appear from the 2nd cent. BC onwards in the whole eastern Mediterranean region...”<sup>24</sup> Other common 1st century types include beakers and bowls characteristic of the period and well attested in other contexts. Rottloff suggests that some of the common household glassware may possibly have been made at Capernaum where Loffreda found a number of this type of vessel along with a deposit of raw material for their manufacture.<sup>25</sup>

While not specifically indicating the diagnostic pieces, the map does mirror what we see from other types of finds besides the glass. One rather surprising observation from the map, though, is the dearth of later Roman glass finds associated with the northern large courtyard houses. Also, one can note the concentration of occupation into the first, second and third centuries CE in the central area above the Iron Age palace-gate complex. More on this aspect when we discuss the architecture.

## STONE VESSELS

During the 2000 season at Bethsaida many interesting and important finds were uncovered. Among them are a collection of limestone vessel fragments which are important indicative pieces from the Roman period. There are not many items that would serve as definite ethnic markers for

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<sup>23</sup>see illustration 3.

<sup>24</sup>Rottloff, Andrea. “Hellenistic, Roman and Islamic Glass from Bethsaida (*Iulias*, Israel).” *Annals of the 14th Congress of the International Association for the History of Glass* (2000). Lochem, Netherlands: AIHV.

<sup>25</sup>Rottloff, “Hellenistic, Roman and Islamic Glass from Bethsaida (*Iulias*, Israel),” 142–43.

first century Jews or Christians.<sup>26</sup> At Bethsaida we have discovered 5 of the 8 markers held to be indicative of Jewish presence. Missing are miqvaot, ossuaries, and synagogues.<sup>27</sup> However, one such marker has been determined with some certainty for late Second Temple Judaism.<sup>28</sup> This marker is that of limestone or chalk vessels that were employed briefly during the time prior to the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, perhaps continuing into the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE.

### *The Vessels of Bethsaida*

While there had been several discoveries of this type of vessel prior to the 2000 season: one in 1994, one in 1997, and another in 1998; during the 2000 season fragments of three such vessels were discovered in a relatively small area. These 3 vessels were discovered in Area A behind the Iron Age II gate complex in the early Roman strata above the iron age levels. These vessels are located within 10 meters of the large public building that has been variously identified as a Roman era Temple or possibly a "synagogal type" building. In locus 403 where the largest of the 3 recently discovered fragments were found, several Roman period pits filled with largely intact pottery were also discovered. One of these pits from the 2000 season is most likely a continuation of a pit first uncovered in 1999 which produced 3 nearly intact Roman period jugs. This suggests

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<sup>26</sup> Aviam has noted various archaeological finds as particular ethnic or cultural markers. Among these he includes: Galilean coarse ware (GCW)--Jewish; Hasmonaen coins--Jewish; Miqvaot--Jewish; Stone vessels--Jewish Kefar Hannania ware, in particular the 1st century CE "Galilean bowl"--Jewish; Roman Phoenician Jar--pagan; Human statues--pagan; Secondary burial in ossuaries--Jewish; secret hideaways--Jewish; synagogues, temples, churches--from a later period perhaps, indicative of Jewish, pagan or Christian presence respectively. Mordechai Aviam. "Distribution Maps of Archaeological Data in the Galilee as an Attempt to Create Ethnic and Religion Zones." *Ancient Galilee in Interaction: Religion, Ethnicity, and Identity*. Yale University New Haven, CN, 2004

<sup>27</sup>There has been debate among the researchers at Bethsaida concerning a large rectangular structure that has features of an important public building. This has been variously called a pagan temple or a synagogue, but recent discussion has moved away from calling the building a synagogue. There is a later 3rd or 4th century synagogue located approximately 3 km NW of Bethsaida along the Jordan river.

<sup>28</sup>Unlike other elements of the Jewish material culture during the Second Temple period, such as pottery, wooden, metal and glass vessels and other implemenets tjat were conceived in previous periods and that remained a part of the material culture after the destruction of the Temple, chalk vessels are the only components of the material culture that appear suddenly in the late first century BCE and vanish after the destruction of the Second Temple and the Bar Kochba Revolt, without remaining in use and without returning to the material culture of the Land of Isreal in succeeding periods. Yitzhak Magen. *The Stone Vessel Industry in the Second Temple Period*, 1. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2002.

the possibility that the area was a place where vessels with some cultic significance were disposed of after they were no longer eligible for use in religious service. This largest of the 3 2000 season fragments is a significant portion of a hand tooled limestone or chalk bowl discovered on May 29, 2000 in locus 403 an area which was known to the volunteers who worked this square in the early part of the 2000 season as "the gold mine" since so many significant finds from the Early Roman period were uncovered there. This type of bowl is designated as "flat-based bowls with straight sides."<sup>29</sup> The vessel type is noted for the fluted effect that the chiseled sides of the bowl create. They are hand carved, faceted, and polished smooth. They have straight sides and are always taller than they are wide. Most often this bowl has one of two types of handle: either a rectangular lug handle near the center of the bowl, or a bar handle near the rim. Since we are missing the rim and a significant portion of the body, our vessel may be of either of these sub-types or may be an example of the slightly less common flat-based bowl with straight sides and without handle. Parallel examples have been found in Jerusalem by Mazar, Magen, Avigad and others.<sup>30</sup> In addition, this type of bowl has been found at Ramat, Rahel, Bethany, Shiloh, Ashdod, and Hizma.<sup>31</sup> Each of these was discovered in a first century Jewish context.

A second fragment in much poorer condition was found on July 1 in L405. This find is a body shard from a somewhat larger vessel. We can note that it appears not to be a hand carved vessel since we do not see any of the characteristic chisel marks or flattened sides, but its type is less certain. Judging by the size and curvature however, we can presume that it is a shard from a jar wall.<sup>32</sup> This type of jar is turned on a large lathe is usually very tall with a deep round basin. Often they are footed. While not appearing on our small shard, these vessels often had decorative motifs executed on their rims and sides. Parallels are found in Jerusalem and many of the same areas as before.

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<sup>29</sup> cite

<sup>30</sup> citwe

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<sup>32</sup> Dr. James Strange suggested at a recent conference that perhaps I should consider if it were a squared vessel. cite Oct 2004 conference.

The third find from 2000, discovered on July 5 in L423, is another example of a barrel-shaped jar. All examples of this type of jar have large open mouths with stepped internal profiles. They were apparently intended to be lidded. They have broad rims often sculpted and may be either triangular or triple ridged, as in our example. They sometimes bear a decorative motif but are often undecorated. Jars and jar fragments of this type, undecorated and having a triple-ridged rim, have been found in Jerusalem around the Temple Mount, in the Jewish Quarter, at the Citadel, along the western slopes of Mount Zion and in the City of David. Outside of Jerusalem however this type is rare, previously only cited as being found at Hizma at a workshop located in the central hill country. Thus, our shard may be of significant importance! Two of the three of the limestone vessels discovered prior to 2000 were fragments of the lathe turned type, with the remaining one being hand produced. The find from 1998 (L254 June 11) consists of 3 fragments of the same stone bowl which would have had an opening at the top of approximately 19cm. It is a lathe turned vessel but one that has been turned on a small lathe as opposed to a large lathe like that which would have been used for the jars described from 2000. This type of bowl has been designated by Magen as bowl type I. These are spherical vessels with low disk bases and slightly inverted hole mouth rims. Two closely spaced incised lines encircle the external wall just below the rim. The vessel lacks handles or decorative motif other than the lines. These are the "mass produced" variety of chalk or limestone vessel. This vessel was again not handcrafted, but instead was turned on small lathe and smoothly milled to produce a very fine appearance that originally may have been designed to mimic the alabaster ware used in other religious contexts. For example, Egyptian temple and funerary practice often employed alabaster vessels of various types. While only a small portion of this vessel was found at Bethsaida the lines below the rim are very indicative. This type of vessel is very common in Jerusalem as well as in Bethany, Qalandiya, Shiloh, Samaria, Capernaum, Jericho, Herodian, and in the Wadi Murabba'at.

The vessel fragment found in 1994 (L940 June 6) and the only one which came from Area C<sup>33</sup>, all of the others having been found in Area A, may perhaps be a fragment of a lathe turned basin or jar. The depression in the rim may indicate that the vessel employed a lid device. Because of the uncertainty of identification of the vessel typology it is not possible to find parallels to this very fragmentary shard at present.

The final vessel under discussion was found in 1997. It was handmade and is similar to the large bowl sherd found in 2000. As with the 2000 find not much beyond the base and a small portion of a side was discovered. Because of the deteriorated condition of the 1997 find, the side did not clearly show the faceting that is characteristic of this type of vessel, but it is nonetheless likely to have been the same type of bowl as the one found in 2000, though somewhat smaller. The base is only slightly more than 3cm in diameter as compared to slightly more than 4 cm for the one found in 2000.

A subsequent search all of the recovered diagnostic pottery shards has returned the recognition of an additional 4 fragments of stone ware vessels similar to the types described above. The vessels have been found in Areas A, B, and C--that is, throughout the excavated site which contain first century occupation.

It should be noted as well that there are significant numbers of basalt vessels found in all areas of Bethsaida. These too would have the same qualities for ritual purity as the chalk vessels and may have been more likely to be locally produced.

### *Significance*

If scholars are correct in their valuation of limestone ware as an ethnic marker of Jewish presence at a site, the value of finding stone vessels at Bethsaida cannot be underestimated. They

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<sup>33</sup>This observation may be significant since Area C is the location of the large courtyard houses that may represent the earliest occupation area for Bethsaida during the Hellenistic period. My suggestion is that the earliest settlers may have been for the most part colonists from the Ptolemaic coastal cities and that later occupation of these buildings may not have been continued into the Roman period as indicated by the glass finds.

become the best indicators that we have of a possible first century Jewish community at the site of Bethsaida. They are known to have been used at over 59 different sites located throughout Roman period Judah with their peak occurrence located in Jerusalem. Their popularity seems to have culminated in the period just prior to the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE and then continued according to some scholars in smaller proportion through the period of the Bar Kokhba revolt until abruptly ceasing in the mid 2nd century CE.

Their presence at Bethsaida indicates a Jewish presence in the first century CE.

## **Architecture**

The chronology of the late Hellenistic and early Roman periods at Bethsaida is problematic because of the fact that both are frequently located in the surface level which is eroded and disturbed by modern Syrian occupation. It is often nearly impossible to distinguish between the latest Hellenistic and early Roman occupation levels. In recent years much more careful attention is being paid to this stratification problem. In the past two seasons, I have been working just south of the “temple” building, and just north of the building where the limestone vessels were found in 2000. Case in point, in 2003 we were able to clearly identify the third century CE layer in that area. Ceramics indicative of the late 2<sup>nd</sup> or third century CE and 4 coins clearly dated to the mid 3<sup>rd</sup> century were found—this by the way seems to be the latest occupation strata at Bethsaida. Beneath that layer we identified a second layer as 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, again with ceramics and 2 datable coins. The quality of construction in those loci mirrored what we had observed in other loci. Namely, we find that, in general, the Roman walls appear to be poorer in construction than the much grander Hellenistic buildings. The slides in the PowerPoint presentation illustrate this observation.

We also note that Iron Age walls and surfaces are often re-employed in the Roman period, and to a lesser extent during the Hellenistic period. For example, many buildings are found to incorporate the remnants of the outer city wall, the Bit-Hulani palace, and other Iron Age elements

that must have been preserved and exposed during the Roman period. The main street leading into the Iron Age gate complex was reused during the Roman/Hellenistic period. Roman and Hellenistic pottery was found on the paving stones and even migrating between the stones to appear below them. The substructure for the roadway was clearly Iron Age construction however.

### **Oil Lamps**

Because of their characteristic seriation, oil lamps often provide an additional time marker. At Bethsaida, we have a good sequence of oil lamps from the late Hellenistic into the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE. Herodian styles are clearly present as are later 1<sup>st</sup> century CE types. Well over 2 dozen oil lamp indicatives have been recovered for the 1<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Ceramics**

The pottery at Bethsaida shows a change from a coastal import oriented ware to a more local variety in the 1st centuries BCE/CE. For example we have early forms of ESA but not later. There is evidence of local Galilean ware in the Roman period. For example, the Galilean bowl is a common pottery type found. Other local wares from Kefar Shikhin and Kefar Hanania types are found. As one progresses from the 1<sup>st</sup> century into the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> there seems to be an increase again of imported ware. This may be indicative of the general increase in prosperity that occurred in the region during that time.

### **Conclusions**

I feel that the evidence presented provides a reasonable demonstration that a first century settlement was in existence at Bethsaida. I think that the archaeological evidence would suggest that the settlement had declined somewhat from the late Hellenistic period, but that first century Bethsaida had incorporated elements of the larger Hellenistic settlement. I think that the lack of destruction debris and the fairly well sequenced numismatic evidence argues for a continuous settlement from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE, although that is not without debate. The first century Et-Tell

does appear to be less wealthy, no longer as oriented to the Phoenician coast, and more oriented to the west and south—the Jewish Galilee—than the earlier Hellenistic period settlement. Further, in terms of its ethnic identity, it shows elements of being a Jewish not Gentile settlement and therefore remains the most viable candidate for biblical Bethsaida

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