

# Simon Peter in Capernaum

## AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF THE FIRST-CENTURY VILLAGE

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During the last several decades, scholars have researched the life and ministry of Simon Peter to understand how Jesus' most famous disciple—a Galilean fisherman called to “fish for people” (Matthew 4:19)<sup>1</sup>—became the “rock” upon which the Christian church was built (see Matthew 16:18).<sup>2</sup> In particular, studies on the historical Peter have raised a number of important questions regarding his personal background and development, including his original social context (would he have been poor or financially comfortable?), the extent of his literacy (would he have been illiterate or well educated?), and his cultural familiarities (in addition to being Jewish, would he have been inherently sympathetic to Gentile concerns?). These issues are significant for understanding Peter's missionary activities among Jews (see Galatians 2:7–8), traditions of his scriptural authorship (see 1 Peter 1:1–2; 2 Peter 1:1), and his role as chief Apostle whose revelations led to the inclusion of Gentiles within the Christian community (see Acts 10:1–48).

In an attempt to answer these questions, scholars have painted two very different pictures of Peter's background and cultural proclivities. Traditionally, many scholars have claimed that Peter was a fisherman of modest means who

left his occupation to follow Jesus at a great personal cost. Peter likely spoke Aramaic, lacked formal education, and did not have a sufficient knowledge of Greek to write the New Testament letters ascribed to him. As an inherently conservative Jew, Peter would have had to overcome his natural religious sensitivities to bring the gospel to the Gentiles.<sup>3</sup> Recently, however, other scholars have challenged this portrayal by arguing instead that Peter was a successful, multicultural, and bilingual businessman, whose Greek proficiency and intellectual sophistication enabled him to write polished letters, whose temporal resources afforded him the luxury to follow Jesus, and whose early exposure to Hellenistic culture uniquely positioned him to teach Gentiles.<sup>4</sup>

While most of this debate has focused on the relevant literary sources (such as the New Testament), some scholars are beginning to recognize the potential of archaeology to illuminate Peter's early life and ministry.<sup>5</sup> No first-century artifacts linked to Peter himself have been found,<sup>6</sup> but the broader study of material culture—especially in his native region of Galilee—can offer valuable insights into the cultural, religious, and economic environment in which he lived. For example, recent studies have examined the site of et-Tell/"Bethsaida," a town in the predominantly Gentile tetrarchy of Herod Philip to the northeast of the Sea of Galilee that might have been Peter's birthplace. This village had a mixed population of Jews and non-Jews (shown by the presence of pig and nonkosher fish bones<sup>7</sup>) and was highly Hellenized (reflected by the existence of a Roman temple<sup>8</sup>), suggesting to some scholars that Peter's cultural upbringing required him to speak fluent Greek as well as Aramaic, and naturally prepared him to work with Gentiles as well as Jews.<sup>9</sup>

Despite this intriguing possibility, however, the emphasis on Bethsaida suffers from two major difficulties. First, the identification of Bethsaida as Peter's hometown rests on one ambiguous reference in the Gospel of John and has little corroborating support.<sup>10</sup> Second, the identification of Bethsaida with the site of et-Tell is debated among scholars, making its relevance to Peter's life uncertain.<sup>11</sup> In light of this uncertainty, I believe that a more important and reliable site to examine is Capernaum—a Jewish fishing village on the Sea of Galilee in which, according to the synoptic Gospels, Peter lived with extended family (see Mark 1:29–30), worked as a fisherman (see Matthew 4:18), witnessed many of Jesus' miracles (see Matthew 8:1–17), and began his life of discipleship (see Mark 1:16–20). Curiously, few scholars have effectively incorporated the archaeology of this site into their study of the historical Peter. Therefore, in an attempt to illuminate Peter's formative cultural environment, I will provide an archaeological survey of first-century Capernaum, Simon Peter's ostensible hometown.<sup>12</sup>

A survey of Capernaum provides a very different picture of Peter's origins than the remains of et-Tell/"Bethsaida." Unlike Bethsaida, Capernaum (a modest Jewish village whose population appeared to be religiously conservative) left no discernable trace of Gentile presence or influence and did not enjoy the amenities of larger towns and cities. Neither being completely destitute nor economically prosperous, Capernaum's inhabitants secured a stable living through their labors in fishing and agriculture. This assessment supports the more traditional view of Peter as a common fisherman who came from a conservative Jewish background and who likely possessed little or no formal education. To illustrate this observation, I will provide a brief overview of Capernaum's history and excavations, and will then consider three aspects of the first-century village that relate to Peter's experience there: Capernaum's relationship to the Galilean fishing industry, the nature of Capernaum's civic and domestic life, and the presence of a synagogue.

## The History and Excavations of Capernaum

Before beginning an archaeological survey of Capernaum, it is helpful to provide a brief overview of the ancient history and modern exploration of the village. For centuries scholars have known of the existence of Capernaum (Kefar Nahum, the "Village of Nahum"<sup>13</sup>) from references in ancient literary sources.<sup>14</sup> The village is not mentioned in the Old Testament,<sup>15</sup> but it is mentioned in Jewish texts from the late Second Temple period. It appears that Capernaum was settled as a small Jewish fishing village along the north shore of the Sea of Galilee sometime in the second century BC, likely during the Hasmonean colonization of the region.<sup>16</sup> By the time of Jesus and Peter in the early first century AD, Capernaum was situated on the border of two realms: the Jewish tetrarchy of Herod Antipas to the west (in which Capernaum was located) and the predominantly Gentile tetrarchy of Herod Philip to the east. Because of its new status as a border town, Capernaum's fishing and farming population expanded to include officials from Antipas' administration, such as toll/tax collectors (see Mark 2:13–17; Matthew 9:9–13; Luke 5:27–32) and military officers (see Matthew 8:5–13; Luke 7:1–10). The growing village's proximity to the lake and a local trade route also brought in interregional traffic and may have attracted less reputable elements of society, such as prostitutes and beggars.<sup>17</sup>

Despite its potentially strategic situation, Capernaum is best known in ancient sources as a central location for the early Jesus movement. The synoptic Gospels regularly refer to Capernaum as the residence of Jesus' earliest disciples (including Peter, Andrew, James, John, and Matthew/Levi; see Mark 1:16–31; Matthew 9:10–13), the adopted home base of Jesus' Galilean ministry (see Matthew 4:13–17;

9:1), the location of numerous healings and exorcisms performed by Jesus (see Mark 1:23–34; 2:1–12), and the site of a synagogue in which Jesus taught (see Mark 1:21–22). Outside of the New Testament, however, Capernaum receives little attention in ancient Jewish texts; Josephus briefly mentioned it as a village with limited medical resources,<sup>18</sup> and later rabbinic literature decried some “unorthodox” Jews who lived there in the second and third centuries.<sup>19</sup>

Following the two Jewish revolts against Rome (AD 66–73 and 132–135), Capernaum experienced significant development and expansion with the presence of a Roman military unit in the village. Its population continued to be predominantly Jewish,<sup>20</sup> but Capernaum’s traditional associations with Jesus and the “house of Peter” made it a popular site for Christian pilgrimage during the Byzantine period.<sup>21</sup> Following the Muslim conquest of the Galilee region in the seventh century, Capernaum’s Jewish population became outnumbered by Christians and Muslims.<sup>22</sup> For an unknown reason, the village was abandoned in the eleventh century and was never reinhabited.<sup>23</sup> Following centuries of abandonment, Capernaum’s precise location was forgotten, but by the early twentieth century most scholars agreed that Capernaum should be identified with the ruins at Tel Hum along the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee.<sup>24</sup> There, early explorations uncovered the remains of a monumental synagogue and an octagonal church shrine thought to commemorate the location of Peter’s house.<sup>25</sup>

Beginning in the late 1960s, extensive archaeological excavations have been conducted at the site. The first were carried out between 1968 and 1986 by Stanislaw Loffreda and Virgilio Corbo (on behalf of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum) in the western part of the village. Their excavations focused on the octagonal church, the monumental synagogue, and some of the surrounding dwellings. Between 1978 and 1987, the neighboring Greek Orthodox Church conducted additional excavations (directed by Vassilios Tzaferis) of the site’s eastern ruins that uncovered domestic structures and portions of the village’s harbor facilities. These projects produced valuable material from the ancient village and greatly clarified its historical development.<sup>26</sup> Their findings also led to numerous speculations regarding the relationship between remains at the site and the stories of the New Testament.

More recent studies of Capernaum have attempted to contextualize the village within its surrounding Galilean culture. As Galilee’s ancient cities (Sepphoris and Tiberias) and other villages (e.g., Cana, et-Tell/“Bethsaida,” and Magdala) have been excavated, scholars have gained increasing insight into the religious, economic, and cultural dynamics of the entire region at the time of Jesus and Peter.<sup>27</sup> As a result, new questions about the region have arisen which have not yet been resolved:

Was first-century Galilee sharply divided between the urban elites and rural peasants?<sup>28</sup> Or was there an economic symbiosis between the cities and villages that resulted in financial prosperity for many?<sup>29</sup> Was Galilee thoroughly Hellenized, mostly Jewish, or a synthetic mixture of both?<sup>30</sup> These regional questions are still being debated and have recently been applied to Capernaum in particular: Was the residence of Jesus and Peter a poor village of illiterate subsistence-level fishermen,<sup>31</sup> or was it a prosperous town of successful, multicultural businessmen that benefited from a bustling trade network?<sup>32</sup>

The answers, of course, impact the way we view the historical Jesus and his earliest followers, including Peter. Unfortunately, our ability to reconstruct first-century Capernaum and definitively answer these questions is limited by a number of factors. First, portions of the site remain unexcavated, currently leaving us with an incomplete picture of the ancient village. Second, many of the published excavation reports are inaccessible and inadequate by modern standards, making it difficult to date its remains with precision and often forcing researchers to rely on secondary or anecdotal evidence.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, any reconstruction of the first-century village must be tentative. Despite these limitations, however, historical sources and the excavation reports allow us to make some observations about Peter's hometown with relative confidence.

For example, it appears that in the first century Capernaum was a modest, unwallled village that extended in a thin strip along the lakeshore and had a population of between 1,000 and 1,500.<sup>34</sup> Excavations have shown that Capernaum was more prominent than small rural hamlets like Nazareth, but its lack of monumental public architecture, paved streets, sewage systems, and Roman luxuries ranked it far below Galilee's major cities: Sepphoris and Tiberias.<sup>35</sup> Capernaum's material culture indicates that its inhabitants in this period were mostly conservative (non-Hellenized) Jews who relied on fishing, agriculture, and commerce for their living, and who were neither wealthy nor completely impoverished. The population of the first-century village included many families that were living modestly above subsistence level, a few that may have enjoyed additional affluence, and some that were destitute. In other words, support exists for both sides of the current debate over Capernaum's socioeconomic status, with the cumulative evidence pointing to a Jewish village that was mostly lower to "middle" class.

Since this assessment has significant implications for Peter's early life and the beginnings of the Jesus movement, it is important to examine the archaeological remains of Capernaum and compare them to the scriptural accounts of Peter's experience there. In the following sections I will consider three aspects of the first-century village that elucidate Peter's formative cultural

environment—its fishing industry, its civic and domestic life, and the presence of a synagogue.

## Capernaum and the Galilean Fishing Economy

The ancient literary sources and archaeological evidence confirm that Capernaum's location on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee led to its natural involvement with the Galilean fishing economy. This, of course, is the vocational context for Peter, his extended family, and his associates, who were fishermen based in the village. By the first century, the fishing industry had become a major source of revenue in Galilee, with fish and fish products (including a popular fish sauce called *garum*) serving both as staples of the local diet and as exportable commodities.<sup>36</sup> While this activity resulted in economic prosperity in some areas—particularly in the larger lakeside towns and cities—the remains at Capernaum suggest that its inhabitants benefited from the fishing industry to a lesser degree.

Since the late Hellenistic period, local administrators sought to enhance the regional economy by taking advantage of the Galilee's natural freshwater resources. By the Roman period, over a dozen ports and harbors were constructed around the lake to accommodate fishing and other maritime activities.<sup>37</sup> These harbors reveal much about the local fishing industry, as well as the relative importance of the port cities, towns, and villages. For example, explorations have shown that the more prosperous cities and towns around the lake built large and well-constructed ports for fishing and for docking military and transport vessels. On the east side of the lake, the Greco-Roman Decapolis cities of Hippos and Gadara both possessed impressive harbors, the latter consisting of a three-acre enclosed basin, a breakwater and promenade made of finely chiseled stone, a large tower, and administrative buildings around the harbor's gate.<sup>38</sup>

On the west side of the lake, the Hasmoneans established the port town of Magdala/Tarichaeae (the home of Mary "Magdalene"; see Luke 8:2) as a location for the processing and selling of fish. Josephus describes the many maritime vessels, shipyard workers, and wood supplies associated with Magdala's harbor,<sup>39</sup> and excavations have uncovered its promenade, a sheltered basin, basalt moorings, a colonnaded springhouse, a tower for processing fish, and nearby buildings (one containing a mosaic depicting a fishing boat).<sup>40</sup> In the first century, Herod Antipas built Tiberias, one of his two regional capitals, just south of Magdala. Unfortunately, little of its ancient harbor survives under the modern city, but large numbers of mooring stones, stone anchors, and hundreds of stone net sinkers found along the

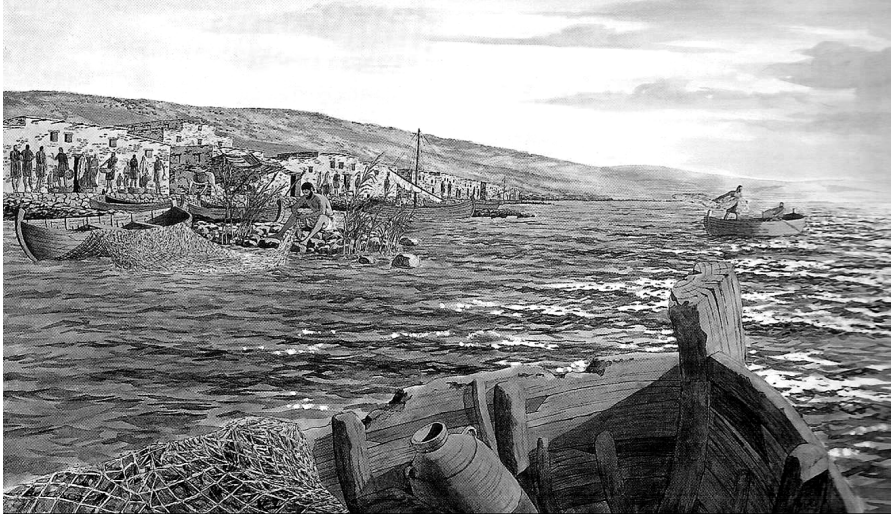
shore attest to the significant fishing activity of this city.<sup>41</sup> Both ports encouraged a vibrant fishing economy in the lake's western district.<sup>42</sup>

Capernaum, like other villages around the lake, had its own harbor facilities, but they were much more modest than those found in the more prosperous towns and cities. Most of the exposed harbor facilities at Capernaum have been uncovered on the east side of the site, but the precise dating and extent of these features are debated.<sup>43</sup> At some point in the Roman period, Capernaum had a basalt breakwater that stretched along its shore to protect the village from the lake and to provide an anchorage for fishing boats.<sup>44</sup> This breakwater created a promenade between the shore and the closest dwellings, providing an open space in which fishermen could unload their catches, wash and repair their equipment, and possibly sell their fish to others in the village.<sup>45</sup> The harbors along the promenade were constructed with unworked basalt fieldstones and were built in various shapes and sizes, having curved piers, triangular piers, or straight docks. Some of these extended about a hundred feet into the lake.<sup>46</sup> Onshore near the largest harbor, excavators discovered artificial storage pools built to keep fish fresh after being caught.<sup>47</sup>

Unfortunately, it is difficult to date Capernaum's extant harbor features with precision. Some scholars claim that they date to the first century, and are thus contemporary with Jesus and Peter.<sup>48</sup> It is much more likely, however, that they were not built until the second or third century as a part of Capernaum's expansion in the Late Roman period, and that prior to their construction the village's shoreline was largely unprotected, consisting of only a few smaller jetties made of stacked basalt fieldstones.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, Capernaum's harbor facilities in the first century were quite modest in comparison to those serving the Decapolis cities, Tiberias, and Magdala. They do, however, provide a sense of Capernaum's ancient fishing activities and paint an approximate picture of important New Testament scenes, such as the disciples washing their nets on the shore (see Luke 5:2), Jesus' calling of Peter and Andrew along the shore to "fish for people" (see Mark 1:16–18), and Jesus' calling of James and John to leave their boat in the harbor (see Mark 1:19–20).

It is possible that near Capernaum's harbor there was a small customs office for the collection of tolls and taxes on catches of fish and other interregional trade.<sup>50</sup> Administrative buildings likely related to these activities have been found next to the harbors at other sites such as Kursi, where the foundations of a public building (adorned with a mosaic floor) survive north of the pier and were surrounded by hundreds of lead net weights.<sup>51</sup> However, at Capernaum no such structures have yet been discovered from the first century.<sup>52</sup> The Gospels do record the existence of a "tax booth" (*teloniōn*) from which Jesus called Matthew/Levi to a life of discipleship (see Matthew 9:9; Mark 2:13–14),<sup>53</sup> but the size and





An artistic reconstruction of Capernaum's ancient shoreline, including its modest jetties made of stacked basalt fieldstones, typical first-century boats, and activities of local fishermen. Painting by Balage Balogh, used by permission.

nature of this facility are not certain.<sup>54</sup> If Matthew's "tax booth" was an actual building, it may have been a modest structure that is not easily recognizable as an administrative office.

Small finds at Capernaum and nearby villages also illuminate Peter's occupation, attest to fishing activities around the Sea of Galilee, and help us to identify the various methods of fishing used in the first century.<sup>55</sup> It appears that the most common method was net fishing. This included the use of large dragnets spread into the lake by men on a boat and handled by two teams of workers on the shore. Once the net was spread, lead or stone weights attached to the bottom of the net would sink the net into the water, creating a wall to catch anything in its path. After the men on shore pulled in the net, they would separate the kosher fish (mostly tilapia) from the nonkosher fish (such as scaleless catfish; Leviticus 11:9–12) and send the catch to be processed.<sup>56</sup> Another method of net fishing used small, circular throw nets (or "cast nets") worked by one or two individuals either on shore or from a boat. These nets also required weights to sink them low enough into the lake to catch the fish (mostly smaller freshwater sardines).<sup>57</sup> A third method—typically used from boats in deeper waters—was with a trammel net, which used several layers of weighted netting to create underwater walls designed to trap the fish.<sup>58</sup>

Archaeological evidence exists for net fishing around the Galilee during the first century. We would not expect the rope or linen nets themselves to survive long



in Galilee's humid climate, although one such net was found preserved in the arid Judean desert.<sup>59</sup> The small lead and stone net weights, however, do survive in significant quantities in villages around the lake.<sup>60</sup> These finds illustrate Jesus' parable of the dragnet, which caught both the good (kosher) and bad (nonkosher) fish, requiring them to be separated (see Matthew 13:47–50); Peter and Andrew throwing a small cast net from the shore when they were called by Jesus (see Matthew 4:18; Mark 1:16); and episodes in which the disciples were told to let down their trammel "nets" in deep water fishing (see Luke 5:3–6; John 21:6). Other small finds that survive include needles for mending nets (see Mark 1:19–20),<sup>61</sup> small metal hooks for line fishing (see Matthew 17:24–27),<sup>62</sup> and stone anchors for docking boats.<sup>63</sup>

One remarkable discovery that helps us to understand the work of Jesus' fishermen-disciples is the hull of a small wood boat from the first century that was submerged in the Sea of Galilee until its recovery in 1986 off the coast between Capernaum and Magdala.<sup>64</sup> Through creative conservation work, the boat has been carefully excavated, preserved, and studied. Despite its popular name ("the Jesus boat"), there is no evidence that the boat belonged to Jesus or his disciples, but it represents the type of vessel they likely would have used on a regular basis. The boat was made of low-quality timber (often patched together with different types of wood), was smeared on its underside with bitumen pitch, and contained a small mast and sail.<sup>65</sup> Based on the size of the vessel, archaeologists estimate that between five and seven grown men could work in the boat comfortably, but that up to fifteen men could fit within it if necessary.

Small groups of men would go out on the lake in such a boat and would work through the night (typically without clothing; see John 21:7). This boat vividly illustrates New Testament accounts of Jesus teaching in a small boat offshore (see Mark 4:1–2; Matthew 13:1–3), the offshore fishing activities of Jesus' disciples (see Luke 5:1–11; John 21:1–11), and the moments when Jesus and his disciples traveled in a single boat across the Sea of Galilee (see Mark 4:35–41; 6:32; Matthew 8:23–27; 14:13; Luke 8:22–25). It also reflects the likely professional limitations of Jesus' fishermen-disciples; not being a large or expensive fishing vessel, the boat's construction and traces of frequent repair reflect the work of skilled craftsmen who had only modest resources at their disposal.<sup>66</sup>

These maritime discoveries from the Capernaum region not only illustrate important episodes from the New Testament, but they help us in assessing Peter's occupational pursuits and the context in which he operated. Recent research on the Galilean fishing industry has led to a debate over the socioeconomic status of fishermen in Capernaum. Fishing businesses had the potential to prosper in the larger ports like Tiberias or Magdala, but what about those in the smaller villages?

Some scholars have argued that to afford supplies (boats, weights, anchors, and nets), obtain an imperial fishing license, and operate a successful fishing operation, Peter and his associates must have been savvy and bilingual businessmen who possessed significant capital.<sup>67</sup> Others have contended that the multilayered bureaucracy of the Galilean economy, high overhead costs, the need to have fish processed (dried, smoked, and salted) in Magdala, and heavy taxation would have left those doing the actual fishing (like Peter) with extremely limited income.<sup>68</sup> As is often the case, reality might have been somewhere in between, with some fishing families receiving more “take home” revenue than others.

The New Testament leaves only a few hints of Peter’s status in this economy, but those few hints might be telling. Interestingly, different Gospels give different impressions of Peter’s work as a fisherman. According to Mark and Matthew (the earliest Gospels written),<sup>69</sup> Peter and his brother Andrew were called by Jesus as they were casting small throw-nets into the lake from the shore (see Mark 1:16–18; Matthew 4:18–20), and Peter occasionally fished with a line and hook (see Matthew 17:27). Both of these methods were typically employed by lower-class fishermen with no better resources at their disposal. In contrast, James and John left a larger fishing operation with boats and hired day laborers (see Mark 1:19–20; Matthew 4:21–22), suggesting a higher level of resources and income among the Zebedee family.<sup>70</sup> Peter owned his own home and seemed able to pay his taxes (see Mark 1:29), showing that he was not destitute, but he does not appear to have had the same resources (boats and hired help) as some of the other disciples.<sup>71</sup>

The Gospel of Luke, on the other hand, rewrites the narrative of Peter’s calling by describing Peter as owning his own boats and being a full business partner with James and John (see Luke 5:1–11; also see John 21:1–3), implying a more prosperous status for Peter.<sup>72</sup> It is not clear why Luke gives this different portrayal, but his personal inexperience with Galilee and his consistent effort to elevate stories of Jesus and Peter for his urban Greek audience might help explain his anomalous account.<sup>73</sup> In any case, Gospel accounts provide two slightly different pictures of Peter’s economic status, with the fisherman either living at subsistence level (the impression given in Mark and Matthew) or well above subsistence level (the impression given in Luke). As will be seen in the following section, the civic and domestic life of first-century Capernaum suggests an economic status for Peter’s family that may have been somewhere in between.

## Civic and Domestic Life at Capernaum

In addition to viewing Peter’s vocation in the context of the local fishing economy, an examination of the civic and domestic life of Peter’s village can provide

further evidence for his socioeconomic and religious background. The excavations of Capernaum's western remains can be particularly helpful in this regard, as Loffreda and Corbo uncovered numerous houses, streets, alleyways, and other finds that illuminate the cultural dynamics of the ancient village. Unfortunately, as with so much at the site, it is often difficult to determine the precise dating and original appearance of these features. Nevertheless, the remains provide glimpses into Peter's hometown and allow for comparisons with other sites in the region. They suggest that fishing, agriculture, and commerce were secure sources of income for Capernaum's inhabitants, but that these professions were not as lucrative in the village as they might have been in other locations.

Recent excavations at other sites in Galilee have given evidence for prosperity and centralized urban planning in some parts of the region. For example, excavations at the cities of Sepphoris and Tiberias—and to a more limited degree at the walled town of Yodefāt and the port town of Magdala—have shown that some Galilean sites possessed such amenities as stone-paved streets and plazas, sewage systems provided by aqueducts and drainage channels, monumental public buildings used for administrative purposes, and even entertainment facilities. Upper-class domestic structures at these sites also incorporated Roman-style luxuries, such as private baths and interior decoration (mosaic and opus sectile floors, stucco work, and Pompeian wall frescoes). Although the inhabitants of these sites were primarily Jewish, the material culture displays their Hellenistic proclivities and their financial means to support an aristocratic lifestyle.<sup>74</sup>

In contrast, excavations at Capernaum revealed no evidence for Roman amenities, central planning, or a Hellenized upper class in the first century. Capernaum's streets and alleys were not originally laid out on a grid system, leaving them to evolve with the organic growth of the village's domestic structures.<sup>75</sup> These streets and alleys were not paved with stone, but were mostly packed dirt and pebbles, making Capernaum dusty during the dry season and muddy during the rainy season. With no aqueducts, drainage channels, private bathrooms, public latrines, or any other form of sewage system,<sup>76</sup> inhabitants likely relieved themselves outdoors or tossed the contents of chamber pots into the alleyways between houses, producing a malodorous environment typical of ancient villages.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, aside from the likely presence of a modest synagogue (see below), there is no evidence at Capernaum for public building projects—basilicas, theaters, paved plazas, etc.—thus contrasting the village's economic status with the cities and more prosperous towns in the region.

Based on the excavated groups of houses at the site, it appears that the average inhabitants of Capernaum were neither destitute nor wealthy. The dwellings in

this village were typical of first-century villages in the Galilee region. These were modest structures consisting of three or four single-story rooms surrounding a central courtyard, with walls made of various-sized basalt fieldstones.<sup>78</sup> Unlike the well-dressed blocks used at more prosperous sites, the irregular stones used at Capernaum were not chiseled to fit into place, but were held together by a mixture of pebbles and “mortar.”<sup>79</sup> The walls contained no traces of interior plaster or decoration.<sup>80</sup> As noted by the excavators, this style of wall construction was not able to support a second story or heavy roof. Instead, the dwellings at Capernaum were covered with thatched roofs supported by wood beams and reeds bound together with a thick mud mortar.<sup>81</sup> The thatching and mortar was smoothed out with stone roof rollers and subsequently dried, providing a sufficiently sturdy roof that could be used for light work, sleeping, storage, and drying produce.<sup>82</sup>

This style of roof construction nicely illustrates Mark’s account of four men from the village who “removed the roof” of a house by “having dug through” (*ezorizontes*) the dried mud, straw, and reeds to lower a paralytic into the crowded room so he could be healed by Jesus (see Mark 2:1–12). The excavators and other scholars have observed that Mark’s details accurately reflect an average home in Capernaum.<sup>83</sup> Luke’s version of the story, however, differs from Mark by claiming that the men removed the house’s “ceramic roof tiles” (*keramōn*; see Luke 5:17–26). In Roman Galilee, ceramic roof tiles are mostly found in an urban context associated with monumental structures or upper-class dwellings. They are extremely rare in village domestic architecture, where walls were not designed to support their weight and where the flat roofs provided valuable work space.<sup>84</sup> At Capernaum, no roof tiles were discovered in any first-century domestic context.<sup>85</sup> Therefore, it appears that Luke’s account assumed the Roman-style villas familiar to his urban Gentile audience rather than accurately describing a home in a Galilean village.<sup>86</sup>

Inside Capernaum’s domestic structures, the small living rooms around the courtyard had uncovered openings for windows, but these were located high on the wall to serve for lighting and ventilation rather than to provide a view of the outside.<sup>87</sup> Most of the living rooms left no traces of a permanent door, suggesting that the rooms opened to the shared courtyard with only a mat or curtain covering.<sup>88</sup> The floors of these rooms were made of either packed dirt or a basalt cobblestone pavement with thin spaces (interstices) between the cobbles, which often contained broken pottery or an occasional dropped coin.<sup>89</sup> Both styles of flooring can illustrate Jesus’ parable of the lost coin in the house—a story of a woman who swept all day over the packed dirt or basalt cobbles to find the precious coin that would feed her family (see Luke 15:8–10).<sup>90</sup>



An artistic reconstruction of the first-century “house of Peter” (Insula I) nicely illustrates the typical domestic structures in Capernaum, including the modest walls made of basalt fieldstones, the roofs made of wood beams and reeds bound together with a mud mortar, and the shared courtyard space which allowed members of the extended family to live and work in close proximity. Painting by Balage Balogh, used by permission.

As was typical for a Galilean village, each housing complex in Capernaum consisted of three or four rooms clustered around an open courtyard. This arrangement allowed numerous members of an extended family to live and work together in the same shared space. These housing complexes were accessed from the street through doorways with thresholds, doorjambes, and a wooden door equipped with a locking mechanism that opened into the courtyard.<sup>91</sup> Courtyards in Capernaum were paved with basalt cobblestone and often contained small presses for crushing olives, hand-operated grinding stones for wheat, small ovens for baking bread and other meals, and loom weights for making clothing, reflecting the daily routine of women in the family.<sup>92</sup> Courtyards often contained areas for housing animals and crude stone staircases that led to the roofs of the living rooms.<sup>93</sup> Some courtyards also included a small shop that opened to the street so that the family could sell their produce or fish to neighbors.<sup>94</sup>

Most of the dwellings at Capernaum contained common household pottery such as cooking pots, “casseroles,” wine jugs, cups, and bowls, almost all of which were low-quality locally produced wares.<sup>95</sup> This pottery assemblage suggests that villagers ate modest meals of soups and thin stews (surely supplemented with local staples such as bread, fish, and olives) out of shared dishes,<sup>96</sup> likely as they sat close together in a living room upon mats placed over the packed dirt floor.<sup>97</sup> In



addition, an ostrakon and the absence of imported amphorae at Capernaum suggest that villagers drank local wine.<sup>98</sup> These observations illustrate stories in the synoptic Gospels in which Jesus, his disciples, and “sinners” gathered for meals within various homes (see Mark 2:15–17; Matthew 9:9–13).

Other finds in Capernaum’s domestic structures indicate that the village’s inhabitants were mostly conservative and religiously observant Jews. Unlike at nearby Hellenistic sites (including the Decapolis cities and et-Tell/“Bethsaida”),<sup>99</sup> no pig or nonkosher fish bones were found in the excavations at Capernaum, showing that the villagers maintained a diet in accordance with the law of Moses (see Leviticus 11). In addition, each of the excavated houses contained stone vessels (mostly cups) used for ritual purity washings, such as the washing of hands before eating meals according to Jewish custom (see Mark 7:1–4; Matthew 15:1–2).<sup>100</sup> Most of these stone vessels were of a low quality, either carved by hand or made on a small lathe.<sup>101</sup> No ritual baths (*miqva’ot*) were found in the village, but the lake likely provided the means for ritual bathing.<sup>102</sup>

These finds point to a high level of observance of the Jewish purity and food laws in Peter’s hometown. This aligns with the impression of Capernaum given in the New Testament, which contrasts the Jewish village with nearby Gentile cities (e.g., Matthew 11:20–24). The stone vessels and absence of pig bones at Capernaum might also reflect Peter’s initial discomfort over Jesus’ apparent indifference toward ritual hand washings (see Matthew 15:1–20; Mark 7:1–23)<sup>103</sup> and Peter’s later anxiety over his vision of the unkosher foods, in which he exclaimed, “I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean” (Acts 10:9–16). Even after his vision, Peter’s inherent cultural tendencies manifested themselves in Antioch, as he naturally preferred dining with Jewish-Christians rather than with Paul’s Gentile converts (see Galatians 2:11–14). In short, Peter seems to have been comfortable in and influenced by the conservative Jewish culture of his home village.

In light of these observations, it is interesting to note that the New Testament does record the presence of a few Gentiles at Capernaum. This includes a Gentile “centurion,” whose servant was paralyzed (see Matthew 8:5–13),<sup>104</sup> and a “royal official” (presumably a Gentile), whose son was ill “at the point of death” (see John 4:46–54), both of whom sought Jesus’ help.<sup>105</sup> Unfortunately, there is no archaeological trace of a Gentile presence at Capernaum—no pig bones, Greek inscriptions, or Roman art—leaving the impression that the village was entirely inhabited by conservative Jews.<sup>106</sup> Therefore, it is difficult to know how the Gentiles in these stories would have interacted with Capernaum’s majority Jewish population. Matthew implies a high degree of tension between the “centurion” and his Jewish neighbors (see Matthew 8:5–13), whereas Luke claims that there was



a mutual affection between him and the local elders (see Luke 7:1–5). In light of Capernaum’s material culture and Luke’s tendency to present Gentiles in the best possible light, the impression given in Matthew may more accurately reflect the village’s cultural dynamics.<sup>107</sup>

Although there is no archaeological evidence for a Gentile minority at Capernaum, there are indications that some families in the villages were more affluent than others. Most of the domestic structures, pottery, and small finds suggest that the average family at Capernaum lived at or slightly above subsistence level. However, some families may have enjoyed modest surplus income. For example, some dwellings in Capernaum contained higher quality household vessels than were found in most of the residential area. These include a small collection of glassware,<sup>108</sup> limited quantities of imitation Roman pottery (Eastern Terra Sigillata A),<sup>109</sup> and a few fragments of large lathe-turned stone vessels.<sup>110</sup> The presence of such finds does not point to an elite upper class,<sup>111</sup> but they might reflect the presence of individuals, such as the small contingent of Herodian customs and military officers, who enjoyed more affluence than others. Yet, despite their presence, Capernaum was still very much a lower to “middle” class village.

An important example of an average first-century dwelling at Capernaum that reflects the domestic profile described in this section is a structure identified by early Christians as the “house of Peter” (Insula I). The remains of this house were uncovered in the late 1960s as the Franciscans excavated an octagonal chapel built in the Byzantine period to memorialize the location.<sup>112</sup> In the process of excavating the shrine, Loffreda and Corbo discovered that the earliest structure underneath was a typical domestic complex built around the first century BC. They also found that its subsequent history lent plausibility to the tradition that the house once belonged to Jesus’ most famous disciple. Excavations showed that by the late first or early second century AD, the largest room of the complex (room 1) was renovated with a plastered floor, a feature unattested elsewhere at Capernaum.<sup>113</sup> At this same time, the pottery assemblage in the room shifted from common household wares to oil lamps and storage jars, suggesting that the room began to be used for communal gatherings rather than daily living. Loffreda and Corbo interpreted these developments as evidence that Jewish-Christians in Capernaum treated the room as having special value and held assemblies there.<sup>114</sup>

By the fourth century, the entire housing complex was identified by Christian pilgrims as the “house of Peter” and was converted into a *domus ecclesia*—a church building that incorporated elements of the private dwelling for worship purposes. At that time the walls of room 1 were plastered and decorated with painted images of paradise scenes, buildings, and possibly floral crosses.<sup>115</sup>

Throughout the next century, pilgrims etched Greek, Syriac, Hebrew, and Latin inscriptions into the plaster walls that included their own names, pleas for Jesus to save them, and the name of Peter.<sup>116</sup> Sometime in the fifth century, this house church was demolished and replaced by a domed octagonal shrine built over room 1, complete with mosaics, an eastern apse, and a small baptismal font. Thus the first-century “house of Peter” was enshrined for Christian pilgrims within a memorial chapel for the remainder of the Byzantine period.

Based on the history of this building, its excavators claimed that Capernaum’s Jewish-Christian population accurately preserved the memory of the site and that the dwelling below the shrine did indeed belong to Peter. This claim has received varying levels of acceptance over the last forty years. Recently, however, scholars have challenged the notion that an established Jewish-Christian community existed in Capernaum in the first three centuries, casting doubt on the claim that a continuous memory of the location of Peter’s house was accurately transmitted.<sup>117</sup> Therefore, while identifying Insula I as Peter’s house is an intriguing possibility—especially considering the site’s long tradition of Christian veneration—it is ultimately impossible to prove.

Regardless, the first-century dwelling on the site fits the profile of other domestic structures in the village, and its features resemble the New Testament stories regarding Peter’s house. For example, the original complex contains four or five rooms clustered around a central L-shaped courtyard, suitable to accommodate an extended family.<sup>118</sup> This is similar to the Gospels’ description of Peter, Andrew, and Peter’s in-laws all living together in a shared residence (see Mark 1:29–31; Matthew 8:14–17).<sup>119</sup> The courtyard had a spacious entryway from the street at the northeast corner,<sup>120</sup> and both the courtyard and the entryway were large enough for crowds to gather to see Jesus teach and perform miracles within the house (see Mark 1:32–34; 3:20–21, 31–35).

So while we cannot be certain that this building was the actual house of Peter, it does reflect the type of dwelling in which Peter and his family likely lived. The quality and material profile of the building also support the impression that Peter’s family lived as average villagers, perhaps above subsistence level but without wealth, affluence, or Hellenistic tastes. By all accounts it appears that Peter and his family fit in with their religiously conservative Jewish surroundings and that their fishing activities were not lucrative, but were sufficient to support an extended family.

## The “Synagogue of the Centurion”

A final issue that sheds light on the social, economic, and religious dynamics of first-century Capernaum is the presence of a synagogue within the village. The

New Testament indicates that a synagogue was at the center of Capernaum's village life and that Jesus frequently taught and performed exorcisms in that setting (see Mark 1:21–27; Luke 4:31–37; John 6:24–59). The existence of this institution in Peter's hometown supports the observation that Capernaum's inhabitants were religiously conservative Jews, whose regular routine included Sabbath observance, the study of scripture, and some form of communal prayer. This was likely the setting in which Peter and his family learned the Torah and the writings of the prophets (through Aramaic translations of the Hebrew texts), as well as gathered for holy days and performed many of their other religious obligations.<sup>121</sup>

Any reconstruction of first-century Capernaum must acknowledge this synagogue and its place on the village landscape. However, there are two important issues that must be considered when doing so. First, it is necessary to note the multifaceted yet modest nature of synagogues in Judea and Galilee during this period. Second, for Capernaum it is necessary to evaluate the relevance of the extant synagogue remains at the site for the time of Jesus and Peter. Space will not allow for a full discussion of these issues, but a brief overview will provide some final observations on Peter's hometown.

In recent years, numerous studies have shed light on the nature and function of synagogues during the late Second Temple period (ca. 200 BC–AD 70), which is when this institution began to grow and develop.<sup>122</sup> Even though the law of Moses did not require congregational assembly outside of a temple setting, Jewish communities by the first century regularly met together for a variety of reasons, and synagogues became the settings for these meetings. In its earliest uses, the word “synagogue” (*synagōgē*) simply referred to “a gathering” of people for a single purpose. These “gatherings” could occur in various settings, including in a building specifically made for assembly, in a private home, or in an open public space (such as a town square). Furthermore, the purpose for the “gathering” could be religious worship, but it could also be to discuss local politics, conduct legal proceedings, or facilitate limited educational activities. In short, the earliest “synagogues” were multipurpose community centers.<sup>123</sup>

Scores of synagogue buildings have been found in Galilee from late antiquity (ca. AD 300–600), showing that by those centuries most Jewish communities built large structures specifically for the purpose of religious worship. These buildings contained assembly halls, shrines for housing sacred scrolls, and religious iconography (such as menorahs or biblical mosaics) to accompany the liturgy. Synagogues in the first century, however, are not as consistent, defined, or prominent. In comparison to later periods, very few first-century synagogue buildings have been discovered in Galilee, with structures at Gamla, Magdala, and Khirbet Cana as rare

examples.<sup>124</sup> With the exception of the large hall in the densely populated town of Gamla, these are small buildings that contain no religious iconography or liturgical features,<sup>125</sup> but that were designed as general public meeting places.<sup>126</sup>

Because there was no set template for synagogue architecture in this period, different locations could have had different types of “synagogues”; some cities and towns may have had the means to build modest structures, while Jews in other locations (often including the villages) could have held their “gatherings” in any space conducive for meeting. In the case of Capernaum, most New Testament references do not elaborate on the precise nature of the village’s synagogue, but one passage in the Gospel of Luke specifically mentions the building of a physical structure:

A centurion [in Capernaum] had a slave whom he valued highly, and who was ill and close to death.

When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to him, asking him to come and heal his slave.

When they came to Jesus, they appealed to him earnestly, saying, “He is worthy of having you do this for him,

For he loves our people, and it is he who built our synagogue for us.” (Luke 7:2–5)

Unfortunately, Luke does not describe its size or layout, but his account has led many to refer to Capernaum’s first-century synagogue as the “synagogue of the centurion.”<sup>127</sup>

Luke’s mention of a synagogue building in Capernaum has created significant interest in the monumental synagogue remains that now dominate the site. This imposing structure, built with imported limestone ashlar, is one of the largest synagogues in Israel. It features a main prayer hall (with benches along two walls, Corinthian columns on three sides, and a second story), a large open courtyard to its east (with colonnaded porticoes on three sides), and a porch entryway along its south side.<sup>128</sup> Soon after these ruins were uncovered and partially reconstructed in the early 1900s, some scholars began to wonder if this was the “synagogue of the centurion” mentioned in Luke.<sup>129</sup> Most, however, came to believe based on its architectural style that the building dated to the second or third century, long after the time of Jesus and Peter.<sup>130</sup>

This second conclusion was almost universally accepted until the Franciscans excavated the building in the late 1960s, removed portions of the synagogue’s pavement, and cut trenches underneath its main features.<sup>131</sup> In every trench they dug—in the prayer hall, the courtyard, and the porch—Loffreda and Corbo discovered



The monumental limestone synagogue at Capernaum, built during the Byzantine period, rests on a basalt foundation and included a large prayer hall, courtyard, and porch entryway. Photo courtesy of Kent P. Jackson.

pottery and thousands of coins dating to the fourth and fifth century sealed under the stone pavement (in both the mortar bedding and the fill below), showing that the synagogue could not have been constructed before the Byzantine period.<sup>132</sup> Most scholars now agree that Capernaum's monumental limestone synagogue was built around the fifth century,<sup>133</sup> but some claim that this building was built on an earlier basalt synagogue that stood on the site in the first century.<sup>134</sup> If this claim is correct, the limestone synagogue may have preserved and incorporated portions of the "synagogue of the centurion" known to Jesus and Peter.

Those who make this claim point to three main observations: (1) Religious buildings are often built on the location of earlier religious buildings, thus preserving the sanctity of the site. Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that Capernaum's Byzantine synagogue marked the location of its first-century synagogue. (2) The monumental limestone synagogue at Capernaum rests upon a basalt foundation. However, in the southwest corner of the prayer hall, the basalt foundation and the limestone wall are misaligned by about 10 centimeters, suggesting that the foundation represents portions of an earlier building on which a later structure was constructed.<sup>135</sup> (3) Deep under the limestone pavement of the synagogue's nave, Loffreda and Corbo discovered a basalt cobblestone pavement dating to the Early





In the southwest corner of Capernaum's synagogue, the basalt foundation and limestone wall are slightly misaligned. This has led some scholars to argue that the basalt foundation represents an earlier synagogue building from the time of Jesus and Peter, but numerous factors controvert this proposal. Photo courtesy of Kent P. Jackson.

Roman period.<sup>136</sup> Since the area covered by this lower basalt pavement seemed too large for a domestic structure, the pavement must have been the floor of an earlier public building, such as a synagogue.<sup>137</sup>

Based on these observations, some scholars believe that the basalt foundations of the prayer hall were originally the lower courses of the walls belonging to the first-century "synagogue of the centurion."<sup>138</sup> No other features of this building have been found, but proponents claim that it was a rectangular, single-story structure constructed and paved with basalt. Proposed reconstructions include two rows of columns that run north-south through the hall and rest on stylobates (low foundation walls designed to support the colonnades), three to four rows of benches along its west wall, and entrances on the east and west of the building.<sup>139</sup> Since its dimensions were the same as the prayer hall of the later synagogue, the first-century synagogue would have measured approximately 24.2 x 18.5 meters (covering an area of 448 square meters), making it by far the largest first-century synagogue building ever discovered.<sup>140</sup>

As intriguing as this possibility may be, however, such a large public structure seems incongruent with the nature of the first-century remains at

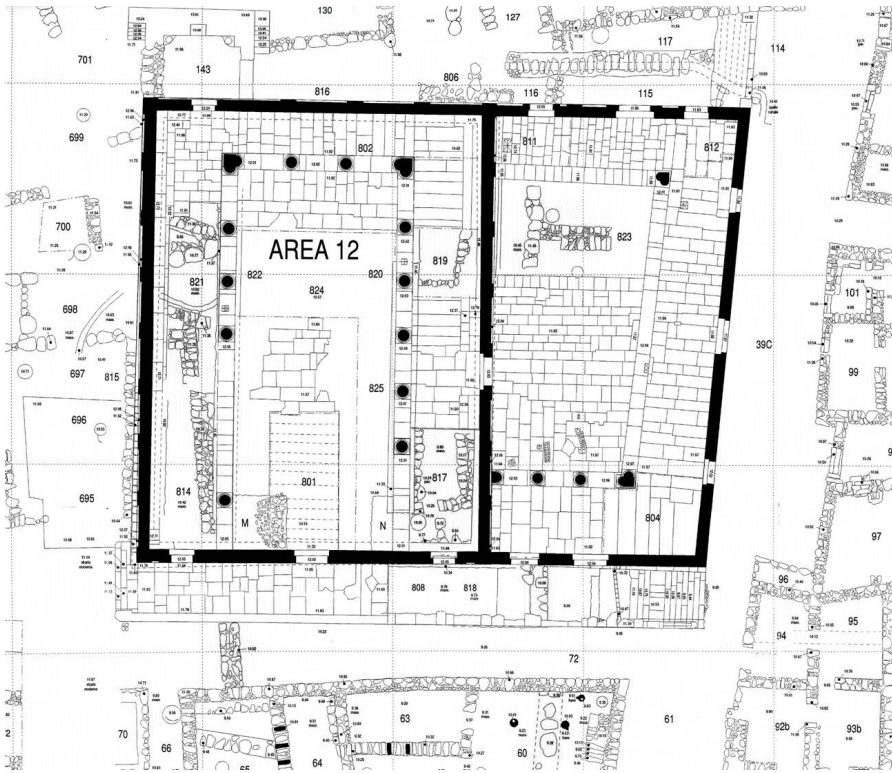


Capernaum. Would the small population of a fishing and farming village, most of whom (like Peter) lived at or modestly above subsistence level, have had the means to construct the largest synagogue in the region? Even if a “centurion” built the synagogue for the estimated 1,000 to 1,500 Jewish inhabitants of Capernaum, would he have built an assembly hall almost 50 percent larger than the hall at Gamla, with its estimated population of 3,000 to 4,000?<sup>141</sup> If so, the massive basalt synagogue at Capernaum could significantly impact our assessment of financial resources within Peter’s village. In light of this potential significance, it is important to note that some scholars point to archaeological reasons why the basalt foundation of the limestone synagogue likely did not belong to an earlier structure, making it irrelevant to an evaluation of first-century Capernaum.

First, the proposed reconstruction of the first-century synagogue has a number of key weaknesses: no evidence for its benches have been discovered;<sup>142</sup> traces of its other building materials are either absent or not adequately published for examination;<sup>143</sup> an architectural connection between the basalt cobblestone pavement and the basalt “walls” of this synagogue has not been demonstrated;<sup>144</sup> the extant basalt “walls” rise four feet above the basalt pavement and extend the entire length of the limestone synagogue, but contain no openings for doors;<sup>145</sup> the proposed “stylobates” of the synagogue (which run almost the entire length of the hall) rise unusually high above the main floor, which would make movement in the hall extremely difficult;<sup>146</sup> and it would be the only known synagogue from this period paved with a cobblestone floor (other first-century synagogue floors consist of pavement stones and/or packed earth covered with mats).<sup>147</sup>

Second, the difference in building materials and alignment between the basalt foundation and the limestone walls of the Byzantine synagogue does not need to indicate two separate buildings: the construction technique of using basalt courses as the foundation for a monumental limestone building is attested in contemporary nearby architecture, reflecting the benefits of basalt (which is harder than limestone) as a foundation;<sup>148</sup> the misalignment between the basalt foundation and limestone wall in the southwest corner of the building could easily be explained as an unfortunate result of the area’s sloping topography;<sup>149</sup> and, if the misalignment reflects the adjustment of a later building, why is this misalignment only reflected in the southwest corner and not in all areas of the building? (The basalt and limestone features are perfectly aligned in every other corner and under both stylobates. Was the original building asymmetrical?)

Finally, and most convincingly, it is clear from the excavation reports that the entire fifth-century synagogue building—including its basalt foundation—cut through and demolished residential structures that were built



Top plans of the excavations of Capernaum's synagogue (outlined in bold) show the remains of walls and other features from earlier domestic structures that were demolished when the synagogue was constructed (see the drawings of numerous walls running beneath the synagogue's prayer hall, courtyard, and porch). The presence of these Hellenistic and Roman period homes undermine claims that a first-century synagogue existed at this location. Top plan adapted from the map of the site in Stanislaw Loffreda, *Cafarnao V* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 2005).

between the first century BC and first century AD, and which appear to have been occupied into the third or fourth century.<sup>150</sup> These late Hellenistic and Early Roman period domestic complexes are represented by remains of their walls,<sup>151</sup> basalt pavement,<sup>152</sup> and other features which were covered by the synagogue's prayer hall, courtyard, and porch.<sup>153</sup> Within these earlier dwellings, excavators found evidence for domestic life including ovens, grinding stones, and household pottery such as cooking pots, jugs, storage jars, bowls, and cups.<sup>154</sup> We would not expect to find these items in a public space such as a synagogue, but rather in the courtyards and rooms of private dwellings.<sup>155</sup> The coins and pottery found on the floors showed that these dwellings were likely inhabited into the fourth century,<sup>156</sup> leaving no place for an earlier synagogue to exist at this location.

Together, these observations make a strong case against the proposal that a first-century basalt synagogue stood at the site. Instead, the basalt “walls” appear to have been originally built as the foundations for the fifth-century synagogue and not as the walls of an earlier structure. As a result, many current synagogue scholars either reject this proposal or remain agnostic on the issue.<sup>157</sup> Since the site was the location of common residential dwellings at the time of Peter and for centuries afterward, it is theoretically possible that this residential structure was the location of a “house synagogue,”<sup>158</sup> but there is no positive evidence for this usage or for the building having been built by a Gentile benefactor such as the “centurion.”

So, while the New Testament indicates that a synagogue existed in Capernaum when Jesus and Peter lived there, no reliable evidence survives for its construction, size, layout, or location. Assuming a synagogue building did exist in the first-century village, it likely resembled other known village synagogues (e.g., Qiyrat Sefer and Khirbet Cana), which were small, modestly constructed buildings with no Jewish iconography and no liturgical furniture.<sup>159</sup> In short, the New Testament references to a synagogue in Capernaum confirm that Peter’s hometown was inhabited by religious Jews, but the extant synagogue remains at the site cannot be used as evidence for wealth in the first-century village and likely have no bearing on reconstructing Peter’s social context.

## Conclusion: Peter in Capernaum

In providing this archaeological survey of first-century Capernaum, I have attempted to elucidate the socioeconomic, religious, and cultural setting of Peter’s early life and ministry. As mentioned previously, scholars debate the extent of Peter’s financial status, education, and inherent sympathies to Gentile customs in order to evaluate the scriptural traditions about his missionary efforts, his leadership in the early church, and the authorship of the New Testament books associated with his name. Could Peter have been wealthy enough to leave his fishing business unharmed while he followed Jesus, or did his discipleship come at great financial cost to his family? Did his cultural upbringing naturally incline him to fellowship with Gentiles, or did he need to overcome his cultural tendencies to bring them the gospel? Was Peter educated enough to write letters in polished Greek using sophisticated rhetoric and citations from the Septuagint, or would he have needed to rely on more educated scribes to do so?

While archaeology cannot answer these questions directly, the excavations of Capernaum can establish a valuable context for understanding Peter’s early life. This survey has shown that first-century Capernaum was a lower to “middle” class Jewish fishing village. At the time of Jesus and Peter, it was not one of the poorest

villages in the region (such as Nazareth), but it was also not a wealthy city like Tiberias or Sepphoris, or even a prosperous port town like Magdala. Most of the village's population, it seems, lived at or modestly above subsistence level. Within this environment, it appears that Peter and his brother Andrew were able to support their families, own a courtyard house, and pay their taxes through their work as fishermen (even if they might not have been as successful as James and John), but likely enjoyed little additional revenue or affluence.

The archaeological evidence also indicates that Capernaum's inhabitants were religiously conservative Jews who had no Hellenistic leanings, explaining Peter's natural interest in ritual purity laws and observance of a kosher diet. Therefore, if Peter was eventually sympathetic toward Gentiles, he likely did not develop these sympathies in his home village. While Peter and his Jewish associates may have had some interaction with Gentiles in the village through a few local military officers, interregional traffic, or travels around the lake, there is no indication that the average Aramaic-speaking Jew in Capernaum knew much Greek beyond, perhaps, the vocabulary necessary to do business. With no multicultural educational institution in Capernaum, anyone who reached a higher Greek proficiency than this must have acquired it elsewhere.

As for his level of cultural sophistication, descriptions of Peter in the New Testament accord with what we know of his life in Capernaum—Peter and the other disciples were astonished by Jerusalem's monumental architecture (see Matthew 24:1), Peter's unpolished accent betrayed his rural Galilean origins (see Matthew 26:73), and Jerusalem elites viewed Peter as a "common uneducated" man (see Acts 2:7–8; 4:13). These descriptions confirm that Peter was very much a product of his upbringing in a modest village on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. Therefore, while there are many questions that archaeology cannot answer directly, the archaeological evidence from first-century Capernaum is an important source of information in our study of the early life, work, and ministry of Jesus' most famous disciple.

## Notes

1. All biblical translations in this paper have been taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

2. For recent studies on the historical Peter, see PHEME PERKINS, *Peter: Apostle for the Whole Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000); MARTIN HENGEL, *Saint Peter: The Underestimated Apostle* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010); and MARKUS BOCKMUEHL, *Simon Peter in Scripture and Memory: The New Testament Apostle in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012).

3. See John H. Elliott, *1 Peter: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 120; Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 443–44.

4. See Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Fishers of Fish, Fishers of Men: What We Know of the First Disciples from their Profession," *Bible Review* 15, no. 3 (June 1999): 22–27, 48–49.

5. The early use of archaeology in research on Peter was limited, focusing mainly on the identification of the "house of Peter" at Capernaum and the location of Peter's burial in Rome; see Perkins, *Peter*, 38–39.

6. Sensational claims have been made that Peter's bones were discovered in the necropolis under St. Peter's Basilica in Rome (see John Evangelist Walsh, *The Bones of St. Peter: The First Full Account of the Search for the Apostle's Body* [Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1985]), but these claims are impossible to substantiate and are not typically incorporated into serious scholarship on the historical Peter.

7. Rami Arav, "New Testament Archaeology and the Case of Bethsaida," in *Das Ende der Tage und die Gegenwart des Heils: Begegnungen mit dem Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt*, ed. M. Becker and W. Fenske (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1999), 84.

8. Rami Arav, "Bethsaida Excavations: Preliminary Report, 1994–1996," in *Bethsaida: A City by the North Shore of the Sea of Galilee*, vol. 2, ed. Rami Arav and Richard A. Freund (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University, 1999), 18–24, 32–44.

9. See Mark Appold, "Peter in Profile: From Bethsaida to Rome," in *Bethsaida: A City by the North Shore of the Sea of Galilee*, vol. 3, ed. Rami Arav and Richard A. Freund (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University, 2004), 133–45; Markus Bockmuehl, "Simon Peter and Bethsaida," in *The Missions of James, Peter, and Paul: Tensions in Early Christianity*, ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig Evans (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2005), 53–90, and Markus Bockmuehl, *Simon Peter*, 165–76.

10. In John 1:44, Bethsaida is called "the city of . . . Peter" without any further reference to Peter's life there. The synoptic Gospels, on the other hand, do not mention any relationship between Peter and Bethsaida. Instead, they consistently indicate that Peter's family lived in Capernaum. Some scholars have attempted to harmonize these accounts by speculating that Peter was born in Bethsaida but later moved to Capernaum for tax purposes (see Murphy-O'Connor, "Fishers of Fish," 25–27, and Appold, "Peter in Profile," 141). Others point out the lack of historical support for a connection between Peter and Bethsaida and claim that there existed competing traditions among early Christians over Peter's residence. See Peter Richardson, "What Has Cana to Do with Capernaum?," in *Building Jewish in the Roman East* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2004), 91–107, and Fred Strickert, *Philip's City: From Bethsaida to Julias* (Collegetown, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011), 47–59.

11. See Mendel Nun, "Has Bethsaida Finally Been Found?," *Jerusalem Perspective* 54, no. 3 (1998): 12–31 and R. Steven Notley, "Et-Tell Is Not Bethsaida," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 70, no. 4 (December 2007): 220–30.

12. In referring to Capernaum as Peter's "hometown," I recognize that none of the Gospels specify the location of Peter's birthplace. However, the synoptic Gospels consistently present Capernaum as the residence of Peter's family, the location of Peter's home, the setting of Peter's livelihood, and the location of his early interactions with Jesus.



13. The identity of the “Nahum” after whom the village was named is not known, but a relationship with the Old Testament prophet Nahum is unlikely. Because of the different transliterations of the village’s name from Hebrew into Greek, some early Christian writers translated it as the “Village of Consolation.” See Stanislao Loffreda, *Recovering Capernaum*, 2nd ed. (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1993), 14–15. Despite its name referring to a “village,” New Testament writers often identify Capernaum as a “city” (*polis*; e.g., Luke 4:31). However, there is no evidence that Capernaum was ever raised to the official status of a polis, and it shared none of the features (walls, public architecture, political importance, or substantial population) that characterized contemporary cities, such as Sepphoris, Tiberias, Caesarea, or Jerusalem. Since the Gospel authors also refer to small hamlets like Nazareth and Nain as “cities” (e.g., Luke 2:4; 7:11), their use of this term is likely an attempt to highlight the importance of Jesus’ activities (e.g., Acts 26:26) without intending to provide precise nomenclature. See Jonathan L. Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus: A Re-Examination of the Evidence* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), 166–69. Josephus seems to be more technically correct when he refers to Capernaum as “a village” (κωμη; *Life* 403). See Steve Mason, *Flavius Josephus: Life of Josephus* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2003), 160. For discussions on the differentiations between cities, towns, villages, and hamlets in Galilee, see Martin Goodman, *State and Society in Roman Galilee, AD 132–212*, 2nd ed. (London: Valentine Mitchell, 2000), 27–40; and Ze’ev Safrai, *The Economy of Roman Palestine* (London: Routledge, 1994), 17–103.

14. See Joseph Blenkinsopp, “The Literary Evidence,” in *Excavations at Capernaum Volume 1: 1978–1982*, ed. Vassilios Tzaferis (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1989), 201–10.

15. Although it is not mentioned in the Old Testament, archaeological excavations showed that the site was inhabited in the Bronze Age, abandoned in the Iron Age, and possibly reoccupied on a limited scale during the Persian period. See Loffreda, *Recovering Capernaum*, 27.

16. See Mordechai Aviam, “People, Land, Economy, and Belief in First-Century Galilee and Its Origins: A Comprehensive Archaeological Synthesis,” in *The Galilean Economy in the Time of Jesus*, ed. David A. Fiensy and Ralph K. Hawkins (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 11–20.

17. For the debate over Capernaum’s proximity to a local trade route in the first century, see Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus*, 146–48. It is well known that Jesus dined with “tax collectors and sinners” while in Capernaum (see Matthew 9:10–11; also see Luke 7:36–50), and his parables to the indignant Pharisees on these occasions often included references to prostitutes and beggars (e.g., Luke 15:1–2, 30; 16:3, 19–31).

18. Josephus, *Life* 403–4 (see *War* 3.519–20). At a skirmish near Bethsaida/Julias during the first Jewish revolt against Rome (ca. AD 66–67), Josephus fell off his horse and fractured his wrist. He was taken to Capernaum, but since that village had such limited resources, he was transported to better medical facilities at Magdala/Tarichaea. See Mason, *Life of Josephus*, 160.

19. *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 1:8§4. Previous generations of scholars argued that the “heretics” (minim) in Capernaum were Jewish-Christians, but more recent scholars have challenged this claim; for overviews of this debate, see Joan E. Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places: The Myth of Jewish-Christian Origins* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 25–31, 276–77,



and Stuart S. Miller, "The Minim of Sepphoris Reconsidered," *Harvard Theological Review* 86 (1993): 377–402.

20. Epiphanius, *Haer* 30, no. 11, reported that Capernaum was exclusively Jewish until the fourth century.

21. See the fourth-century pilgrimage itinerary of Egeria in John Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Aris & Philipps, 2006), 97–98.

22. For the occupation of Capernaum in the early Islamic period, see Blenkinsopp, "Literary Evidence," 206. Although the Franciscan excavations of western Capernaum suggested a decline and abandonment of the site in the early seventh century, the Greek excavations of eastern Capernaum showed that the village expanded to the east and north during the seventh century and was inhabited until its abandonment in the eleventh century, just prior to the first crusade. See Tzaferis, "Historical Summary," *Capernaum* 1, 213–21.

23. Burchardus wrote in 1283 that Capernaum was by then a poor village containing only seven dilapidated houses belonging to fishermen. See Stanislaw Loffreda and Vassilios Tzaferis, "Capernaum," *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. Ephraim Stern (Jerusalem: The Israel Exploration Society, 1993), 292.

24. By the late nineteenth century, American and European explorers debated Capernaum's precise location. Edward Robinson, Eli Smith, and Heinrich Kiepert, *Biblical Researches in Palestine and the Adjacent Regions* (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1856), 346–58, identified it with the ruins at Khirbet el-Minyeh, while Charles W. Wilson, *The Recovery of Jerusalem* (New York: D. Appleton, 1872), 266, 292–301, and *The Survey of Western Palestine* (London: Palestine Exploration Fund, 1881), 298–99, identified it with the ruins at Tel Hum. This debate is reflected in James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), 186–87 n. 5, who cites Charles F. Deems, *The Light of the Nations* (New York: Gay Brothers, 1884), 167–68, as saying that ancient Capernaum's exact location will probably never be known. For the arguments that ultimately convinced scholars that the ruins of Tel Hum were ancient Capernaum, see John C. H. Laughlin, "The Identification of the Site," in *Capernaum* 1, 191–99.

25. The synagogue was first excavated in 1905 by the Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft. See Heinrich Kohl and Carl Watzinger, *Antike Synagogen in Galiläa* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1916), 4–40. Shortly thereafter, the church shrine was uncovered by the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land. See Gaudence Orfali, *Capharnaüm et ses Ruines* (Paris: A. Picard, 1922).

26. Summaries of these excavations and their findings can be found in Loffreda, *Recovering Capharnaum*, 7–12, and Loffreda and Tzaferis, "Capernaum," 291–96.

27. For examples of recent studies, see Douglas R. Edwards and C. Thomas McCollough, *Archaeology and the Galilee: Texts and Contexts in the Greco-Roman and Byzantine Periods* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), and Jürgen Zangenberg, Harold W. Attridge, and Dale B. Martin, eds., *Religion, Ethnicity, and Identity in Ancient Galilee: A Region in Transition* (Tübingen: Mohr Seibek, 2007).

28. See John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed, *Excavating Jesus: Beneath the Stones, behind the Texts* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 51–97, and Douglas E. Oakman, "Execrating? or Execrable Peasants!," in *Galilean Economy in the Time of Jesus*, 139–64.

29. See Douglas R. Edwards, "Identity and Social Location in Roman Galilean Villages," in *Religion, Ethnicity, and Identity*, 357–74, and Aviam, "People, Land, Economy," 5–48.

30. Mark A. Chancey, *The Myth of a Gentile Galilee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), and Mark A. Chancey, *Greco-Roman Culture and the Galilee of Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), provide a helpful overview of this debate and demonstrate that the evidence favors a traditional Jewish atmosphere in first-century Galilee, with little support for extensive Hellenization in the region before the revolts.

31. Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus*, 139–69; Crossan and Reed, *Excavating Jesus*, 51–97.

32. Sharon Lea Mattila, "Revisiting Jesus' Capernaum: A Village of Only Subsistence-Level Fishers and Farmers?," in *Galilean Economy in the Time of Jesus*, 75–138.

33. To their credit, Loffreda and Corbo published final reports of their finds in western Capernaum, but these were published in Italian and do not contain all of the necessary data pertaining to the site's architecture, ceramics, coins, and inscriptions. The small finds have yet to be published, and the reports are often lacking in stratigraphic analysis. See Virgilio C. Corbo, *Cafarnao I: Gli edifici della citta* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1975); Stanislao Loffreda, *Cafarnao II: La Ceramica* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1974); Augusto Spijkerman, *Cafarnao III: Catalogo Delle Monete della Citta* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1975); Emmanuele Testa, *Cafarnao IV: I graffiti della casa di S. Pietro* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1972). Critical reviews of these reports can be found in James F. Strange, "Review: The Capernaum and Herodium Publications," *BASOR* 226 (April 1977), 65–73; James F. Strange, "Review: The Capernaum and Herodium Publications, Part 2," *BASOR* 233 (Winter 1979), 63–69; and L. Michael White, *The Social Origins of Christian Architecture, Volume II* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 153–54. Tzaferis published a preliminary report ("New Archaeological Evidence on Ancient Capernaum," *Biblical Archaeologist* 46, no. 4 [1983]: 198–204) and a high-quality final report (*Capernaum 1*) of finds on the east side of the site, but these reports only contain descriptions of the Muslim-era remains (long after the time of the first-century village). Promised reports on the earlier periods have not yet appeared. Currently, the only preliminary report of the Roman period remains on the east side of the site is in John C. H. Laughlin, "Capernaum: From Jesus' Time and After," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 19, no. 5 (1993): 55–61, 90.

34. Because of ancient sensitivities against placing burials inside an inhabited area, the presence of several sarcophagi in a Late Roman mausoleum about 300 meters north of the shore marks the northernmost boundary of the village. Although a (later?) promenade appears to extend east-west along the shore for about 800 meters, ruins from the Early Roman period have only been found along 300–500 meters of the shoreline, leaving Capernaum's first-century borders to extend a maximum of 300 x 500 meters. The site's excavators estimated that the inhabited area of 10–12 acres could accommodate a population of no more than 1,500 inhabitants, causing them to refer to Capernaum as "a relatively small village." These calculations can be found (with slight variation) in Loffreda and Tzaferis, "Capernaum," 292; Tzaferis, "Historical Summary," 216; and Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus*, 149–52.

35. See the comparisons between Capernaum and the cities in Crossan and Reed, *Excavating Jesus*, 51–97.

36. A thorough examination of Galilee's fishing industry in the first century can be found in K. C. Hanson, "The Galilean Fishing Economy and the Jesus Tradition," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 27 (1997): 99–111.

37. With the receding of the lake in recent decades, archaeologists have been able to explore the remains of ports and harbor facilities in various locations around the lake. See Mendel Nun, "Ports of Galilee," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 25, no. 4 (July/August 1999): 18–31, 64. Since most of these have not been systematically excavated, however, their precise date is often difficult to determine with certainty.

38. Second-century coins indicate that Gadara's harbor was sufficiently large to host naval battle games. See Nun, "Ports of Galilee," 29–31, 64.

39. Josephus, *War* 3.462–542; Nun, "Ports of Galilee," 27–29.

40. See Hershel Shanks, "Excavation Planned for Mary Magdalene's Hometown," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 33, no. 5 (September/October 2007): 52–55, and Nun, "Ports of Galilee," 27–29. Aviam, "People, Land, Economy," 13–15, considers Magdala's impressive harbor built by the Hasmoneans and expanded by Herod Antipas to be "the first evidence for the royal investment in the Galilee."

41. Nun, "Ports of Galilee," 27–29.

42. Murphy-O'Connor, "Fishers of Fish," 25–27, speculated that Peter moved from Bethsaida (in Philip's territory) to Capernaum (in Antipas' territory) to take advantage of the flourishing fishing industry in the tetrarchy of Antipas, and also to avoid double taxation incurred by sending fish across political borders to Magdala. This is an interesting possibility, but there is no direct evidence for this suggestion and no reason to believe that there were no fish-processing facilities on Philip's side of the lake.

43. Nun, "Ports of Galilee," 24–25, shows that harbor remains survived on the western side of the site as well, but that the Franciscan excavators did not recognize them as such and unknowingly dumped their excavation debris into the ancient harbor.

44. Loffreda and Tzaferis, "Capernaum," 296. See Tzaferis, *Capernaum* 1, 2–3.

45. Capernaum's promenade appears to extend about 800 meters along the lakeshore. See Nun, "Ports of Galilee," 24–25. However, the excavation reports show that the extent of the Early Roman period village was much shorter, with buildings extending only 300–500 meters. See Loffreda and Tzaferis, "Capernaum," 292; Tzaferis, "Historical Summary," 216; and Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus*, 149–52.

46. Nun, "Ports of Galilee," 24–27.

47. Loffreda and Tzaferis, "Capernaum," 295; Tzaferis, "Ancient Capernaum," 201; Tzaferis, *Capernaum* 1, 2–3, 218, suggests that these pools may have belonged to an ancient fish market. Similar storage pools have been found at the nearby sites of Kursi and Magdala. See Nun, "Ports of Galilee," 21, and Dina Avshalom-Gorni, "Migdal—Preliminary Report," *Hadashot Arkeologiyot*, 125.

48. Nun, "Ports of Galilee," 24–27, seems to prefer this position.

49. In the one preliminary report of the Roman period remains from eastern Capernaum, Laughlin, "Capernaum," 58–59, states that the extant port features date to the Late Roman period (i.e., the second and third centuries). See also Crossan and Reed, *Excavating Jesus*, 85.

50. Appold, "Peter in Profile," 141, claims that Antipas' administration taxed 25–40 percent of the income from daily catches, thus necessitating administrative buildings and officers to document business and collect taxes near the harbors. See Hanson, "Galilean Fishing Economy," 99–111.

51. Nun, "Ports of Galilee," 21, describes this structure, but does not provide a precise date for it.

52. Some public buildings (including a bathhouse and storerooms) were excavated along the eastern portion of the promenade, but these date to the second or third centuries. See Laughlin, "Capernaum," 58–59.

53. K. C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 99, identifies Matthew/Levi the "tax collector" as working for Antipas' administration providing fishing licenses and collecting tolls on catches.

54. Based on the diminutive form of the word, Gerhard Friedrich, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 7:97 n. 93, states that "the τελώνιον at which Levi (Mt.) sat was probably a simple exchange table on which receipts were written and payments received . . . The tax collector could get up and go away without ado." In contrast, the term *bayṭhamekes* used in b. Sukk. 30a likely referred to "a proper building." If this assessment is correct, Matthew/Levi may not have required an actual structure from which to conduct his business.

55. For small finds relating to the Galilean fishing industry, see Sandra Fortner, "The Fishing Implements and Maritime Activities of Bethsaida-Julias (et-Tell)," in *Bethsaida: Volume 2*, 269–80. For overviews of ancient Galilean fishing methods, see Mendel Nun, *The Sea of Galilee and Its Fishermen in the New Testament* (Israel: Kibbutz Ein Gev, 1989) and Mendel Nun, "Cast Your Nets Upon the Waters: Fish and Fishermen in Jesus' Time," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 19, no. 6 (November/December 1993): 46–56.

56. Nun, *Galilee and Its Fishermen*, 16–22.

57. Nun, *Galilee and Its Fishermen*, 23–27, claims that these were the small fish (*opsaria*) referred to in the New Testament accounts of the multiplication of the fish and loaves (see John 6:9).

58. Nun, "Cast Your Nets," 53–56.

59. The net was discovered in a cave near Ein Gedi used during the Bar Kokhba revolt (AD 132–35). Yigael Yadin, *Bar-Kokhba: The Rediscovery of the Legendary Hero of the Second Jewish Revolt against Rome* (New York: Random House, 1971), 194–97, claimed that the net was for trapping fowl, but Nun, *Galilee and Its Fishermen*, 26, argued that it was a fishing net.

60. For the different kinds of stone and lead weights found at et-Tell/"Bethsaida," see Fortner, "Fishing Implements," 270–76. Since the small finds from Capernaum have not been published, there is no record of weights from the first-century village, although they certainly were used there. Such weights were found on the east side of Capernaum in domestic structures from later periods. See Tzaferis, *Capernaum 1*, 131–35 (fig. 72, nos. 15–21).

61. Fortner, "Fishing Implements," 272, reports seven needles for mending sails and nets found at et-Tell/"Bethsaida." A similar needle was found at Magdala. Nun, *Galilee and Its Fishermen*, 31.

62. Fortner, "Fishing Implements," 271; Nun, *Galilee and Its Fishermen*, 45–46. As for Capernaum, Crossan and Reed, *Excavating Jesus*, 84, states that "fish-hooks and net weights [were] strewn around" Capernaum's courtyards (see Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus*, 157). However, as far as I can determine, only two fishhooks have been published by the excavators. These were found in the "house of Peter" embedded within a fourth-century floor (Corbo, *Cafarnaon I*, 75, table, 80, photo, 32). While they may be evidence for the occupation of the home's earliest inhabitants, Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places*, 278, suggests that the two hooks were deposited by later Christian pilgrims to commemorate Peter.

63. Fortner, "Fishing Implements," 278, discusses the irregular shapes and sizes of stone anchors from et-Tell/"Bethsaida." Tzaferis, *Capernaum I*, 132–33 (fig. 72, no. 31) reports the discovery of a stone anchor on the east side of Capernaum from a later context.

64. Shelley Wachsmann, *The Sea of Galilee Boat: A 2000-Year-Old Discovery from the Sea of Legends* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing, 2000).

65. See John J. Rousseau and Rami Arav, *Jesus and His World: An Archaeological and Cultural Dictionary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 25–30; Crossan and Reed, *Excavating Jesus*, 86.

66. Appold, "Peter in Profile," 141.

67. Murphy-O'Connor, "Fishers of Fish," 22–27, 48–49.

68. Hanson, "Galilean Fishing Economy," 99–111.

69. Scholars typically locate the Matthean community in Syria, but arguments have been made that Matthew's Gospel was written in Galilee, highlighting Matthew's ties and familiarity with the region. See Anthony J. Saldarini, "The Gospel of Matthew and Jewish-Christian Conflict in the Galilee," in *The Galilee in Late Antiquity*, ed. Lee I. Levine (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992), 23–38. Similar, though weaker, arguments have been made for locating the composition of Mark in Galilee. See Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 127, 162, and Cilliers Breytenbach, "Mark and Galilee: Text World and Historical World," in *Galilee through the Centuries: Confluence of Cultures*, ed. Eric M. Meyers (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 75–85.

70. Nun, *Galilee and Its Fishermen*, 23–27.

71. Appold, "Peter in Profile," 141.

72. However, Hanson, "Galilean Fishing Economy," 105, points out that even if Peter, James, and John owned their own boats and were able to hire day laborers to assist in their work, they should not necessarily be considered "wealthy," especially in comparison with the urban elites of Tiberias. This caution is supported by the modest nature of the "Galilee boat" discussed previously, which shows that fishermen with very limited resources could own their own boats.

73. For the Lucan account of Peter's calling (including Luke's reworking of Mark and incorporation of additional details), see François Bovon, *Luke 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1–9:50* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 166–72. Hanson, "Galilean Fishing Economy," 105, points out that fishing "cooperatives" (*koinōnoi*) are attested in Egypt and Asia Minor during the first century, but not in Palestine until the fourth century. Therefore, Luke's account of Peter's fishing business "may be due to [Luke's] own experiences or interests rather than those of the [Galilean] fisherman."



74. See the descriptions and analyses of these sites in Morten Horning Jensen, *Herod Antipas in Galilee* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 126–86; Aviam, “People, Land, Economy,” 5–48; Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus*, 62–138; and Avshalom-Gorni, “Migdal.”

75. Loffreda and Tzaferis, “Capernaum,” 292, claim that the “planning of the village was organic and orderly,” with main streets dividing the village into quarters and small neighborhoods. However, other scholars point out that the semblance of order at the current excavation site was imposed on the village by the building of the monumental synagogue in the Byzantine period. In the first century, Capernaum’s streets did not intersect at right angles. There was no *cardo* or *decumanus*, and the blocks of buildings do not appear to have been arranged along axes. See Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus*, 152–53; Chancey, *Greco-Roman Culture*, 111 n. 89; and Jensen, *Herod Antipas*, 171–72.

76. Loffreda, *Recovering Capernaum*, 21, 24.

77. Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus*, 153; Katharina Galor, “Domestic Architecture,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Daily Life in Roman Palestine*, ed. Catherine Hezser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 434; Barry Hobson, *Latrinae et Foricae: Toilets in the Roman World* (London: Duckworth, 2009), 129–30. Jodi Magness, *Stone and Dung, Oil and Spit: Jewish Daily Life in the Time of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 130–44, also discusses these conditions, the lack of toilet privacy in ancient villages, and the work of manure merchants who often removed accruing human and animal waste to sell as fertilizer. The Torah required the Israelites of the desert wanderings to bury their excrement outside the camp to ensure ritual (not hygienic) purity in the vicinity of the Tabernacle (see Deuteronomy 23:12–14), but in the Second Temple period this practice was only a concern to sectarians who sought to extend the purity laws of the temple into daily life. For example, Josephus (*War* 2.147–49) notes that the Essenes were unusual among Jews for their concern over toilet privacy and their literal observance of Deuteronomy’s injunction. In contrast, later rabbis did not consider excrement to be ritually impure in a daily context, and were thus less concerned about its visible presence in the community. See also Jodi Magness, “What’s the Poop on Ancient Toilets and Toilet Habits?,” *Near Eastern Archaeology* 75, no. 2 (June 2012): 80–87.

78. For a more complete study on ancient domestic architecture, see Yizhar Hirschfeld, *The Palestinian Dwelling in the Roman-Byzantine Period* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1995) (For domestic architecture in Capernaum specifically, see pages 68–69, 254); Loffreda, *Recovering Capernaum*, 20–24; Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus*, 157–60. Appold, “Peter in Profile,” 141–42, discusses the similarities between the average dwelling at Capernaum and the domestic architecture at other nearby villages.

79. Katharina Galor, “Domestic Architecture in Roman and Byzantine Galilee and Golan,” *Near Eastern Archaeology* 66, nos. 1–2 (March/June 2003): 48, 54, considers the quality and dressing of building stones as reflections of the inhabitants’ relative wealth and prosperity. At less prosperous villages like Capernaum, the irregular fieldstones used for construction were bound by a “mortar” mixed of marly soil, water, and straw. See also Galor, “Domestic Architecture” (2010), 432.

80. V. Corbo, *The House of Saint Peter at Capernaum* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1969), 37.



81. See Corbo, *House of Saint Peter*, 37. Some dwellings in the region used basalt pilasters, vaulting, arches, and beams to support roofs of heavy stone slabs (as seen at nearby Chorazin), but this technique is not attested in Galilee until the third century AD and was not popular until the Byzantine period. During the Early Roman period, the wood, reed, and mud thatched roofs used at Capernaum were much more common in Galilean villages. See Hirschfeld, *Palestinian Dwelling*, 237–43, and Galor, “Domestic Architecture” (2010), 430–32. For the absence of stone beams, arches, or roof slabs in Capernaum’s domestic structures, see Laughlin, “Capernaum,” 60, and Galor, “Domestic Architecture” (2003), 49–55.

82. Hirschfeld, *Palestinian Dwelling*, 243–46, describes this common style of roof construction and the effort required to maintain it during the rainy season. See also Galor, “Domestic Architecture” (2010), 433.

83. Corbo, *House of St. Peter*, 37; Loffreda, *Recovering Capernaum*, 72.

84. See Hirschfeld, *Palestinian Dwelling*, 243, and Galor, “Domestic Architecture” (2010), 430.

85. The only published report of ceramic tiles at Capernaum is in Laughlin, “Capernaum,” 61, which indicated that tiles were found in association with a Byzantine-period public fountain on the northeast side of the site.

86. See Crossan and Reed, *Excavating Jesus*, 83–84; Hirschfeld, *Palestinian Dwelling*, 243; and Galor, “Domestic Architecture” (2010), 430.

87. See Galor, “Domestic Architecture” (2010), 431, and Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus*, 157.

88. Evidence for stone thresholds, door posts, and locking mechanisms were found at the courtyard entrances, but not in association with the living rooms. See Mattila, “Revisiting Jesus’ Capernaum,” 115; Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus*, 159; and Hirschfeld, *Palestinian Dwelling*, 254–55.

89. Galor, “Domestic Architecture” (2010), 432, also considers a structure’s flooring as an indication of the prosperity of its inhabitants. In contrast to more wealthy homes with floors of hewn or polished stone, simple homes with floors of compact dirt or basalt cobbles typically indicate more limited means.

90. Corbo, *House of St. Peter*, 39.

91. Corbo, *House of St. Peter*, 37–39; Hirschfeld, *Palestinian Dwelling*, 254–55; Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus*, 159; Mattila, “Revisiting Jesus’ Capernaum,” 115.

92. Corbo, *House of St. Peter*, 40–50, describes the fireplaces and ash deposits in the courtyard of Insula I (the “house of Peter”). For the multifaceted uses of courtyards, see Galor, “Domestic Architecture” (2010), 433; Loffreda, *Recovering Capernaum*, 20; and Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus*, 157.

93. Hirschfeld, *Palestinian Dwelling*, 245.

94. Loffreda, *Recovering Capernaum*, 24; Mattila, “Revisiting Jesus’ Capernaum,” 117.

95. For an official report on the pottery at Capernaum, see Loffreda, *Cafarnao II*. Unfortunately, this report does not include a full tally of household vessels, but a description and evaluation of the assemblage can be found in Andrea M. Berlin, “Romanization and anti-Romanization in pre-Revolt Galilee,” in *The First Jewish Revolt: Archaeology*,

*History, and Ideology*, ed. Andrea M. Berlin and J. Andrew Overman (London: Routledge, 2002), 60–64; see also Crossan and Reed, *Excavating Jesus*, 85.

96. Andrea Berlin's analysis of Galilean household pottery has shown that cooking pots (with rounded bodies and narrow mouths) were well designed for preparing soups, beans, and other long-simmering meals, while "casseroles" (with wide bodies and broad mouths) were well designed for preparing thin stews containing chunks of meat and vegetables. Furthermore, the relatively small number of serving vessels per household indicates that Galilean families shared two to three common platters or bowls while they dined; see Andrea Berlin, *Gamla I: The Pottery of the Second Temple Period* (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 2006), 140–51, and "Jewish Life before the Revolt: The Archaeological Evidence," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 36, no. 4 (2005): 437–45; see also Crossan and Reed, *Excavating Jesus*, 96.

97. Berlin, *Gamla I*, 137–38, supports this suggestion by pointing out that domestic space in Galilean villages was rarely large enough to accommodate family dining at a table; see also Magness, *Stone and Dung*, 77–84.

98. Mattila, "Revisiting Jesus' Capernaum," 90, points to a small number of Rhodian wine jars as evidence for imported wine at Capernaum (see Loffreda, *Cafarnao II*, 65, 209–10), but these date to the second century BC, when such wine was distributed throughout Galilee (see Chancey, *Greco-Roman Culture*, 134). Evidence for local wine production and consumption at Capernaum in the Roman period is found on a Hebrew ostrakon from Insula I, which reads: "N the wine maker/wine which he squeezed/may it be for good." Strange, "Review," 69, argues against Corbo's claims that the inscription refers to the Eucharist practices of Jewish-Christians (Corbo, *Cafarnao I*, 107–11).

99. For example, see Arav, "New Testament Archaeology," 84.

100. Stone is not in the list of materials susceptible to impurity in Leviticus 11, so stone vessels were seen as acceptable for the purposes of ritual hand washings (m. Kelim 10:1). For the use of stone vessels in early Judaism, see Yithak Magen, *The Stone Vessel Industry in the Second Temple Period: Excavations at Hizma and the Jerusalem Temple Mount* (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 2002). Orfali, *Capharnaüm*, 64, fig. 115, reports stone vessels being found in the areas around Capernaum's synagogue. Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus*, 160, reports stone mugs, cups, and basins found elsewhere at the site.

101. Jonathan Reed, "Stone Vessels and Gospel Texts: Purity and Socio-Economics in John 2," in *Zeichen aus Text und Stein: Studien auf dem Weg zu einer Archäologie des Neuen Testaments*, ed. Stefan Alkier and Jürgen Zangenberg (Tübingen: A. Francke, 2003), 381–401, especially pages 385, 395–96. Although Capernaum's stone vessels were never published, Reed claims to have personally examined 150 fragments recovered in the excavations.

102. Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus*, 157–58.

103. In this account, the Pharisees criticize Jesus' disciples because "they break the tradition of the elders, for they do not wash their hands before they eat" (Matthew 15:2). In response, Jesus rebukes them for emphasizing traditional practices (see Matthew 15:3–9) and focusing on outer ritual purity at the expense of inner ethical purity (see Matthew 15:10–11, 17–20; see also Matthew 23:25–26). Peter's initial discomfort at this exchange is reflected in the disciples' concern that Jesus offended the Pharisees (see Matthew 15:12)

and in his request for Jesus to clarify his unpopular teaching on ritual purity (see Matthew 15:15). For a technical consideration of Jesus' relationship to the ritual purity laws in this episode, see Thomas Kazen, *Jesus and Purity Halakhah: Was Jesus Indifferent to Impurity?* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 60–88.

104. The nature of this man's position as a "centurion" is uncertain. It implies a Roman military presence in Capernaum during the time of Jesus and Peter, but historical sources indicate that Roman military units had no permanent presence in Galilee until after the Jewish revolts, when Galilee was stripped of its relative autonomy and placed under the administrative control of the Roman legate in Syria. The excavations at Capernaum support this picture, with the only traces of a Roman military presence—a bathhouse, mausoleum, and milestone—dating to the second century (Loffreda, *Recovering Capernaum*, 81; Laughlin, "Capernaum," 55–61, 90; Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus*, 155–56). Therefore, the "centurion" of the synoptic Gospels must have been a Herodian military officer who was given a title adopted from the Roman army. See Chancey, *Myth of a Gentile Galilee*, 102, and *Greco-Roman Culture*, 50–55.

105. The desperation of the royal official to find a cure for his sick son recalls the limited medical resources Josephus found in the village. See Josephus, *Life* 403–4; Mason, *Life of Josephus*, 160.

106. A small number of imported Rhodian wine jars stamped with Greek letters were found in Capernaum from the second century BC (Loffreda, *Cafarnao II*, 65, 209–10), and Hasmonean coins with Greek legends circulated in the region up to the first century AD. However, none of these items were produced in Capernaum and are thus not evidence for a Greek-speaking population in the village. See Chancey, *Greco-Roman Culture*, 133–41. The only known inscription produced in Capernaum in the Roman period was a Hebrew ostrakon mentioning a local winemaker. See Strange, "Review," 69, and Corbo, *Cafarnao I*, 107–11.

107. Bovon, *Luke 1*, 257–65, suggests that Luke's redacted version of this story was meant to emphasize the kindness and benefaction of a "pious centurion" toward the local Jewish community, a trend manifested elsewhere in Luke's writings (e.g., Acts 10:1–11:18). For the actual tensions between Jews and Roman culture in first-century Galilean villages, see Berlin, "Romanization and anti-Romanization," 57–73.

108. A full set of first- or second-century glass vessels—including plates, bowls, goblets, and flasks—were discovered at Capernaum in Insula II (between the synagogue and "house of Peter"). See Stanislaw Loffreda, "Vasi in vetro e in argilla trovati a Cafarnao nel 1984. Rapporto preliminare," *Liber Annuus* 34 (1984): 385–408, and *Holy Land Pottery at the Time of Jesus: Early Roman Period, 63 BC–70 AD* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 2002), 103–4. Mattila, "Revisiting Jesus' Capernaum," 94–95, points to this collection as evidence for moderate wealth at Capernaum (contra Crossan and Reed, *Excavating Jesus*, 85, which denies the existence of even the simplest glass forms). However, Mattila recognizes that this elegant-looking glassware is free blown, making it the least expensive glass available.

109. Loffreda, *Cafarnao II*, 66, 210, and *Holy Land Pottery*, 70–72; Mattila, "Revisiting Jesus' Capernaum," 91–92. Berlin, "Romanization and anti-Romanization," 57–73, shows that this type of pottery was present at Capernaum (and other Galilean sites) in

the first century BC but not after, suggesting that its subsequent absence reflects anti-Roman attitudes among Jewish villagers at the time of Jesus and Peter.

110. Reed, "Stone Vessels and Gospel Texts," 385, 395–96, shows that these represent 2 percent of Capernaum's stone vessels, a slight indicator of modest wealth; see also Mattila, "Revisiting Jesus' Capernaum," 98.

111. Jensen, *Herod Antipas*, 172.

112. For the excavations and assessment of the site, see Corbo, *House of St. Peter*; Corbo, *Cafarnaio I*, 25–111; Loffreda and Tzaferis, "Capernaum," 295; and James F. Strange and Hershel Shanks, "Has the House Where Jesus Stayed in Capernaum Been Found?," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 8, no. 6 (1982): 26–39. For a critique of the excavators' interpretations, see Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places*, 273–90.

113. Anders Runesson, "Architecture, Conflict, and Identity Formation: Jews and Christians in Capernaum from the First to the Sixth Century," in *Religion, Ethnicity, and Identity*, 240–42.

114. Loffreda, *Recovering Capernaum*, 57. Breytenbach, "Mark and Galilee," 84, points out that Mark (written in the 60s AD) identifies the house of Peter in Capernaum as a spiritual center of the early Jesus movement around the same time Room 1 was renovated.

115. For the original report of the painted and decorated plaster, see Testa, *Cafarnaio IV*, 13–48. Strange, "Review, Part 2," 64–65, offers a summary and critique of the excavators' interpretation of the images.

116. Testa, *Cafarnaio IV*, 51–182; Jack Finegan, *The Archaeology of the New Testament: The Life of Jesus and the Beginning of the Early Church* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 108–9. Based on the official publication reports, inscriptions included the following: ΠΕΤΡΟ(С or Y) ΒΕΡΕΝΙ(KH) ("Peter" or "of Peter Bereni(ce)"); (Ι)ΧΘΥC ("fish"); (ΧΡΙ)CΤΕ ΕΛΕΗC(ΟΝ) ("Christ have mercy"); (ΚΕ ΙC ΧΕ ΒΟΗΘΙ) ("Lord Jesus Christ Help"); ΡΟ ΜΑΕ ΒΟ ΡΕΤΡ ΟC ("Peter, Helper of Rome?"). Strange, "Review, Part 2," 66–68, evaluates Testa's readings and, in some cases, offers a devastating critique.

117. For example, see the assessment of Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places*, 273–77, 293–94.

118. Loffreda, *Recovering Capernaum*, 52, 71.

119. Appold, "Peter in Profile," 140.

120. Loffreda, *Recovering Capernaum*, 54, 71.

121. For a discussion of common religious activities in first-century synagogues, see Lee I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 145–69.

122. For example, see Howard Clark Kee, "Defining the First-Century C.E. Synagogue: Problems and Progress," *New Testament Studies* 41 (1995): 481–500, and Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 21–44, 135–73.

123. Chad S. Spigel, *Ancient Synagogue Seating Capacities: Methodology, Analysis and Limits* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 1–6; Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 135–45; Richard A. Horsley, *Archaeology, History, and Society in Galilee: The Social Context of Jesus and the Rabbis* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 131–53.

124. Anders Runesson et al., *The Ancient Synagogue from Its Origins to 200 C.E.: A Source Book* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2008), 22–25, 33.

125. A stone table decorated with a menorah found in the synagogue at Magdala (dating to the 60s AD) is the lone example of religious iconography in a pre-AD 70 synagogue. See Avshalom-Gorni, "Migdal."

126. Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 45–55; Jodi Magness, *The Archaeology of the Holy Land* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 286–92.

127. Recalling this account, there is epigraphical evidence from the late first century that a synagogue in the Diaspora (Acmonia) was built for a Jewish community by a Gentile benefactor (Julia Severa, a high priestess of the imperial cult in the city). See Runesson et al., *Ancient Synagogue*, 134–35.

128. The initial excavation report for this building is found in Corbo, *Cafarnao I*, 113–69.

129. For example, see Orfali, *Capharnaüm*, 74–86.

130. Kohl and Watzinger, *Antike Synagogen*, 218, were the first to make this argument.

131. For descriptions of these excavations, see Loffreda and Tzaferis, "Capernaum," 292–95.

132. Over 20,000 of these coins were discovered in a single locus (Trench 12; L812) in the northeast corner of the courtyard. See Ermanno A. Arslan, "The L812 Trench Deposit inside the Synagogue and the Isolated Finds of Coins in Capernaum, Israel: A Comparison of Two Groups," *Israel Numismatic Research* 6 (2011): 147–62. Thousands of coins from the fourth and fifth century were also found in other trenches under the courtyard, prayer hall, and porch. The complete collection has not been published, but examples of coins and pottery from each trench can be seen in Virgilio Corbo, Stanislao Loffreda, and Augusto Spijkerman, *La Sinagoga di Cafarnao* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1970), 61–139; S. Loffreda, "Potsherds from a Sealed Level of the Synagogue at Capharnaum," *Liber Annuus* 29 (1979): 215–20; and "Coins from the Synagogue at Capharnaum," *Liber Annuus* 47 (1997): 223–44.

133. See David Milson, *Art and Architecture of the Synagogue in Late Antique Palestine* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2007), 335–36; Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 77; Spigel, *Ancient Synagogue*, 173–77. Jodi Magness, "The Question of the Synagogue: The Problem of Typology," in *Judaism in Late Antiquity*, ed. Alan Avery-Peck and Jacob Neusner (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill 2001), 18–26, argues that the synagogue was built in the early sixth century. A small number of Israeli scholars still hold to a second- or third-century date for the building based on its architectural style. E.g., Gideon Foerster, "The Ancient Synagogues of the Galilee," 289–319 (esp. 300) in *Galilee in Late Antiquity*. They claim that the fourth- and fifth-century coins and pottery were deposited under the pavement during later repairs or renovations, but this is now a minority position.

134. The first to make this claim was one of the synagogue's excavators, Virgilio Corbo. Although he and Loffreda had previously shown that residential buildings existed under the fifth-century synagogue, they later reinterpreted the evidence and argued that an earlier first-century synagogue stood on the site. See Virgilio Corbo, "Resti della sinagoga del primo secolo a Cafarnao," in *Studia Hierosolymitana III*, ed. Giovanni Claudio Botini (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1982), 313–57; Stanislao Loffreda, "Ceramica ellenistico-romana nel sottosuolo della sinagoga di Cafarnao," in *Studia Hierosolymitana III*, 273–312; see also James F. Strange and Hershel Shanks, "Synagogue Where Jesus Preached



Found at Capernaum,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 9, no. 6 (1983): 24–31; Loffreda, *Recovering Capernaum*, 43–49.

135. Similar basalt foundations were found under the other limestone walls and stylobates of the prayer hall. See Strange and Shanks, “Synagogue,” 30, and Loffreda, *Recovering Capernaum*, 45–49.

136. Pottery found in and under this basalt cobblestone dates to the first century AD, indicating that the pavement must have been laid during or after that century. See Strange and Shanks, “Synagogue,” 29.

137. Loffreda, *Recovering Capernaum*, 45–49; Loffreda and Tzaferis, “Capernaum,” 294–95.

138. Some believe that the basalt foundation represents the walls of a synagogue renovated in the second or third century. See Loffreda, *Recovering Capernaum*, 45–49, and Runesson, “Architecture,” 239 n. 30.

139. For proposed reconstructions, see Runesson et al., *Ancient Synagogue*, 29–32; Runesson, “Architecture,” 237–39; Donald D. Binder, *Into the Temple Courts: The Place of the Synagogues in the Second Temple Period* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999), 186–92; Strange and Shanks, “Synagogue,” 28–31.

140. These measurements are given in Strange and Shanks, “Synagogue,” 30. According to their calculations, the large hall at Gamla measured 19.4 x 15.4 meters (covering an area of 299 square meters), making the proposed first-century synagogue at Capernaum significantly larger than the Gamla synagogue. For slight variations on the measurements of both buildings, see Spigel, *Ancient Synagogue*, 76–78, 173–77, 326–27. Based on his calculations, Lee Levine estimates that the proposed first-century synagogue at Capernaum would have been “about 50 percent larger than the one at Gamla and more than twice the size of the Masada and Herodium buildings.” Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 71; see also Binder, *Into Temple Courts*, 192–93.

141. According to Spigel, *Ancient Synagogue*, 173–77, 326–27, the prayer hall at Capernaum could hold over 700 individuals, which, for the site’s first-century population, could be over half of the village. In contrast, the much more prosperous, densely populated, and partially walled town of Gamla had a synagogue that could fit around 500 (between one-sixth and one-eighth of the community).

142. Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 71.

143. As far as I can determine, no reliable evidence has been found for the roof, columns, or other building materials of this building. Corbo, “Resti della sinagoga,” 339, and Strange and Shanks, “Synagogue,” 31, claim that column drums—one made of gray granite—and fragments of cornice molding were discovered in the fill under the pavement of the limestone synagogue, but they do not provide the necessary illustrations or stratigraphic data to demonstrate a connection between this material and a first-century synagogue.

144. Yoram Tsafrir, “The Synagogues at Capernaum and Meroth and the Dating of the Galilean Synagogue,” in *The Roman and Byzantine Near East: Some Recent Archaeological Research*, ed. John Humphrey (Ann Arbor, MI: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1995), 154–56; Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 71.

145. Tsafrir, “Synagogues,” 155; Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 71. Corbo, “Resti della sinagoga,” 339, and Strange and Shanks, “Synagogue,” 28, 30, acknowledge this problem and

speculate that an elevated entrance existed along the west wall (above the extant courses of the basalt wall), which must have been accessed by stairs. However, no evidence for a door or stairs in this area has been discovered.

146. According to their reconstructions, Strange and Shanks, "Synagogue," 28, and Runesson et al., *Ancient Synagogue*, 29–32, draw in the west stylobate as extending the full length of the hall, but postulate a small gap to the south of the east stylobate. For an image of the unusually high eastern "stylobate" (MB5), see Binder, *Into Temple Courts*, 189, fig. 9.

147. For the synagogue floors at Gamla, Magdala, and Khirbet Cana, see Runesson et al., *Ancient Synagogue*, 23–25, 33; Avshalom-Gorni, "Migdal."

148. For example, the seventh-century palace at Khirbet el-Minyeh is a limestone structure with a basalt foundation. See K. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 2:381–89.

149. Magness, "Question of the Synagogue," 19–20; Tsafir, "Synagogues," 155–56, points out that the misalignment in the southwest corner is so slight (ca. 10 cm) that, given the sloping topography of the site, the architect likely left room for minimal corrections as he laid the basalt foundations.

150. Stanislaw Loffreda, "The Late Chronology of the Synagogue of Capernaum," *Israel Exploration Journal* 23 (1973): 37–42; Kee, "Defining," 495–96; Magness, "Question of the Synagogue," 20–22.

151. Walls of earlier domestic structures were found in numerous areas under and around the synagogue: Trench 6 (outside the northeast corner of the prayer hall) contained a wall belonging to a house whose pavement extended into Trench 2 (inside the northeast corner of the prayer hall); Trench 9 (outside the southwestern section of the porch) contained a north-south wall which originated from a group of private houses to the south of the synagogue and continued under the foundations of the porch; outside the northern face of the prayer hall, a long wall ran parallel to the synagogue and continued under the stepped structure on the synagogue's northwest corner; the street built between the synagogue and private houses to the south blocked a corridor used by one of these houses (Room 66); the northeast stairway of the synagogue courtyard was also built against the wall of a private house; finally, a long north-south wall from a Hellenistic structure was found in Trench 14 (the southwest portion of the prayer hall), and remains of that building continued outside the synagogue in Trench 15. For a description and top plan of these features, see Loffreda, "Late Chronology," 38–40, and Tsafir, "Synagogues," 156. The presence of these walls both under and continuing outside the synagogue shows that they could not have been internal rooms of the proposed first-century synagogue, which was supposedly confined to the space of the prayer hall.

152. Basalt pavements belonging to domestic structures were also found under and around the synagogue. Sections extend from under the southern part of the nave (Trench 1) to under the southern façade, under the foundations of the northern wall and stylobate of the prayer hall (Trench 2) to under the northwest corner of the courtyard (Trench 11), under the foundations of the west wall of the prayer hall (Trench 3), and beyond the northwest corner of the prayer hall (Trench 7). See Loffreda, "Late Chronology," 38–40. Like many of the walls, these pavements also extend well beyond the proposed boundary of the first-century synagogue.

153. For example, a small channel to the north of the synagogue was put out of use with the synagogue's construction (Trench 12). See Loffreda, "Late Chronology," 38–40. Chancey, *Myth of a Gentile Galilee*, 103, claims that stairs from these early domestic structures were also found under the synagogue, but it is not clear from his description where these were located.

154. Loffreda, "Late Chronology," 40.

155. For a comparison between the basalt cobblestone under the synagogue and other courtyard pavements at the site, see S. Loffreda, "A Reply to the Editor," *Israel Exploration Journal* 23 (1973): 184.

156. According to the excavators, fourth-century coins found in the occupational levels of some of the domestic structures under the synagogue demonstrate that "the private houses . . . were in use until the second half of the fourth century AD." See Loffreda, "Late Chronology," 40, and Spijkerman, "La moneta della sinagoga di Cafarnao," in *La Sinagoga di Cafarnao*, 125–39. Tsafir, "Synagogues," 156, also points out that in the fill above the basalt pavements, the layers closest to the pavement only contained coins dating through the third and early fourth centuries (likely representing the accumulations on the residential floors), whereas the upper layers of the fill contained all of the late-fourth- and early-fifth-century coins (likely representing the fill brought in to support the synagogue pavement); see also Magness, "Question of the Synagogue," 22, and Loffreda, "Coins," 230, 240–41.

157. Those who reject the presence of a first-century synagogue at Capernaum include Kee, "Defining," Tsafir, "Synagogues," and Magness, "Question of the Synagogue." Those who omit it from their work on ancient synagogues include Milson, *Art and Architecture*, 335–36, and Spigel, *Ancient Synagogues*, 173–77. Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 71, simply states that "given the meager remains, there is little to be learned about the overall plan of this building and its identification as a synagogue is at present rather tenuous."

158. Strange and Shanks, "House Where Jesus Stayed," 29–30, recognized this possibility, and suggested that the remains of a home were eventually converted into a synagogue.

159. See Runesson et al., *Ancient Synagogue*, 22–25, 65–66.