

The Development and Impact of Archaeological Method in Excavations of Roman Period Synagogues in Galilee

In this paper I will trace the evolution of archaeological method in Palestine beginning in the 19th century and ending with the method used at the Shikhin Excavation Project since 2011. This study will define distinguishing characteristics of synagogue architecture throughout Galilee and review artifacts in the vicinity which date the structures as qualified by the evolving archaeological method. I believe I will find that excavations at synagogue sites dated to the Roman period display three common techniques used in modern Syro-Palestinian Archaeology: reliance on pre-excavation surveys, stratigraphic excavation with defined loci, and the 5x5 meter grid plan. These methods are a product of generations of archaeological innovation in Palestine and they reflect the changing motivations of excavators and scholars.

I will begin by evaluating 19th and 20th century excavation methods of Roman period synagogues in Galilee. I am especially interested in the reasoning behind their methods. How and why did they choose particular sites and how do their mistakes and successes contribute to later 20th and 21st century archaeology in Galilee?

I will continue by defining the method used at Shikhin and how it is a logical continuation of techniques used by previous generations of archaeologists. This method was specifically developed by Dr. James F. Strange and Dr. Eric Meyers in the 1960's-80's. Again, I will interpret the motivations behind their choice of sites and the methods used today in comparison to previous excavations.

I believe a common motivation behind the choice of sites and the methods of excavation after 1948 will become evident through this research. Seemingly, prior to the declaration of the Jewish state, excavations in the region were motivated largely by westerners desire to trace

Christian heritage. In comparison, later 20th and 21st century excavations by western and Israeli/Palestinian archaeologists seem to be motivated by the claim of Jewish heritage in the region. The resulting impact of this claim appears to have had a bearing on the ousting of Arab Palestinian communities.