

International team explores rural Galilee and finds ancient synagogue

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Among various important discoveries, the 2010 Kinneret Regional Project discovered an ancient synagogue, in use at around 400 AD. This year's archeological focus is the first systematic excavation on Horvat Kur, a village inhabited from the Early Roman through the Early Medieval periods located on a gentle hill two kilometers west of the Lake of Galilee. Thirty volunteers - mostly students of theology, religious studies, and archeology - and staff from the Netherlands, Finland, Switzerland, Romania, Belgium, Spain, Israel, and Germany explore the material remains of the village life in Galilee, a region that features very prominently in Early Christian and Rabbinic tradition. The 2010 campaign lasts from June 21 until July 16 and is sponsored by the Universities of Bern, Helsinki, and Leiden.

Already after two weeks of excavation, the hardships of digging in the blazing Galilean sun were revealed. Archeologists worked in two different areas. In area A - situated on the hill-top - a narrow test trench dug in 2008 was expanded to a larger area of three squares, 5 x 5 meters each, now being fully excavated. At this location, remains of an elaborately built monumental wall were discovered already at an early stage of excavation. This wall, preserved up to 80 centimeters, runs North-South for at least 10 meters and clearly divides the excavated space into two different areas. To the west of it, a cobblestone pavement covered with what the researchers think was a small courtyard. In 2008, a large number of coins were found on the surfaces of this open space, indicating that the building represented by the above mentioned monumental wall might already have been in use at around 400 AD.

During the 2010 campaign, another large amount of coins came to light in the same area which are likely to corroborate this dating once numismatic analysis of the newly found coin material is completed. Fragments of pilasters and other architectural elements were found close by in tumble, which will eventually contribute to the reconstruction of layout and design of the building.

To the east of the monumental wall, the researchers found a totally different situation, indicating that this space was inside the building: Here a low bench made of hewn stones and covered with grey plaster runs alongside the wall, interrupted only by an entrance roughly in the center of its excavated part. The floor was made of grey hard plaster. It will need to be checked in the future if there are additional floor layers below.

Taken all the available evidence together, it seems very likely that the Kinneret Regional Project 2010 has discovered a part of the western wall of yet another ancient Galilean synagogue. Together with the well-known synagogues at Capernaum and Chorazin (both around the fifth and sixth century AD, the new synagogue at Horvat Kur - tentatively dated to the fourth or fifth century AD - adds new evidence for a very tight net of synagogues in a relatively small area on the Northwestern shores of the Lake of Galilee.

In area C on the fringe of the topmost plateau of Horvat Kur, parts of two courtyards with work installations and a room full with dumped pottery from the middle of the first millennium AD came to light. These findings allow fascinating insights into the social and economic life in a Galilean village during this period. Recycled architectural elements, so-called spoliae, and broad walls made of fieldstones or reused ashlar demonstrate how frequently village space changed to adapt buildings to the needs of their inhabitants. Future excavations will expose the entire structure and allow analysis of the use and organization of space of the

inhabitants. The expedition will aim to unearth traces of earlier habitation to clarify the development of the village.

Remains from the domestic quarter in C and the public area in A will substantially add to the knowledge of ancient rural Galilee and they will substantially contribute to solve current research questions like population growth and economic status or cultural interaction of indigenous and external influences in rural Galilee throughout the classical period. In addition, the new finds and findings at Horvat Kur will contribute substantially to the ongoing fierce debate about the chronology of Galilean synagogues.

The Kinneret Regional Project also continued its work on the material remains of Tel Kinrot, a large site situated directly on the shore of Lake Kinneret about 11 kilometers north of modern Tiberias. To date, archeological investigations revealed settlement layers from the Chalcolithic throughout the Ottoman periods, about the fifth millennium BC to the second millennium AD). The site was under excavation by the Kinneret Regional Project until 2008. After that a small in-lab team of experts continuously analyzed the finds and findings from the various settlement layers in order to prepare them for [subsequent publication](#). During the 2010 study season, special focus was laid on the examination of the city layout and the analysis of the architecture in the domestic quarters dating to the Iron Age I period (eleventh and tenth century BC). In addition, the catalogue of the hitherto retrieved small finds, especially those relating to textile industry, could be further completed. As in previous years, the restoration of the uniquely well preserved assemblage of the Iron Age I period was continued.

Future campaigns of the Kinneret Regional Project will return to surveying the region around Horvat Kur and record agricultural installations as already started in 2008, explore the many caves and cisterns on the site to better understand Horvat Kur's water supply

system, and of course to continue excavations on the hill itself. After final publication of the results of the first phase of KRP's activities at Tel Kinrot, fieldwork at this important site will be resumed. At the same time, the site's preservation and conservation or restoration of excavated areas will be continuously pursued in collaboration with the local authorities.

The Kinneret Regional Project as an academic consortium of the Universities of Bern/Switzerland, Helsinki/Finland, Leiden/Netherlands, and Mainz/Germany will henceforth also be committed to its educational field program for international students of all disciplines to bring them into hands-on contact with the history and material culture of a region that is at the foundations of both Judaism and Christianity.

Provided by Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz

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