8 Galilean Jews and Christians in Context
Spaces Shared and Contested in the Eastern Galilee in Late Antiquity

Raimo Hakola

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss Jewish and Christian groups in eastern rural Galilee particularly in relation to synagogues that recent archaeological excavations have firmly dated to Late Antiquity. In earlier scholarship, many previously discovered Galilean synagogues were dated to the second and third centuries CE, but there is now mounting archaeological evidence that demonstrates how synagogues were built, renovated and in use in the region from the late fourth to the seventh centuries. Not only are the synagogues in, for example, Capernaum and Chorazin now generally dated to the fifth century or even later, but the evidence for the newly found synagogues at Horvat Kur and Huqoq clearly demonstrates that rural Jewish communities continued to establish these public buildings well into the period when the influence of Christianity became more and more visible in the region.

In the area discussed in this chapter, just north of the plain of Ginosar, the synagogues of Chorazin, Horvat Kur and Huqoq are situated quite close to Tabgha, where a Christian pilgrim church was established during the fifth century, and Capernaum, where the Byzantine church and the synagogue are located next to each other. Günter Stemberger has emphasized the relevance of this area for the study of Jewish-Christian relations in Late Antiquity because "Jews and Christians lived side by side in a plainly Jewish territory."1 The co-existence of these different communities in a rather small area raises questions concerning their mutual relationships; however, it is difficult to reconstruct these relations in any more detail because direct literary and archaeological evidence that could shed light on them is limited at best. In circumstances like this, it is evident that our imaginative reconstructions of the situation in Galilee are shaped to a great extent by models and patterns put forward on the basis of the evidence connected to Jewish-Christian relations elsewhere in the ancient world.

1 Günter Stemberger, "Christians and Jews in Byzantine Palestine", in Christians and Christianity in the Holy Land: From the Origins to the Latin Kingdoms, Ora Limor and Guy G. Stroumsa (eds) (Cultural encounters in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages 5; Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2006): 300.
I argue here that recent changes in how the relations between Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity are understood should become more fully incorporated into Galilean studies. For this reason, the first part of the chapter sets up a broader context for evaluating the relations between Jewish and Christian communities in Galilee. While many older historical reviews have replicated polemical accounts found in many Christian and Jewish literary sources, several scholars have concluded that the portraits advocating separation and antagonism need to be balanced by evidence – literary and archaeological – demonstrating parallel developments and social and cultural interaction between different communities. I suggest that Galilean synagogues and pilgrim churches may be taken as spaces that gave a sense of distinct and secure identity for local Jewish and Christian communities but, at the same time, the shared Galilean rural landscape enabled various interactions between the members of these communities.

Jews and Christians in Context

Blurred Boundaries

Averil Cameron has remarked that ‘the mutual relations between Christians and Jews in Late Antiquity . . . cannot be taken out of the wider context of the development of early Christianity’. In earlier scholarship, the development of Christianity in the first centuries CE has often been seen in light of the so-called ‘parting of the ways’ model. However, this model has increasingly been criticized in recent scholarship. One of the main criticisms against the model has been that it does not match the evidence showing an intense intellectual and social interaction, continuing well into Late Antiquity, between various Jewish and Christian communities. There is evidence beginning from some New Testament writings for the so-called ‘Gentile Christian Judaizing’, a term that, using Michele


3 For the ‘parting of the ways’ model and its ideological underpinnings, see Raimo Hakola, ‘Erik H. Erikson’s Identity Theory and the Formation of Early Christianity’, JBV 30 (2009): 5–15. The following events have been presented either as one singular event or as successive moments that brought about separation between Christianity and Judaism: the ministry of Jesus, the division between Hebrews and Hellenists in the early church in Jerusalem, the mission of Paul to the Gentiles, the first Jewish War (CE 66–74), the tensions between early Christians and synagogues reflected in the Gospels of Matthew and John, the Bar Kokhba revolt (CE 132–135). See Edwin K. Broadhead, Jewish Ways of Following Jesus: Redrawing the Religious Map of Antiquity (WUNT 266; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010): 354.

Murray’s definition refers to Christians who were Gentiles and ‘combined a commitment to Christianity with adherence in varying degrees to Jewish practices without viewing such behavior as contradictory.’ As Murray continues, from the perspective of certain Christian leaders these community members dangerously blurred boundaries between Christian and Jewish communities, which aroused their fierce denunciation in some sources.\(^5\)

The same kind of boundary crossing is well attested in various Christian literary sources stemming from the second to early fifth centuries.\(^6\) As Petri Luomanen has remarked, ‘the intensity of admonitions’ directed against those who attended both Jewish and Christian community gatherings shows that this was an acute problem and a serious challenge for those Christian writers who wanted to keep the boundaries of their communities intact.\(^7\) The discontent caused by blurred boundaries between Jewish and Christian communities is also expressed in the decisions of many ecclesiastical councils that tried to prohibit the interaction of Christians – even clergy – with their neighbouring Jewish communities.\(^8\) The same concern is visible in an imperial edict issued in 383 dealing with Christians who had taken part in pagan, Jewish and Manichean cults.\(^9\) While the participation of some Christians in Jewish gatherings and rituals is much more common in the surviving records, limited evidence can also

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7 Petri Luomanen, *Recovering Jewish-Christian Sects and Gospels* (VCSup 110; Brill: Leiden, 2012): 30. In a similar way, such Christian writers as Augustine of Hippo and Peter Chrysologus tried to prevent the participation of their audiences in feasts and gatherings that they regarded as pagan. See Maijastina Kahlós’ chapter in this volume.

8 Kimelman, ‘Identifying’: 317. For example, the council of Laodicea (363–364) prohibited resting on the Sabbath (Canon 29) and the participation in Jewish feasts and ceremonies (Canons 37 and 38). Other church orders forbade the clergy from participating in Jewish festivals or entering synagogues to pray or to feast (*Apostolic Constitutions* 8.47, 62, 65, 70, and 71).

9 *CTH* 16.7.3. For the text, its translation and interpretation see Amnon Linder, *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation* (Detroit and Jerusalem: Wayne State University Press and The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1988): 168–73. It is a debated question how imperial edicts were enforced and how widely they were followed. The need to reissue the same prohibitions time and again already indicates the limited effectiveness of these edicts. I return to this question later when I discuss the edicts prohibiting the building of new synagogues.
be found of Jews visiting Christian churches and services.\textsuperscript{10} In the light of this evidence, Paula Fredriksen has aptly concluded that ‘the threats, complaints, and laments’ by various Christian writers, together with decisions in church canons and imperial legislation, ‘suggest that these efforts at separation met with frustration much more routinely than with success’.\textsuperscript{11}

As is the case of Christian sources, scholars have reconsidered those rare rabbinic passages that seem to encourage the strict separation between Jews and Christians.\textsuperscript{12} The most famous and often cited example is the story of rabbi Eliezer ben Hycanus’ arrest and later release: rabbi Eliezer was suspected of heresy, which in this case most probably meant contacts with some sort of Christians. The meeting between Eliezer and a heretic is placed in a Galilean context in late first or early second century Sepphoris but, as often is the case with rabbinic stories, the historical context and the details of the story remain elusive.\textsuperscript{13} Particularly in previous scholarship of early Christianity, passages like this were taken quite unproblematically as evidence of how rabbinic Jews were able to regulate interactions between emergent Christian communities and other Jews.\textsuperscript{14} However, the power and influence of the rabbinic movement during the first centuries CE have been significantly reconsidered in recent rabbinic scholarship (cf. below) and, accordingly, passages advocating separation are no longer taken as direct

\textsuperscript{10} Cf. Paula Fredriksen, \textit{Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defence of Jews and Judaism} (New York: Doubleday, 2008): 399 n. 24. Fredriksen refers to the decision of the Fourth Council in Carthage in 436 (canon 84) according to which a bishop may not prohibit a pagan, a heretic or a Jew from entering into the church and hearing the word of God; however, these persons should leave together with the catechumens before the Eucharist is celebrated.

\textsuperscript{11} Fredriksen, \textit{Augustine} 99. Thus also Lieu, \textit{Neither Jew Nor Christian} 206: ‘The Christian polemic against the Jews seeks to construct an identity of separation and alienation, to build impermeable boundaries, but…there is much, even within the pages of polemic, which denies that, witnessing to intersecting lives, a shared identity of monotheistic worship, ethical code and textual interpretation’.

\textsuperscript{12} As Kimelman (‘Identifying’: 302) remarks, Christians sources are ‘so full of references to Jews and Judaism that the phrase obsessed with may be in order’ while ‘the data on Christianity in rabbinic literature is comparably sparse’ (italics original). For a discussion of rabbinic passages possibly referring to Christians, see Günter Stemberger, ‘Rabbinic Reactions to the Christianization of Roman Palestine: A Survey of Recent Research’, in \textit{Encounters of the Children of Abraham from Ancient to Modern Times}, Antti Laato and Pekka Lindqvist (eds) (Studies on the Children of Abraham 1: Leiden: Brill, 2010): 141–63. In addition, many scholars have recently argued that Christian theological concepts have been assumed and addressed to in a number of rabbinic writings. Cf. Daniel Boyarin, \textit{Border Lines: The Partition of Judeo-Christianity} (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Peter Schäfer, \textit{The Jewish Jesus: How Judaism and Christianity Shaped Each Other} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).


\textsuperscript{14} For references, see Raimo Hakola, \textit{Identity Matters: John, the Jews and Jewishness} (NovTSup 118; Brill: Leiden, 2005): 43–4.
reflections of historical reality but as attempts to clarify distinct identities. Daniel Boyarin has suggested that the Eliezer story shows how the rabbis are

both recognizing and denying at one and the same time that Christians are
us, marking out the virtual identity between themselves and the Christians in
their world at the same time that they are very actively seeking to establish
difference.\textsuperscript{15}

This story and other rabbinic passages (\textit{e.g.}, \textit{Hul.} 2:20–21) that try to limit interaction among Jews actually testify that rabbis could not avoid constant contacts with those they regarded as heretics, \textit{minim}.\textsuperscript{16} It thus seems that although many
Christian theologians and rabbis tried to shape particular ideological beliefs and
behavioural patterns in their respective audiences, the social reality was much
more complicated and unpredictable than these attempts to construct clearly
defined identities would imply.

There is evidence of other kinds of mixing between Jews and Christians. Mixed
marriages and sexual relations between Christians and Jews were prohibited
already in the synod of Elvira in 306 (canons 16 and 78)\textsuperscript{17} but the reappearance
of this theme in later imperial legislation shows the persistence of these relations-
ships despite increasing public pressure against them.\textsuperscript{18} Legislators also tried to
regulate conversions among Christians and Jews: for example, Christian emperors
prohibited the circumcision of non-Jewish slaves by their Jewish owners, thus
following some precedents in Roman law.\textsuperscript{19} The general prohibition against Christian
conversions to Judaism appears in a number of edicts which suggests that this phe-
nomenon continued to haunt the Christian establishment for a long time.\textsuperscript{20} Many
of the laws regulating Jewish–Christian relations in the \textit{Codex Theodosianus} were
later reissued as such or with minor revisions in the \textit{Codex Justinianus} which also
speaks for their continued relevance.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[15] Boyarin, \textit{Dying for God} 32.
\item[16] Thus Stuart S. Miller, ‘The Minim of Sepphoris Reconsidered’, \textit{HTR} 86 (1993): 401; Claudia
Saccenti, \textit{Jewish Responses to Early Christians: History and Polemics 30–150 C.E.} (Minneapolis:
in \textit{Geschichte–Tradition–Reflexion: Festschrift für Martin Hengel zum 70. Geburtstag}. Band I: Juden,
Kahn, \textit{The Sage in Jewish Society in Late Antiquity} (New York: Routledge, 1999): 72; Boyarin,
\item[17] Paula Fredriksen, ‘What Parting of the Ways: Jews, Gentiles, and the Ancient Mediterranean
City,’ in Becker and Reed, \textit{The Ways That Never Parted} 60 n. 79.
\item[18] For the interdiction against marriages between Christians and Jews, see \textit{CTh} 3.7.2 – \textit{CTh} 3.7.5 (in
up to Visigothic period attests to continuing mixed marriages between Jews and Christians.
\item[19] For the laws against circumcision of non-Jewish slaves by Jewish owners, see \textit{CTh} 16.8.5 and
16.9.1 (in 335), \textit{CTh} 16.8.6 and 16.9.2. (in 339) and \textit{CTh} 3.1.5 (in 384) in Linder, \textit{Jews} 92–4,
\item[20] \textit{CTh} 16.8.1 (in 329), \textit{CTh} 16.8.19 (in 409), \textit{CTh} 16.8.22 (in 415), \textit{CTh} 16.8.26 (in 423) and
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
In the case of Jewish converts to Christianity, the main concerns were the harassment of these converts by other Jews, the right of Jewish converts to inherit from their Jewish parents and cases where it was suspected that some Jews converted because they wanted to avoid their debts or escape judicial proceedings. While other laws clearly try to encourage and make the conversion of Jews to Christianity easier, the last mentioned cases are interesting, as they are based on encouraging those who have joined Christian communities, but allegedly for the wrong reasons, to return to their Jewish communities. It is also noteworthy that these laws deal with the practical, everyday consequences of conversions, which suggests that they reflect a real-life phenomenon even though it is difficult, if not impossible, to estimate the prevalence of such conversions.

It is significant that one of the best-known Jews who is said to have converted to Christianity is from late antique Galilee: Epiphanius of Salamis tells of Joseph of Tiberias whom he is said to have met in Seythopolis (presumably in the 350s or 360s). According to Epiphanius, Joseph had been a close assistant to the Jewish patriarch in Tiberias and was, after his conversion, authorized by Constantine to build churches in Tiberias, Sephoris, Capernaum and Nazareth. Epiphanius repeatedly asserts that he has heard Joseph’s story directly from the man himself, but many aspects in Epiphanius’ long and colourful story invite doubt. Andrew Jacobs has analyzed the story of Joseph’s conversion together with other corresponding conversion stories told by Epiphanius and he has shown that these stories resonate with Epiphanius’ theological agenda as they help him portray Christianity as able to absorb true and authentic Judaism at its core. We should, therefore, be cautious in drawing far-reaching historical conclusions from Epiphanius’ story; for example, it may not help in assessing how common or uncommon conversions of Jews to Christianity were. What the story does show is that it made perfect sense for a Christian writer in the 370s to imagine that such

21 The protection of Jewish converts to Christianity from harassment CTh 16.8.1 (in 329), CTh 16.8.5 and 16.9.1 (in 335) in Linder, Jewr 79, 124–32, 138–51; the prohibition preventing the disinheritance of Jewish converts to Christianity CTh 16.8.28 and 16.7.7. (in 426), CTh 15.1.13 (in 527 or 528) in Linder, Jewr 313–19, 368–9; the prohibition against receiving Jewish converts who seek asylum from creditors or to escape judicial proceedings, CTh 9.45.2 (in 397), CTh 16.8.23 (in 416) in Linder, Jewr 199–201, 275–6.


25 Jacobs, ‘Matters’: 44.
conversions took place among high-ranking Jews even in such a renowned centre of Jewish learning as Tiberias. Such a possibility of Palestinian Jews converting to Christianity appears also in later Christian sources.

The Ways that Never Parted?

The evidence presented above has caused many scholars to question whether the ‘parting of the ways’ model aptly describes the varied relations among Christians and Jews. Daniel Boyarin has suggested that we should think of Christianity and Judaism in Late Antiquity as ‘points on a continuum’ so that

on one end were the Marcionites... and on the other the many Jews for whom Jesus meant nothing. In the middle, however, were many gradations that provided social and cultural mobility from one end of this spectrum to the other.

In the book The Ways That Never Parted, Annette Yoshiho Reed and Adam Becker summarize the emerging new thinking by saying that ‘Jews and Christians (or at least the elites among them) may have been engaged in the task of “parting” throughout Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, precisely because the two never really “parted”’.

It is perhaps predictable that this new perspective has also received criticism. Peter Schäfer admits that ‘the old model of the “parting of the ways” of Judaism and Christianity needs to be abandoned in favour of a much more differentiated and sophisticated model, taking into consideration a long process of mutual demarcation and absorption’. However, Schäfer refers to Daniel Boyarin’s claim that “Christianity” is simply a part and parcel of ancient Judaism and says that

26 The final redaction of the Palestinian Talmud is usually located in Tiberias in the early fifth century, which shows the importance of the city for the rabbinic movement. Cf. Herman L. Strack and Günter Stemberger, Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash (Markus Bockmuehl (trans.); second edition; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996): 171. For the urban character of the rabbinic movement, see below.
27 John Moschos, Pratum spirituale 176 and 227 in John Moschos, The Spiritual Meadow (Pratum Spirituale), John Wortley (trans.) (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1992): 144–6, 205–10. I thank Dr. Ulla Tervahauta for bringing these passages to my attention.
29 Reed and Becker, ‘Introduction’: 23 (italics original).
30 Daniel Boyarin, ‘The Parables of Enoch and the Foundation of the Rabbinic Sect: A Hypothesis’, in “The Words of a Wise Man’s Mouth are Gracious” (Qoh 10,12): Festschrift für Günter Stemberger on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday Mauro Perani (ed.) (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 2005): 53–72, especially 64. It should be remarked that while Boyarin’s continuum model (cf. above) can be used to describe variations among Jews and Christian, the claim that ‘Christianity is simply part and parcel of Judaism’ is clearly an overstatement which does not take seriously enough the point that many Jewish and Christian groups not only presented themselves as separated but actually did not have much in common.
this statement ‘means to replace one evil with another’. According to Schäfer, the debates between Jews and Christians should not always be taken as ‘inner-Jewish debates’ because this would represent a ‘misguided attempt to harmonize the historical dissonances’.²¹ In a more direct way, Shaye Cohen has argued that various discussions between Jews and Christians in antiquity could not be used as evidence against the parting of the ways. According to Cohen, the actions of the Roman authorities from the early second century onward coincide with the sense of separate communities reflected in various Jewish and Christian writings. This evidence suggests that ‘the mutual demarcation had been achieved by the early decades of the second century CE’.²² Cohen’s argumentation could be supplemented with references to second and third century Roman philosophers who already assessed Christians as a group separated from Jews.²³

These critical comments are important because they remind us that separation, and quite often antagonism, were not merely literary or rhetorical constructions but a living reality for many Jews and Christians. In Palestine, one of the most notorious examples is the rampage instigated by the Syrian monk Barsauma who, together with his supporters, attacked and destroyed several synagogues in the early fifth century.²⁴ Furthermore, tense relations between some local Christian and Jewish communities are reflected in recurring imperial edicts that forbade attacks against Jews and the destruction of their synagogues.²⁵

While I think that there is much to recommend in recent criticisms against the ‘parting of the ways’ model, it also seems that some criticisms may have gone too far in the opposite direction by playing down the evidence for separation between many Jewish and Christian groups. Given the evidence for local and temporal varieties and complexities among different Jewish and Christian communities, both dictums, ‘the ways that never parted’ or ‘the ways that parted’, may be considered unrepresentative as general descriptions of Jewish-Christian relations in the ancient world. The ‘parting of the ways’ model one-sidedly emphasizes separation between Christian and Jewish communities, but it is likewise misleading to claim that ‘the ways never parted’ because many Jews, Christians and even Romans were well capable of making a distinction between Jewish and Christian

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²¹ Schäfer, The Jewish Jesus 84–85.
²⁴ For Barsauma, see Hagith Sivan, Palestine in Late Antiquity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008): 176–84.
communities and already from the second century onwards most – but not all – Jewish and Christian groups followed their own religious authorities, beliefs, rituals and festival calendars.\textsuperscript{36} As Stuart Miller has rightly concluded, rabbis and Christian theologians may have used similar kinds of theological arguments, as for example Daniel Boyarin has concluded, but they were clearly not similar ‘as Jews who lived and practiced in many of the same ways.’\textsuperscript{37}

**Diverse Jewish and Christian Communities**

The preceding discussion has demonstrated that our reconstructions of Jewish and Christian communities in Late Antiquity should not be based on a simple model that presents these communities as separate with fixed and stable boundaries.\textsuperscript{38} Most of our literary sources are written from the perspective of religious elites who wanted to secure the boundaries of their communities. The difference between religious rhetoric and a more diverse social reality has been repeatedly demonstrated by Judith Lieu who has remarked that the ‘emphasis on internal rhetoric inevitably leads to a strong sense of self-identity, often at odds with other evidence that early Christian groups were more amorphous.’ Furthermore, ‘the moment of separation provokes much more vigorous rhetoric, enhancing this sense of otherness, which may be less visible to outsiders.’\textsuperscript{39} Lieu’s conclusion can be supported by various social psychological studies that explain those cognitive, emotional and motivational factors relevant in the formation of distinct group identities. The so-called social identity approach has recently become common in the study of early Judaism and Christianity and, from this perspective, it is only natural that members of a group try to maximize the differences between their own group and other groups when building a secure and distinct social

\textsuperscript{36} It is noteworthy that Annette Yoshiko Reed and Adam Becker make it clear that, despite the provocative title of their collection, *The Ways That Never Parted*, they are not suggesting that their book sets up a new paradigm for the study of Jewish-Christian relations. Cf. Reed and Becker, ‘Introduction’ 23: ‘Even as the “Parting” model still remains relevant, a new understanding of how late antique Jews and Christians related and interrelated with one another is slowly yet steadily developing. It is, however, neither the right time nor the right place to propose a new model to replace the older.’


\textsuperscript{38} The new understandings of ancient Jewish-Christian relations have clear parallels in how the relationship between Christians and pagans in Late Antiquity is nowadays increasingly understood. Cf. Kahl, *Debate and Dialogue* 26: ‘Scholars before the 1970s for the most part took the division between pagans and Christians for granted and regarded them as mutually exclusive categories and even as opposed and hostile to each other. Several modern scholars nonetheless have recently questioned the clear boundaries and investigated the late antique persons who do not fit into the category of the rigid Christian–pagan dichotomy.’

identity. However, the evidence reviewed above cautions us to bear in mind that the actual positions of such groups as Jews and Christians in society are not necessarily identical with how their members imagine their position in relation to the outside world.

The more dynamic view that allows for various interactions and exchanges between Jewish and Christian communities is in line with the recent focus on religion as ‘lived’ in the field of sociology of religion. As Meredith McGuire has remarked, this focus does not consider religions as stable and single entities but as ‘made up of diverse, complex, and ever-changing mixtures of beliefs and practices, as well as relationships, experiences and commitments’. From this perspective, the borders of religious identity and commitment are always potentially ‘contested, shifting and malleable’. The tension between lived religion and attempts to stabilize and authenticate a particular form of religious identity as the only accepted alternative is clearly seen in the writings of both Christian theologians and rabbis. Judith Lieu has expressed this by saying that it is never straightforward ‘to explain theological data with historical categories’ because ‘theological boundaries and social boundaries are not necessarily coextensive’. For this reason, Andrew Jacobs is right in remarking that various literary representations of relations between Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity never reflect the reality in an innocent and transparent way, but rather show how ‘that reality was produced, scripted, and resisted through linguistic representations’ and how ‘Christians and Jews constructed their world’.

The emphasis on the dynamic nature of lived religion reflects changes in how the formation of identity is currently understood. While sameness and continuity

40 For the application of the social identity approach with relevant references, see Hakola, *Reconsidering* 24-6.
41 The discrepancy between the rhetoric of separation and social reality is also clearly seen in how various Christian writers positioned themselves in relation to polytheistic cults and their adherents. Kahlos has shown that, despite all the polemic and the dismissal of these cults by Christian theologians, ‘ordinary people often continued in peaceful coexistence throughout the fourth and fifth centuries’. Maijsteria Kahlos, *Forbearance and Compulsion: Rhetoric of Tolerance and Intolerance in Late Antiquity* (London: Duckworth, 2009): 138.
43 McGuire, *Lived Religion* 187. For a similar kind of view regarding the practical realizations of ethnic and religious categories in the field of archaeological theory, see Sian Jones, ‘Identities in Practice: Towards an Archaeological Perspective on Jewish Identity in Antiquity’, in *Jewish Local Patriotism and Self-Identification in the Graeco-Roman Period*, Sian Jones and Sarah Pearce (eds) (JSPhSOp, 31; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998): 45: ‘Indeed, it is possible to question the very existence of bounded, homogeneous ethnic entities except on an abstract level… In contrast, the praxis of ethnicity results in multiple transient realizations of ethnic difference in particular contexts. These practical realizations of ethnicity, in many instances, involve the repeated production and consumption of distinctive styles of material culture.’
44 Lieu, *Neither Jew Nor Christian* 19.
were earlier seen as characteristic of successful identity formation, it has recently become increasingly common to take various individual and group identities as socially constructed and potentially always in need of renegotiation. In light of the social identity approach, social categories are not fixed but always dependent on the specific social environment so that ‘people who are categorized and perceived as different in one context . . . can be recategorized and perceived as similar in another context’.

This approach can explain why some early Christian writers are sometimes more unbiased or even favourable in their attitudes to Jews, and in other contexts disparage them and their religion. Origen, for example, may at some points be very critical of Jews and their religion but when he is disputing with Celsus he acknowledges that the worship of the Jews is superior to all other forms of worship and that Jewish wisdom is superior to the wisdom of the Greek philosophers.

Similarly, it has often been noticed that Augustine, particularly influenced in his views of Jews and Judaism by Romans 9–11, was rather moderate and not polemical when compared to other early Christian writers. Given this thrust in some of Augustine’s writings, his attacks against Jews in his Tractatus in Ioannis Evangelium are surprisingly harsh and hard to understand. Paula Fredriksen even says that Augustine’s Johannine Jews in his Tractatus seem a different tribe from the one encountered in [his] Against Faustus.

In light of the variations in how even Christian intellectuals assessed Jews and their religion, we can conjecture that attitudes on the ground were much more diverse than regular occasions of mistrust and even open hostility in the written record would imply. From the social identity point of view, it is only to be expected

48 Cels. 5.42–43. For this passage, see Robert Louis Wilken, ‘Something Greater than Temple’, in Anti-Judaism and the Gospels, William R. Farmer (ed.) (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press, 1999): 198–199. Wilken concludes that ‘even as he [Origen] draws a contrast between the Jews and the Christians, he steadfastly maintains that the Jews are not to be placed in the same category as the idolaters, the pagans’. Cf. also Nicholas de Lange, Origen and the Jews: Studies in Jewish-Christian relations in Third-Century Palestine (University of Cambridge Oriental Publications 25; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976). De Lange argues that even though Origen is at times critical of Jews, for example because of their literal interpretation of the Scriptures, his writings also imply that he had contact with Jewish teachers and was familiar with the Jewish thought of his time.
51 Fredriksen, Augustine 305.
that writings that aim at creating a common group emphasize the distinctiveness of the writer’s group and minimize or even completely ignore similarities between this group and other groups in its surroundings.52 A more diverse social reality is reflected, however, in practically oriented sources that speak about mundane relations among Jews and Christians. The letters of two Gazan ascetics, Barsanuphius and John, respond to many everyday concerns among their Christian lay audience who are seemingly interacting with their Jewish and pagan neighbours in a variety of ways. The topics addressed include invitations to shared meals or the use of shared winepresses, themes that illustrate what kind of peaceful interactions took place between Palestinian Christians and Jews in the first part of the sixth century.53 Another source from the late sixth/early seventh century presents a scene where Christian and Jewish children are playing together in an unnamed village somewhere in Palestine.54

The incongruity between religious rhetoric and more diverse social reality has led many scholars to re-evaluate the scope of influence of Christian and Jewish religious expert groups. In the field of early Christian studies, the discovery of the Nag Hammadi library has challenged earlier notions of ‘orthodoxy’ and ‘heresy’ among various early Christian groups and shown that it is too simplistic to approach diverse historical sources in terms of doctrinal disputes between heretical and orthodox positions.55 This has been one of the main reasons why the concepts of ‘heresy’ and ‘orthodoxy’ are now increasingly understood, not as accurate descriptions of diverse early Christian groups, but as instruments in the process of self-definition that is always achieved in relation to those experienced, and excluded, as others.56

In a similar way, scholars have been reassessing the power and influence of the rabbinic movement that has been repeatedly described in recent studies as a relatively powerless group concerned with issues of purity. This view emerges from the stratigraphic study of the rabbinic laws as well as from the study of legal case histories connected to rabbis of different eras. Many scholars have concluded that the rabbis were neither representative of Judaism at the time, nor were they in any position to enforce their views on those Jews who did not belong to their

53 For the question of whether a Christian can accept an invitation to a meal by a Jew or a pagan during their festivals, see Letters 775–776, in Barsanuphius and John Letters, Volume 2, John Chrysostom (trans.) (FCH 114; Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2007): 281. For the question of whether Christians and Jews may use a shared wine press, see Letter686 on p. 242.
54 John Moschos, Prunum spiritual. 227 (John Moschos, The Spiritual Meadow 205–10). I thank Dr Ulla Tervahauta for bringing this passage and the passages mentioned in the previous footnote to my attention.
circles. Several specific rabbinic regulations, such as those connected to food and dietary practices, separated those Jews who observed these regulations not only from non-Jews but also from other, non-rabbinic Jews. Joshua Ezra Burns summarizes the recent mainstream view among rabbinic scholars when he says that ‘the rabbis’ legal authority over the Jewish community extended only to those who voluntarily placed themselves under their jurisdiction.

The diversity of Jewish groups is evident in the use of the term minim to refer to different individuals and groups that the rabbis regarded as heretical. In earlier scholarship, it was common to connect these references with clearly defined historical groups such as Christians in general or Jewish Christians in particular; however, it has become all the more evident that references to the minimare far too miscellaneous and scattered for us to reconstruct, in detail, the groups that the rabbis are opposing. In fact, many scholars have pointed out that the rabbinic sources describe the minim in quite general terms and blur distinctions between different groups. Stuart Miller has remarked that attempts to identify the minim with clearly defined groups of Jews (or ‘Jewish Christians’) have ‘obscured our understanding of the facts on the ground. The minim was in many ways indistinguishable from other Jews, not only in the eyes of the rabbis but also in reality.’ In the same vein, Peter Schäfer says that rabbinic references to the minim do not reflect ‘the controversy of firmly established “religions” – “Jewish,” “pagan,” “Christian,” “gnostic,” or other – but allow for still


fluid boundaries within (and beyond) which a variety of groups were competing with each other in shaping their identities. 62

Interestingly, the rabbinc policy of ignoring the detailed characteristics of their opponents and blending them all together has clear parallels in Christian sources. Majajastina Kahllos has shown how various Christian authors grouped together those groups they regarded as dissident — pagans, Jews, and heretics — and saw them all as adherents of the same error. 63 The tendency of religious ideologues — both Jewish and Christian — to lump their opponents together can be seen as an attempt to reduce a diverse and sometimes even threatening social reality into controllable categories, a tendency well-attested in research dealing with intergroup relations. 64

It also seems that the involvement and influence of the rabbis in the development of synagogues was considerably more limited than was earlier thought. 65 This view is especially relevant in the study of Jewish communities in Galilee because a great deal of what we know of these communities is based on the archaeological excavations of Galilean synagogues. While late antique synagogues could be taken as spaces that gave expression to a distinct Jewish identity, many scholars have actually recognized how, for example, synagogue art developed alongside Roman and Christian art in its various parallel themes and patterns. 66 This means that synagogues were not only tokens of separate identities, but spaces

64 In social psychological literature, this tendency is called the outgroup homogeneity effect which refers to the inclination of groups to present other groups as homogenous. See Hakola, *Reconsidering* 28–9. I suggest that a crucial part of the invention of distinct early Christian identity was the creation of the portrait of the Jews as united in their opposition to Christians.

that allowed various negotiations between local Jewish communities and their surroundings. Hagith Sivan has described late antique Sepphoris ‘as a space with a Jewish identity that allowed for acceptance of other discourses’. Sivan continues that ‘a sense of citizenship’ in this Galilean urban landscape was nurtured by ‘a shared appreciation of aesthetics, intellectual and artistic, that espoused an astonishing breadth of Judaism in the Galilee of late antiquity. Public spaces . . . reinforced the impression of a collectivity poised between textual strictures and civic culture.67 This view of Galilean synagogues as participating in various ways in wider late antique culture provides a promising point of departure for the discussion of the evidence related to Galilean rural synagogues.

Galilean Synagogues in Late Antiquity

The discussion above suggests that we should examine the evidence connected to Galilean rural synagogues bearing in mind the diversity that characterized Jewish communities in Late Antiquity. As a matter of fact, the study of Galilean synagogues in recent decades has revealed a great amount of diversity in their layout and decoration. In earlier scholarship, it was usual to think that different types of synagogues in Galilee followed each other chronologically so that the earliest Galilean or basilical type of synagogue (second and third centuries) was followed by transitional or broadhouse synagogues (fourth century) and finally by Byzantine synagogues with a basilical plan including an apsis for the Torah ark in the Jerusalem-oriented wall and rich floor mosaics.68 In this scenario, the monumental limestone synagogue in Capernaum was taken as the best example of an early, third century, Galilean-type synagogue, a conclusion that was based mainly on alleged stylistic similarities between this synagogue and some Roman temples in the Syria of the second and third centuries. In the excavations of the Capernaum synagogue in the late 1960s and early 70s, however, the synagogue was dated to the early fifth century on the basis of pottery and coins found underneath its floors.69 The later dating of the Capernaum synagogue resulted in a reconsideration

67 Sivan, Palestine 320.
of the dating of other Galilean synagogues. In addition, Eric Meyers conducted excavations at several sites in Upper Galilee in the 1970s and early 80s and the results of these excavations revealed that synagogues representing different types dated to approximately the same period. Meyers proposes also that the diversity of synagogues may be taken as a reflection of diversity among rural Galilean Jewish communities: ‘The great diversity in synagogue types as well as in decoration suggests variety within Talmudic Judaism even though each divergence still belongs very much to a common culture.’

In recent years, there has been an intense debate on the dating of Galilean synagogues. Even if the evidence for the earliest phase of the synagogue in Nabratein, for example, remains contested, there is no doubt that these buildings were used and renovated well into Late Antiquity. The situation with newly found synagogues at Huqoq and Horvat Kur is different because, even though only preliminary reports of these buildings are available, it is quite clear that they could not have been constructed before the late fourth or early fifth centuries. These

70 For example, Jodi Magness has suggested, on the basis of numismatic and ceramic evidence, that the synagogue in Chorazin should be dated to the fifth century. Jodi Magness, ‘Did Galilee Decline in the Fifth Century? The Synagogue at Chorazin Reconsidered’, in Religion, Ethnicity, and Identity in Ancient Galilee, Jörn K. Zangenberg et al (eds): 259–74.


two buildings endorse the view that synagogues were built and used in the region long after Christianity had gained ground across the Empire.

The late dating of Galilean synagogues, together with the evidence for other Byzantine synagogues in Palestine, has challenged the older view according to which Judaism in Palestine was in decline and under attack and, therefore, increasingly defensive and inward looking after the Constantinian turn. Lee Levine has concluded that this view has been re-evaluated because ‘Jews throughout the Byzantine era were building synagogues everywhere [in Palestine], often on a grand and imposing scale.’ The evidence for late antique synagogues is at odds with several imperial edicts that tried to restrict or prohibit the building of synagogues from the early fifth century onwards. In earlier scholarship, the imperial legislation was seen as one of the most important factors in the alleged decline of Jewish communities in Late Antiquity and these laws are still often used to explain certain features of Galilean synagogues. However, imperial laws

been established in the early fifth century and the building went through one or two rebuilding phases in the late sixth or early seventh century before it was finally abandoned sometime in the second half of the seventh century. See Jürgen K. Zangenberg, Stefan Münger, Raimo Hakola and Byron R. McCane, ‘The Kimmeret Regional Project Excavations of a Byzantine Synagogue at Horvat Kur, Galilee, 2010-2013: A Preliminary Report’, *HeBAJ* 2 (2013): 557–76. For further references, see Jürgen K. Zangenberg’s chapter in this volume.

For the view that Judaism was in decline from the fourth century onwards, see Michael Avi-Yonah, *The Jews of Palestine: A Political History from the Bar Kokhba War to the Arab Conquest* (Blackwell’s Classical Studies; Oxford: Blackwell, 1976); Ze’ev Safrai, *The Missing Century, Palestine in the Fifth Century: Growth and Decline* (Palästina Antiqua 9; Leuven, Peeters, 1998).

Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue* 212. The view that Jewish settlements in Galilee went through a severe crisis in the fourth century as a result of which the number of these settlements remained scanty in the fifth through to the seventh centuries, has recently been revived by Uzi Leibner, ‘Settlement Patterns in the Eastern Galilee: Implications Regarding the Transformation of Rabbinic Culture in Late Antiquity’, in *Jewish Identities in Antiquity: Studies in Memory of Menahem Stern*, Lee I. Levine and Daniel R. Schwartz (eds) (TSAJ 130; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2009): 269–95. Leibner acknowledges that there are in his survey material examples of settlements that ‘evidently remained in existence throughout most or all of the Byzantine period’ (p. 277). It now seems that the settlements at Huqoq and Horvat Kur should be counted among those sites that continued to flourish in Late Antiquity.

CTh 16.8.22 (in 415) prohibits the foundation of new synagogues and orders that synagogues in deserted places should be destroyed, see Linder, *Jews* 267–72. CTh 16.6.25 (in 423) says that the Jews should be granted places for the construction of synagogues to replace those seized from them but, at the same time, forbids the construction of new synagogues and states that the existing synagogues should be preserved as they are, see Linder, *Jews* 287–9; Theodosius II, *Novella* 3 (in 438) prohibits the construction of new synagogues but allows the renovation of old synagogues, see Linder, *Jews* 323–37. For the prohibition against building new synagogues, see also Justinian, *Novellae* 131 (in 545) in Linder, *Jews* 398–402.

Cf. Anders Runesson, ‘Architecture, Conflict, and Identity Formation: Jews and Christians in Capernaum from the First to the Sixth Century’, in *Religion, Ethnicity, and Identity*, Jürgen K. Zangenberg et al. (eds), 252, n. 80. Runesson remarks that the prohibition against building new synagogues could ‘explain why synagogues were built on the same spot on which earlier synagogues had stood’. See also Mordechai Aviam, ‘The Ancient Synagogues at Bar’am’, in *Judaism in Late Antiquity*, Avery-Peck and Neusner (eds): 171. Aviam speculates whether the use of *spolia*
and their enforcement should be seen in the larger context of imperial power politics. The situation with the edicts dealing with Jews is not different from the laws that were directed against pagans or groups regarded as heretics. In both cases, imperial enactments had to be renewed again and again, which suggests that these rulings were quite often ignored at the local level and that they had only a limited effect in different parts of the Empire.\textsuperscript{79} Hagith Sivan has concluded that this was clearly the case in Galilee where the scale of the synagogues and their decoration reflected considerable means and a sense of security.\textsuperscript{80}

I have demonstrated above how recent scholarship has underlined diversity among late antique Jewish communities. This emphasis is well-founded in the case of Jewish communities in rural Galilee. The excavations of two Galilean synagogues at Khirbet Wadi Hamam and Huqoq have revealed floor mosaics that have been interpreted as representing scenes from the story of Samson as it is told in the Hebrew Bible.\textsuperscript{81} Matthew Grey has remarked that the rarity of Samson in ancient Jewish art as well as Samson’s lack of historical ties to Galilee raises the question of why these village communities had such an interest in the exploits of this biblical character that they wanted to have him depicted in their community centres.\textsuperscript{82} Rabbinic traditions regarding Samson do not answer this question because they portray Samson mostly in a negative light.\textsuperscript{83} Grey turns to Jewish liturgical and targumic texts that depicted Samson as an example of how God delivered Israel in the past and which attached future messianic hopes to him. What is remarkable here is that the portrait of Samson as a messianic prototype in the Targums does not correspond to how Samson is depicted in rabbinic literature.\textsuperscript{84} Grey aptly concludes that these sources and their depictions of Samson may provide valuable insight into the practices and worldviews of

in the building of some Galilean late antique synagogues could be regarded as ‘a trick’ to avoid imperial laws against the building of new synagogues. According to our present knowledge, the newly found synagogues at Huqoq and Horvat Kur do not support either suggestion because these buildings were genuinely new constructions located where there is no evidence yet for earlier public structures.


\textsuperscript{80} Sivan, Palestine 46. Sivan is speaking here mainly of Galilean urban synagogues in Sepphoris and in Tiberias but recent evidence suggests that her conclusions could be applied to the late antique Galilean rural synagogues at Huqoq and Horvat Kur as well.

\textsuperscript{81} For the Wadi Hamam mosaic, see Uzi Leibner and Shulamit Miller, ‘A Figural Mosaic in the Synagogue at Khirbet Wadi Hamam’, \textit{JR} 423 (2010): 238–64. On the basis of the pottery found under the mosaic’s plaster bedding, the excavators date the floor to the late third or early fourth centuries. Jodi Magness has contested this dating and suggests that the floor dates to the mid to late fourth-century, see Magness, ‘The Pottery’: 110–22. For the mosaic in the synagogue of Huqoq, see Jodi Magness, \textit{et al.}, ‘Huqoq’: 327–55.

\textsuperscript{82} Matthew J. Grey, ‘“The Redeemer to Arise from the House of Dan”: Samson, Apocalypticism, and Messianic Hopes in Late Antique Galilee’, \textit{JSJ} 44 (2013): 553–89.

\textsuperscript{83} Grey, ‘The Redeemer’: 557.

\textsuperscript{84} Grey, ‘The Redeemer’: 578. The targumic sources referred to by Grey have increasingly been understood in recent scholarship to represent popular liturgical practices that were not in the control of the rabbis.
synagogue congregations in the late antique Galilean villages, including Huqoq
and Wadi Hamam. Grey’s conclusions are in line with recent reappraisals of
the rabbinic movement and show that these revisions should be taken seriously
in the Galilean studies.

The above conclusion can be complemented by Stuart Miller’s discussion of the
predominantly urban character of the rabbinic movement in the fourth century. Miller
notes that even though a limited number of rural sages are mentioned in
the Palestinian Talmudic sources, ‘there are very few sayings attributed to these
sages’. Miller concludes that the traditions in the Palestinian Talmud clearly
reflect the concerns of urban teachers in centres such as Tiberias, Sepphoris or
Caesarea but less the interests of more remote village rabbis. According to Miller,
the Palestinian Talmud’s ‘depiction of rural rabbis is a world that, on the one
hand, was dependent upon big city rabbis, but on the other hand had a vitality
of its own that enabled it to contribute to the larger movement’. This view
implies that while there self-evidently were local, religious leaders with prestige
in Galilean rural communities, it is unproblematic to identify these leaders with
authorities known from rabbinic sources.

The building and renovation of rural Galilean synagogues in Late Antiquity
speaks for the vitality of various village settlements in the region. Following Lee
Levine, these buildings can be described as communal centres whose nature was
determined by the needs and resources of local communities that also bore the
responsibility for their construction, maintenance and repairs and whose chosen
representatives had authority over running these institutions. Each of the
recently found synagogues has remarkable features of its own. The synagogue at
Huqoq had a magnificent mosaic floor that, up until now, is only partially exposed
and the Horvat Kur synagogue originally had a mosaic floor, frescoed walls and
at some point a decorated bemah, a platform which supported a chest holding
Torah scrolls; while the rest of the building was made of black basalt, the bemah
was made of carefully dressed high-quality limestone. The closest parallel to
this bemah is known from the contemporary synagogue at Umm el-Qanatir on the

86 Miller, Sages and Commoners 17. Miller says that he takes the urbanization of the rabbinic move-
ment for granted and considers some of the ramifications of this phenomenon. Other scholars
have noticed the increasing urbanization of the rabbinic movement from the third century on, cf.
Cohen, ‘The Rabbi’: 941; Hessey, The Social Structure 31; Hayim Lapin, ‘Rabbis and Cities in
87 Miller, Sages and Commoners 458.
88 The stone seat found in the Horvat Kur synagogue gives evidence for a person who had an excep-
tional and authoritative position in this community, as Jürgen K. Zangenberg shows in his chapter
elsewhere in this volume.
90 Cf. Zangenberg et al., ‘The Kinneret Regional Project’: 557–76. For the function of the bemah
inside the synagogue, see Zangenberg’s chapter in this volume. For the Horvat Kur Mosaic, see
also Bible History Daily, available at http://www.biblearchaeology.org/daily/ancient-cultures/
Golan Heights. This parallel is not the only connection between synagogues in Galilee and on the Golan, as Hagith Sivan says, architectural fragments throughout the Golan Heights ‘display striking similarities with the art of the Galilean synagogues’. The new dating of the Galilean synagogues to the fifth if not sixth century is in agreement with the dating of synagogues on the Golan. On the basis of this evidence, Sivan speaks of ‘a building “boom” in both the Golan and the Galilee’ which ‘indicates that Jews ignored imperial restrictions on the construction of new synagogues’.

The synagogues at Horvat Kur and Huqoq complement the repertoire of imposing late antique synagogues in the region represented earlier by the synagogues of Capernaum and Chorazin. This new evidence suggests that the Capernaum synagogue should not be taken as a special case whose construction needs to be explained by exceptional circumstances. Such a view has been expressed by Anders Runesson – and he, of course, was not aware of the synagogues in Horvat Kur and Huqoq – who has argued that the construction of the Capernaum synagogue is ‘a defiant act of defiance against [Byzantine Christian] colonizers’. Furthermore, ‘the building was not financed by the local population, but rather by politically and economically more powerful Jews in Tiberias’. According to Runesson, the Capernaum synagogue provides ‘us with an example of how and why the rabbis could assert themselves as the leaders of the Jews’. More recently, Benjamin Arubas and Rina Talgam have revived the view that the building of the Capernaum synagogue was at least partly sponsored by Christian ecclesiastical authorities who wanted to foster Christian pilgrimage to the site where the octagonal church was built, approximately at the same time, on the alleged spot of the House of St. Peter. Both of these views treat the building of the Capernaum

93 Sivan, Palestine 101. See also Eric M. Meyers, ‘Living Side by Side in Galilee’, in Partings, Hershel Shanks (ed.): 146. Meyers speaks of ‘a kind of floruit of Jewish life in the early Byzantine period’, which is most clearly attested in the building and rebuilding of various synagogues. Meyers dates ‘a similar burst in synagogue building’ on the Golan to the fifth and sixth centuries.
94 Runesson, ‘Architecture’: 252–3. Runesson agrees to a great extent with Seth Schwartz who has said that the Christianized state played a decisive role in the formation of rabbinic Judaism, see Seth Schwartz, Imperialism and Jewish Society: 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). For a critical review of Schwartz’s thesis, see Miller, ‘Review Essay’: 334–50. The Palestinian rabbinic sources do not necessarily support the view that the rabbis saw Christianity as a threat, see Burns, ‘The Archaeology’: 404: ‘The rabbis do not appear to have seen themselves as facing an insurmountable threat; the Jews continued to proliferate throughout the Galilee region and would only begin to feel the invasive brunt of the new Christian empire later in the Byzantine era.’
synagogue as a special case. However, the synagogues at Horvat Kur and Huqoq now provide more material to examine these impressive rural buildings as manifestations of the resources and aspirations of local communities, rather than as examples of centralized building projects controlled from afar. Lee Levine may be right when he observes that local synagogues may have been ‘a cause of rivalry between neighbouring communities, and at times envy motivated one to imitate and even outdo the achievements of the other’.90

**Christians in Galilee in Late Antiquity**

Our direct evidence of Christians in Galilee in Late Antiquity is even more meagre than the fragmentary evidence related to Jewish communities. According to a once influential view, supported by many Franciscan scholars, Jewish Christian communities survived throughout Palestine from the late first century CE to the third and fourth centuries and these communities cherished the memory of Christian holy places in Nazareth, Capernaum and elsewhere.97 However, the archaeologival shortcomings of this so-called Bagatti-Testa hypothesis have repeatedly been exposed.98 It has become all the more evident that references to the **minita** in Capernaum in a late rabbinic source,99 or discussions of Jewish Christian groups by various Christian theologians, do not provide solid evidence for the presence

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96 Levine (The Ancient Synagogue, 384) with a reference to Seder Elysha Rabbah 11.
99 The two passages in *Midrash Qohdelet Rabbah* 1:8 and 7:26 refer to the minita in Capernaum and these references have only been taken as evidence for a Jewish Christian community at the site already in the second century, cf. Stanislaw Loffreda, Recovering Capernaum (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1993): 30–31. Benjamin Y. Anubas and Rina Talgam, ‘Jews, Christians and “Mittit”: Who really Built and Used the Synagogue at Capernaum – a Stirring Appraisal,’ in Knowledge and Wisdom: Archaeological and Historical Essays in Honour of Leah Di Segni, Giovanni Bottini, L. Daniel Chrupcala and Joseph Patriarch (eds), SBFCM 54. Milano: Edizioni Terra Santa, 2014: 245–6, 269, take these references as a direct reflection of the position of the Jews in Capernaum in the fifth century; in their scenario, the Capernaum Jews had constant contacts with Christian pilgrims which blurred their Jewish identity and resulted in them being accused of heresy. However, we cannot know how widespread and representative views expressed in this seventh or even eighth century source were (for the dating, see Strack and Sternberger, Introduction 318). In addition, the discussion above has suggested that we should be cautious in arriving at far reaching historical conclusions on the basis of rabbinic references to **minita**.
of Jewish Christian communities in Galilee before the fourth century. After a nuanced discussion, Jürgen K. Zangenberg has concluded that the oft-repeated view of specific Jewish Christian sects in Galilee prior to the Constantinian turn needs to be revised. The scant archaeological traces, for example some graffiti in Capernaum, speak for a growing interest during thelate second through to the fourth centuries but it is probable that those visitors who left these traces represented a ‘mainstream’ or ‘international’ type of Christianity, while the evidence for earlier, local Jewish Christian sects remains inconclusive.

We are on the safe side if we assume that the appearance of Christians in the late antique Galillean landscape should be connected to the beginning of Christian pilgrimage. While there are some examples of second or third century pilgrims to Palestine, mostly male Christian intellectuals, pilgrimage to the Holy Land as a popular movement started after the Constantinian turn in the fourth century. These visitors soon reported what they had seen on their travels; for example, Egeria told her readers that during her visit to Galilee in the 380s she saw churches in Capernaum, Tabgha, Tiberias and Nazareth. Yet, pilgrim accounts rarely reveal any specifics of local circumstances because this literature ‘is marked by a deep religious aura, a lack of interest in the present, and carelessness about space and time, view, and landscape’. Blake Leyerle has described how for Egeria, ‘the value of the land depends on its biblical past’ which explains her ‘blindness to contemporary Jewish life’ in Galilee. On the basis of the gospels, she attaches special significance to simple geographic features like hills and fields, which marks ‘the beginning of the process of social framing through which terrain becomes infused with meaning’. Andrew Jacobs has examined how Christians found ways to cope with contemporary Jewish communities in their pilgrim accounts so

100 References to Ναζαρηται or Ναζαρηταί in various Christian sources have figured prominently in discussions of alleged Jewish Christian groups in Galilee. Luomanen (Recovering 241–2) has shown how Epiphanius created the well-defined, heretical group of Nazarenes from some scattered earlier references. Luomanen concludes that the ‘heresy’ of the Nazarenes never existed but real, historical Nazarenes were Syria-speaking Christians with a Jewish background who had a clear Christian identity and were openly pro-Pauline. Cf. Zangenberg (‘Galilean Jesus’: 89) who says that ‘there appears no genuine connection between Ebionites and Nazareans with the Galilee as such’.


104 Limor, ‘“Holy Journey”’, 347. For the concept of seeing in pilgrim accounts, see Juliette Day’s chapter in this volume.

that they were able to incorporate ‘the “local” experience of Jews into the universality of sacred Christian time and space’.  

Christian pilgrimage to the holy sites soon became tightly connected with the emergence of monasticism in the Holy Land. The first pilgrim centres in Galilee were located in close proximity to the synagogues discussed above. In Capernaum, earlier structures were transformed into a domus ecclesiae, a house church, in the late fourth century and finally an octagonal church was built near the synagogue in the fifth century. In Tabgha, a small chapel was built in the late fourth century to commemorate the place where Jesus allegedly fed five thousand men with five loaves and two fish. A larger building with magnificent mosaics was built in the vicinity in the fifth century. Stefano De Luca has recently emphasized that the church buildings at the site were closely connected to the adjacent structures and that the building complex as a whole is the first attestation of monastic life in Galilee. The circumstances in this part of eastern Galilee were different from many neighbouring areas because Capernaum and Tabgha seem to have been the only rural Christian settlements in this still predominantly Jewish region throughout Late Antiquity. The evidence that we have for this area by the Sea of Galilee speaks of a gradual and limited spread of Christianity that took place, to the best of our knowledge, peacefully.

We do not have any direct evidence, literary or archaeological, that could clarify how emergent Christian communities in Tabgha and in Capernaum interacted with their surrounding Jewish communities. The archaeological evidence speaks for the relative prosperity of these sites, evidenced for instance by the churches in Capernaum and in Tabgha and their richly decorated mosaic floors.

109 De Luca, ‘Vorgeschichte’: 38–44. As De Luca mentions, other examples of early monasteries in the region include the complex in Magdala (fifth/sixth centuries to eighth century) and at Kursi on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee (sixth century). An urban monastery was built in Tiberias during the reign of Justinian I (527–567), see Hirschfeld, ‘The Monasteries’: 406.
110 For the distribution of Christian sites in Galilee, see Mordechai Aviam, Jews, Pagans and Christians in the Galilee: 25 Years of Archaeological Excavations and Surveys, Hellenistic to Byzantine Periods (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press and Institute for Galilean Archaeology, 2004): 9–21. The landscape in the surroundings of Capernaum and Tabgha was totally different from the rural western Galilee, where there is abundant evidence of Christian churches and monasteries in Late Antiquity (ibid: 181–204). See also Jacob Ashkenazi and Mordechai Aviam, ‘Monasteries, Monks, and Villages in Western Galilee in Late Antiquity’, //AJ 45 (2013): 293–331.
111 For example, we do not have any examples in Galilee of the violent conversion of synagogues into churches. This policy is attested archaeologically in places such as Stobi, Gerasa and Apamea, see Levine, The Ancient Synagogue 211.
112 For Capernaum, see Corbo, Caiaria 43–5; for Tabgha, De Luca, ‘Vorgeschichte’: 41–2.
The similarities between Byzantine church and synagogue mosaics have often been noticed, and scholars have asked whether the artisans representing the same workshops or using similar pattern books could have been used both by Jewish and Christian communities.\textsuperscript{113} The sources of wealth generation for these remote Galilean Christian pilgrim sites are still unclear and can be assessed only in light of relevant parallel material. Stefano De Luca has suggested that there are signs in Tabgha that members of this monastic community were involved in small-scale agricultural production, evidenced in other monastic sites in Palestine, even though the main source of income was most probably connected to Christian pilgrimage.\textsuperscript{114} Yitzhar Hirschfeld has described how the monasteries provided pilgrims with physical and spiritual services and, at the same time, often benefited directly from the pilgrims’ work contributions and donations.\textsuperscript{115} Many Christian pilgrims belonged to the wealthy upper class, and it is fully possible that the economic boost brought by the influx of these pilgrims was not limited to the monasteries but benefited the local population on a larger scale.\textsuperscript{116} Hagith Sivan, referring to the co-existence of the synagogue and the Christian pilgrimage church in Capernaum, suggests that ‘in the first half of the sixth century a general state of prosperity was pre-eminently responsible for moments of conciliation . . . [and] pilgrimage assumed a conciliatory function.’\textsuperscript{117} The large body of rabbinic evidence refers to permanent and periodic markets, merchants, various craftsmen and so forth in both urban and rural contexts, and these references suggest that Galilean villages were well integrated into larger Byzantine trade networks.\textsuperscript{118} It is also likely that local Christian communities participated in these networks which provided a venue for the interaction between these communities and their larger, predominantly Jewish, surroundings.

\textsuperscript{113} Levine, \textit{The Ancient Synagogues} 230. Cf. also Zev Weiss, \textit{The Sepphoris Synagogue: Deciphering an Ancient Message through Its Archaeological and Socio-Historical Contexts} (Jerusalem: IES, 2005): 170: ‘it seems that the figural style of the Sepphoris [synagogue] mosaic bore some of the stylistic trends prevailing in the Byzantine mosaics, such as those from Khirbet el-Marrasas, the Leonis House, and Tabgha which are dated to the second half of the fifth and early sixth centuries CE.’ For artists and their workshops, see Haschibi, \textit{Ancient Synagogues} 473–515.


\textsuperscript{115} Hirschfeld, ‘The Monasteries’: 410.

\textsuperscript{116} Taylor, \textit{Christians} 338.

\textsuperscript{117} Sivan, Palestine: 47.

Conclusion

As I remarked at the beginning of this chapter, we must rest our reconstructions of Jewish and Christian communities in late antique Galilee on limited and mostly indirect literary and archaeological evidence. There have emerged two quite opposite ways to envision Jewish–Christian relations in Galilee. Mordechai Aviam emphasizes the strict boundaries between Jewish and Christian areas of settlements and interprets the available evidence in light of ‘Jewish-Christian conflict’ or ‘Jewish–Christian antagonism’.119 My review of recent scholarship dealing with Jewish–Christian relations in the ancient world suggests, however, that these relations were not only characterized by conflict and mutual hostility. This recent scholarly trend lends support to Eric Meyers, who sees Jewish and Christian communities in Galilee as living side by side with each other and remarks that ‘we would be making a great mistake if we were to think of Jews and Christians only as enemies’.120

In light of this discussion, I would like to nuance the view that emphasizes the coexistence of Jewish and Christian communities in Galilee. My conclusion is that despite the rhetoric of separation evident in many written sources, various kinds of interactions took place between Jewish and Christian communities. Recent theoretical discussions emphasize how both individual and group identities are flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances. The members of one group that in some contexts defines itself as completely distinct from other groups, may in different contexts interact with members of their rival groups in many ways. I suggest that local Jewish and Christian communities in late antique Galilee cherished their particular traditions by constructing for themselves specific spaces that set them apart from the rest of the society and in this way reinforced their collective identity. These buildings, synagogues and pilgrim churches, may share much in the details of their art and architecture, but they also epitomize the need of these communities to present themselves as different from one another. Just as literary sources echo the rhetoric of separation and one-sidedly give voice to antagonism and separation, distinct Christian and Jewish holy places probably draw an incomplete portrait of relations between Jews and Christians in Galilee. Members of these communities may have felt unthreatened when they gathered in their sanctuaries, but as soon as they stepped outside of their own communities’ buildings, they were exposed to a more diverse social reality where they interacted with their neighbours in a variety of ways.

119 Cf. Mordechai Aviam, ‘Christian Galilee in the Byzantine Period’, in Galilee through the Centuries, Eric M. Meyers (ed.), 281–300; Jews, Pagans and Christians 316–17. For example, Aviam suggests that the octagonal church in Capernaum and the monastery in Kursi were surrounded by walls to ‘guard’ these sites in predominantly Jewish surroundings (‘Christian Galilee’: 282, 298).

120 Meyers, ‘Living Side by Side’: 150.