

# Jesus the "Material Jew"

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## Introduction

To speak today of "Jesus the Jew" is commonplace. Jesus, son of Joseph and Mary, residents of Nazareth, was born a Jew, lived as a Jew and died as one. But what kind of Jew was he? During the course of the years, scholarship has helped us understand much about his life and his basic teachings and not a small amount of work has been done on the Jewish context of his life and teachings. However, much less attention has been paid to the physical and material realities surrounding the everyday life and teachings of Jesus. The "academic" Judaism of Jesus is often a "literary" Judaism, short on material culture and archaeology, although attempts have been made recently to focus on "Jesus archaeology".<sup>1</sup> Less work, however, has been devoted to material culture and realia, or in the words of Marianne Sawicki: "Until recently, studies of Jesus have paid surprisingly little attention to the land, regarding it merely as a kind of stage or neutral platform supporting the events told in the Gospels.... Anyone who wants to know about Jesus must seek him on his native turf, in his own land and landscape".<sup>2</sup> This is easier said than done, however, or as stated by Peter Richardson: "It is difficult to use *realia* in Galilee, Judea, and South Syria in descriptions of the rising of the Jesus movement, in part because no *realia* can certainly be associated with it in these early stages."<sup>3</sup> "Christian archaeology" is still very monument oriented and still expends much energy on actively seeking archaeological confirmation of the New Testament, focusing on the 'big' issues, and not the micro issues of everyday life.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the material life and culture of Jesus is perforce the material life of Jesus the Jew.

But how can that material life be determined? Surprisingly, there is not agreement about the composition of "material culture". There are those who stress landscape with material culture being a segment of one's physical environment shaped by humans. Others stress artifacts seeing material culture as the totality of artifacts in culture and it includes remnants left behind from the physical world. The former would seem to reflect the quote of Sawicki above. The latter might be identified with archaeology, but it is not. Material culture and archaeology are related but not the same. To both of these views it is possible to add liberally from the theories (and sometimes jargon) of the world of social sciences forming satellite and sub-views including issues of caste, kinship and gender.<sup>5</sup>

It is also not easy to determine just what makes up "Jewish" material culture as opposed to material culture of the Jews. Thus, the material life of the Jews in Hellenistic-Roman Palestine was not that much different than that of their non-Jewish neighbors, both in terms of urban and rural life. What was different related to "Jewish" aspects of everyday life or *halakha* and included such ethnic and religious material markers as *mikvaot*, or stone vessels, both relating to purity, the wearing of fringes on a four-cornered garment, or the use of religious paraphernalia such as "Sabbath lamps". There might also have been some, minor differences in agricultural procedures and perhaps in agricultural tools and implements. Certain types of burial, such as secondary burial might be an indicator of Jewishness, animal bone profiles that lack pig, and aniconic decoration, without human or animal figures, might also be (negative) Jewish material markers<sup>6</sup> Are we to look then for Jesus and the Jesus movement to be frequenting *mikvaot* or using stone implements? Did they wear fringes on their garments? Could we even tell them apart from any other Palestinian Jew of the time in terms of their material culture and

everyday life? For our purposes, what we seek is material culture of the Jews and here and there some "Jewish" material culture. Both of these would probably have also served as the material framework for Jesus and his followers.

While even the "historical Jesus" may have lived at times in an apocalyptic world,<sup>7</sup> his images and thought used a language of everyday life in Roman Palestine. His teachings and parables mention stone vessels, lamps and flasks, pots, utensils, vineyards and towers, coins, swords etc. Understanding the realia of his world, Jewish or not, is of the highest priority in re-creating his social world and this in turn can help us understand his spiritual. What we cannot do, however, in this article, is to deal with the corpus of spatial imagery in the Gospels, or even in Q. The explication of individual verses or motifs must be studied elsewhere. Our work at present serves simply as background.<sup>8</sup>

The material world of Jesus was not just limited to artifacts and land. Jesus was peripatetic and is reputed to have visited certain sites in Palestine such as Nazareth, Cana, Bethsaida, Capernaum, Jericho and Jerusalem. What would he have found in these sites in terms of everyday life and how would all this have impacted upon "Jesus the Jew"? How would his religious life have intersected with the material culture of the sites which he- visited? How would his physical surroundings, Jewish or otherwise, have influenced him?

To answer all these questions would also probably be an endeavor of a lifetime. What we can attempt to do here is briefly to describe the material reality with which Jesus might have come in contact, allowing for a better understanding of the world in which he functioned and taught. As most of this was done in the Galilee, we shall try to relate as much as possible to that region, but we shall not be restricted to the Galilee as

Jesus was not. As there is also no proof that Jesus entered the Galilean cities of Sepphoris or Tiberias, and in fact the only real city that he spent time in was Jerusalem, we shall limit our discussion to the rural sphere.<sup>9</sup> However, as stated above, our work here is a "drop in the bucket" and at best can give only a "taste" both in terms of content and of bibliography.<sup>10</sup>

### **A Framework for Study: Limitations and Reality**

What are the parameters of study to describe the material world of Jesus? In an ideal world the study framework of the material culture of the first century CE would be all encompassing of everyday life (and death). Palestinian society of that time was both rural and urban, but Jewish society was mostly rural. A discussion of rural society would relate to settlements and their components: e.g., houses, courtyards, utensils and the aspects of everyday life with which they were associated, agriculture (crops, implements and labor), work and labor in general, roads and even harbors. A study of urban society, and the Jews after all were also found in the cities of Palestine, would include much of what was just mentioned from an urban perspective as well as such usually urban, but not always, phenomena as bathhouses, markets and fairs, and synagogues. Both sectors were not monolithic in terms of population. There were upper class and lower class, rich and poor and various economic and social permutations of these with their variations in material life. Nor was there an iron wall between rural and urban; distances were relatively short and events and developments in one sphere might impact on the other. The archaeology of the rural and urban spheres might have been somewhat different, but apparently the material culture and everyday ethnic and religious lives were similar and this was the case not only in Galilee, but also in Judaea.<sup>11</sup>

While the depictions of Jesus in the Gospels are mostly in the rural sphere, some of his followers had urban backgrounds of sorts and in any case, the relatively short distances between rural and urban allowed for a diffusion of material culture from one sphere to another and if not in a physical sense, at least certainly in a virtual sense in terms of knowledge. In that ideal study framework it would also be necessary to concentrate on local manifestations of material culture, i.e. of Judaea, Samaria, Peraea and Galilee. Also, due to inter-regional migrations, "local" might have been just as inter-regional (or not). As mentioned above, we make do here with providing background information in order to understand some of the aspects of the material world of Jesus.

Finally, the issue of time frame is also critical. It would certainly be ideal if there were enough sources on all matters which could clearly depict the material culture of Jesus' times. However, this is not the case. Can a tradition dating to the second century CE about this or that utensil depict the material reality of a century before? The fact is that changes in material culture in general in the ancient world progress at a very slow pace. *La longue durée* reigns in the ancient material world. Thus, some of our comments may be dependent on reality described in Rabbinic literature, which while it post-dates the times of Jesus, is still probably dependable in general regarding material culture.<sup>12</sup>

## **Rural Life**

### 1. Settlements

Most Jews in first century Palestine lived in villages of various sizes.<sup>13</sup> Some may have lived in isolated large manor houses or farms, but not many and the few that did were not in the Galilee. Most of these rural villages were also fairly homogenous and monolithic in terms of their ethnic, social and religious composition but it would not be

correct to postulate a uniform "peasant" model, as it were, and social differentiation should not be totally ruled out as an option in the rural sphere. Relatively speaking, a low level of building existed in this sphere and in private homes it would be unusual to find dressed stones, capitals or colored mosaics, although there were some exceptions. Household "high design" did not much exist here. We shall discuss homes in somewhat more detail below. The quality of life in these settlements was probably not high. There were in general few public buildings although the larger rural settlements might have had synagogues or a school building. While there might have been some Hellenization or Romanization in such settlements, it would probably have been more in the nature of politics than of culture or architecture

## 2. Courtyards and Houses

Village life for men, women and children often revolved around the courtyard, usually reached by passing through narrow streets and alleys.<sup>14</sup> It is the courtyard which often provides the means for understanding the relationship between public and private space in the village. Allegiance might often have been more to one's (family) courtyard (= neighborhood) than to the village itself. There was constant tension here between the open courtyard life and the quest for at least some degree of privacy, the latter accomplished usually through the construction of partitions or fences within the courtyard. These physical changes might also have been necessary due to changes in family demographics or on account of changes in the dynamics of courtyard possessions. Often it was not clear who owned what and tension between neighbors was not uncommon.

In addition to residences, the courtyard might have contained dovecotes, chicken coops, storage facilities, cisterns, toilets, a primitive sewer system and perhaps a shop. Life in the courtyard was boisterous and loud with laundering, cooking, baking, grinding and often eating occurring there. Outdoor life in the courtyard was communal. This was also a common play area for children, and various animals, when not grazing, might have also wandered about the courtyard, sometimes serving as children's pets.<sup>15</sup> Courtyards were often locked at night, but there was generally always a coming and going with ultimately little privacy and little quiet. It is not difficult to understand why doors of private residences entered from a courtyard were often kept locked, requiring one to knock to gain entry.<sup>16</sup> Sometimes the courtyards were of a more "internal" nature, signifying that they were not "public" space and this also allowed for greater degrees of privacy.

Different types of houses were constructed in the courtyards. While we shall discuss houses within the framework of a rural setting, it should be remembered that the line of demarcation is not always absolute between rural and urban, at least regarding domiciles, although a higher level of Romanization was to be found in urban residential architecture. It is also important to remember that a house and its attendant space is more than a just a "container" for basic human activities, but rather reflects an "architectural language" which can shape society as well as reflect that society. Also house décor can provide clues as to the nature of life in a particular house.

Eyal Baruch has distinguished six principal types of homes based on architectural function: 1. common courtyard house 2. front courtyard house 3. atrium house 4. peristyle house 5. manor house 6. farmhouse.<sup>17</sup> The common courtyard house is the most

widespread and continues trends in architecture from the Hellenistic period. It had a square or rectangular floor-plan, a central courtyard surrounded by rooms from all or some of its wings and usually common walls with other residential structures. The plan of the front courtyard house was generally the same except for the "front" courtyard. The two courtyard houses, the type Jesus would have come in contact with, were on the lowest socio-economic level. Then came the farmhouse, but as we mentioned, not generally found in Galilee. The Roman house, an urban phenomenon, in all its forms, was on the highest level.

One of the striking features of "Jewish" domiciles was the large number of *mikvaot* or ritual baths found in these houses in spite of the fact that there were often numerous public *mikvaot* nearby, in the settlement itself or in adjacent fields. While these are clearly religious and ethnic markers, the house *mikvaot* reflect a desire for "private" observance of ritual purity as opposed to a more public expression in a public *mikveh*.<sup>18</sup>

Baruch has also shown us that despite a well-developed communal organization in many of the rural villages, the residences were for the most part built in the same style and level of construction. There were no significant signs of social gaps. Baruch sees this as reflecting a cultural perspective that sees the display of personal wealth in a negative manner. If there was surplus wealth, it would have been invested in public buildings such as synagogues, with these providing a leveling mechanism within Jewish village society.<sup>19</sup> Jesus would probably have not been opposed to a view that looked askance at displaying signs of personal wealth and he might even have been in favor of a system of rural leveling mechanisms. Would he have supported the synagogue as an expression of that leveling?



It is obviously impossible here to deal with all component parts of all the types of houses and we shall make reference only to major components.<sup>20</sup> Some houses had a "gate house" or anteroom. External windows seem to have been problematical, since they might have weakened the walls, but internal windows were built to provide light and air. In spite of this, natural sunlight probably did not suffice and it was necessary to find other modes of lighting. The oil lamp was the most common solution. Some were portable and some were hung from the ceiling. Restrictions on kindling fire on the Sabbath required the construction of "slow-drip" lamps and other types of "Sabbath lamps". These too served as clear ethnic and religious functional markers.<sup>21</sup>

The more simple houses were of the one room variety and might have been divided into upper and lower parts. Those who could manage it constructed additional rooms. This new space, and the division of space, was a function of social structure and rank, gender, and age, as well as of practical functionality. There might have been a *traklin*, the rabbinic version of the Roman *triclinium*, serving as dining room for family or formal meals. Reclining on couches, the diner ate food that was placed on different types of tables, some individual, low and round with three legs. This does not mean that diners always dined in Hellenistic style and perhaps often did not. Archaeological evidence from Gamla seems to indicate that residents would have gathered around one or two shared dishes, using a single small bowl or saucer.<sup>22</sup> The food might have been prepared in a kitchen or in "oven areas" in the house, but a good deal of food preparation and cooking took place in the courtyard.<sup>23</sup>

Behind the *traklin* there was often a *kiton* or bedroom, with or without a curtain or partition, and often serving all family members. The size of the room determined sleeping

arrangements and furniture, whether a bed with a wooden frame, mattresses and pillows, or a sleeping mat.<sup>24</sup> Additional domestic furniture was rather limited. Sometimes there were chairs, stools and seats of various kinds. Sitting or sleeping (without at least a mat) on the floor was considered a sign of abject poverty.<sup>25</sup> There might also have been various types of chests, boxes and cupboards for storage.

Bathing rooms and indoor privies were not to be found in rural villages, although they did exist in homes of the wealthy in the urban sphere. The same is true for basements, although there were often more simple storage areas in village houses and some houses had their own water cisterns. Some houses also had a second storey which would have been reached by a staircase from the outside. The roof of a house was usually flat, providing more living space if necessary and served as a work area. Some of the activities that took place in the courtyard might have been transferred to the roof allowing for more privacy.

### 3. Khirbet Qana

As mentioned above, Jesus lived in, visited or passed through numerous sites in Palestine and perhaps not all were mentioned in the Gospels. While in the rural sector there was much that was standard, clearly each village or site had its own individual and sometimes even unique "personality". Obviously we cannot describe all the rural sites associated with Jesus. We shall make do with one example and that is Khirbet Qana, associated with New Testament Cana (John 2:-11; 4:46; 21:2 with 1:43-45).<sup>26</sup>

Khirbet Qana is located on a hundred meter hill on the north side of the Beth Natufa valley eight km south-southwest from Sepphoris and within sight of modern day Nazareth Illit. This site should not be confused with modern day Kefr Kanna near

Nazareth and on the Sepphoris-Tiberias road, and which became associated with Jesus only in the Middle Ages. It is always important to remember, as pointed out above, that distances in Palestine between various cultural, economic, and social spheres are relatively short and while Jesus might be associated for the most part with rural life, urban life was only a short distance away, although it cannot not be insignificant that no Gospel source has him visiting a Galilean city.

Cana persisted through several occupation stages with few major changes. As a hillside village its plan was set by considerations of access and topography and the first century settlement seems to have had little in the way of formal planning. The main access road was from the east, but road connections with other towns are uncertain. Cana was unwalled when Jesus knew it, and this was the case in most Galilean villages Jesus would have visited such as Capernaum and Chorazin. Terms such as *agora* and *forum* are inappropriate for villages like Cana. There might have been a "commercial area", though, in the northeast.

The town core was a fairly packed hilltop with houses, streets and lanes organized in some form of regularity. There were a number of large public cisterns there. Cana had several industrial areas. Much of the industry was related to agriculture although there might have been some glass-blowing activity. It is possible that there was some neighborhood and housing differentiation. Some of the houses were terrace houses without courtyards, while others were of the courtyard variety described above. Some had two stories. Walls were constructed in rough masonry rubble with few dressed stones. Cana had at least one public *mikveh* and a number of apparently Jewish tombs have been uncovered around the site, but all were 200-400 meters away in keeping with purity

concerns. A public building whose chronology is not yet clear and perhaps existed already in the first century CE could have been a synagogue or study house. Other villages were not that different.

#### 4. Utensils

In addition to the basic furniture found in the Jewish houses or courtyards and described above, one would have found in them also implements, vessels, utensils and equipment of sundry types for various purposes.<sup>27</sup> While few houses had kitchens, as mentioned above, there seems to have been a good deal of cooking and eating going on and thus many of the utensils in the Jewish home were related to these basic activities. The Jewish housewife had a well-stocked kitchen and in this she was no different than her non-Jewish neighbors and often they bought the same utensils from the same suppliers.<sup>28</sup> As we shall see below, changes in household assemblages, and such do occur, at least in Galilee, might reflect social and political change.

Certain aspects were, however, unique to the Jewish kitchen. Stone ware was popular among Jews because it was not susceptible to ritual purity and some vessels, such as the wide-necked, bulbous *meyham*, used for heating water, could be stacked on another *meyham* or on a pot-bellied, round-bottom cooking pot in order to keep its contents warm over the Shabbat.<sup>29</sup>

There were also various types of stoves available. The most common was the *kirah*, a single, hollow compartment allowing air to circulate through top holes on which pots or pans could be placed. They could be portable or permanent and sometimes a number were joined together. The best were made of metal or stone and might be status symbols.

The most common cooking vessel was the pot-bellied cooking pot which came in various sizes allowing for easy stacking. Long use would have caused them to be blackened by fire. There were also various types of casseroles for stewing and steaming. Various types of frying pans were also common. Food was served in bowls and platters of different sizes and shapes, some shallow some deep, and were made of metal, glass, clay or wood.

Liquids, and especially wine, were stored in sealed storage jars, in a "wine cellar" if one was available. A vent hole would allow for minimal amounts to be poured out, but larger amounts could have been poured through a funnel. The wine would be poured into a decanter and then into clay pitchers. It was not drunk neat and had had to be diluted with water. The wine was drunk in a cup which in Jewish society was often personal and reflected social position. The rich drank from clear colorless glass and the poor from colored glass.

We have no way of knowing which utensils or implements Jesus used in Galilee, but what he did use in the first century reflected changes in lifestyle in Galilee and these changes went beyond pottery and reflected changes in the political atmosphere.<sup>30</sup> Thus, from the second century BCE and throughout the first century BCE, people in Galilee, Jews and non-Jews, set their tables with imported red-slipped plates and bowls and lit their homes with imported mold-made lamps. These might well be defined as luxury items. There was much use of narrow-mouthed cooking vessels and wide-mouthed casseroles, popular in Greek cuisine, and this implied that Greek cuisine had become commonplace in Galilee for both Jews and non-Jews. On top of all this, at this time there

was even some interior wall painting and stucco decoration in Jewish sites such as Yodfat and Gamla.

It is unlikely that any of this would have made much of an impression on Jesus, since at the end of the first century BCE and continuing into the first century CE, while non-Jews continued to import these wares, the Jews stopped. Galilean Jews set their tables exclusively with locally-manufactured, small, undecorated buff-colored saucers and white chalk vessels and lit their homes with wheel-made local knife-pared lamps. Why did the demand for specific objects cease in Galilee. Adele Berlin sees this as a declaration of anti-Romanization on one hand and an expression of Jewish self-identity on the other. Local Jews made a political statement of solidarity and affiliation with a traditional, unadorned, Jewish lifestyle as well as demonstrating a unified opposition to the Roman presence. That "Jewish lifestyle" also seems to be in keeping with an allegiance to *halacha* and purity. Did Jesus and his followers read their Galilean wares (as well as their simple Judaeon stoneware) in this manner? Did they express anti-Roman feelings and Jewish patriotism with every meal? Obviously this cannot be proven, but Berlin's views do add a fascinating interpretation to mundane activities of (Jewish) life.

## 5. Modes of Production

### A. Agriculture

Agriculture was the main sphere of production in Roman Palestine, and it affected the lives of everyone, whether as consumers or producers.<sup>31</sup> Consumption was not just a matter of survival but impacted upon Jewish life, whether at weekday meals or at Sabbath or holiday meals. An entire ~~tractate-order~~ of the Mishnah, *Zeraim*, relates to agriculture, cultivation and consumption of produce, and even if the Mishnah post-dates Jesus, it is

likely that there was not much change regarding major aspects of agricultural law and/or modes of production and consumption during the Second Temple and Mishnah periods. *La longue durée* also reigns supreme here.

In any case, though, Josephus can give us a good indication of agricultural life during the first century CE. The best general statement regarding Jewish life and agriculture is found in *Against Apion* 1.60: "Now we do not inhabit a country with a coast, nor are we keen on trade or on the mixing with others which results from it. Rather our cities have been built inland, far from the sea, and since we live on good terrain, we work it thoroughly."<sup>32</sup>

In his description of the Land of Israel in *War* 3.35-58, Josephus provides information about the state of agriculture in various regions of Palestine. The soil of the Galilee was rich and fruitful and replete with many types of trees (3.41-43). The Peraea was less fertile than Galilee and much of it was desert, but there were fertile tracts which allowed for the cultivation of olives, grapes and date-palms (3.45-47). Judaea and Samaria were fruitful with an abundance of trees, but also had excellent grass for grazing (3.48-50).

Josephus also provides more local descriptions. Thus, regarding the Valley of Gennesar along the northwestern coast of the Sea of Galilee (also known the "Lake of Gennesar") Josephus (*War* 3.516-521) tells us that it was so fertile that even opposite varieties grew there all year round, such as, walnuts which required a cold climate, figs and olives which required a more temperate one and palms which required hot air. Other crops such as grapes were also found there. Jesus would have spent much time in and

around this area. Jesus would have also been familiar with the fertile Jericho plain (*War* 4.459-475), the breadbasket of Judaea.<sup>33</sup>

In addition to the crops mentioned above by Josephus, it is also important to mention the grains grown in Palestine. Wheat was the most important crop and barley was also popular, especially in southern regions. Spelt was also grown and bread of various forms was the universal dietary staple. There were also more than twenty types of legumes, such as lentils, green beans, and *full* grown in Palestine, popular among the poor in the form of porridge or as a grain substitute. Grapes mentioned above were an important cash crop, but wine consumption was not usually excessive in Jewish society, although wine was supposed to be a part of the festive, holiday or religious meal. In addition to figs, pressed or otherwise, and dates, often in the form of cakes, one could also find carobs, pears, apples, peaches, nuts and pomegranates. Many people also maintained small vegetable gardens for private use.<sup>34</sup>

#### B. Grazing: Animals and Diet

The crops above provided a basic diet, and even a rich one for some. In addition to the agricultural produce mentioned above, there were additional modes of production for the farmer. There was a good deal of sheep grazing in Palestine, most of it in Judaea and a small amount in Galilee and later Rabbinic dicta possibly forbade the raising of sheep in Galilee while allowing it to continue in Judaea and adjacent desert areas. The sheep not only provided a good deal of wool, but also were a source of meat. A farmyard might also have had a cow or two, providing milk and/or cheese and there might also have been chicken coops. Both animals obviously also served as a source of meat, as did doves that were raised in underground columbaria.<sup>35</sup>



Another important component of the ancient diet in Palestine was fish. Then as today, fish was often part of the Sabbath meal and was eaten more often than meat. Fish were caught both along the Mediterranean Sea and the Sea of Galilee. The former fishermen were often non-Jews, the latter were mostly Jewish and they provided for the needs of the Jewish population. While the capital of this industry was Tiberias, it was extremely popular all along the basin of the Sea of Galilee as we learn from numerous sources of the New Testament.<sup>36</sup>

While it is of course impossible to know what constituted the basic diet of Jesus and his followers, there is no reason to assume that it was any different than the normative described above. A safe bet would be along the lines of bread, fish, fresh or salted, olive-oil, (watered down) wine, and perhaps the occasional additional fruit or vegetable.

#### DC. Field Work

Farm work was not easy.<sup>37</sup> Much time was spent plowing. The first two plowings in the summer and fall after the first rain, respectively, prepared the land to absorb water, air and seeds. The third plowing was deep and right before seeding, usually of winter grain and the final plowing covered the seeds, after the land had further been prepared for sowing through fertilization. The metal funnel-shaped plow-share with a sharp point, cut into the earth. It was connected to a sharp wooden tailpiece which was attached to the knee. The knee was connected to a long pole attached to the yoke, and another pole placed on the neck of an ox or cow. Hoeing and weeding kept the planted area free of weeds.

Harvesting with a short handled sickle would have occurred in late spring and was backbreaking. The small piles of grain were gathered into larger stacks and transported to the threshing floor, which could be public or private. Threshing separated kernels from husks, consisting of chopped straw and chaff. The work, done in public threshing floors, was an ecological hazard, even by ancient standards and could not be done near a settlement. Little was wasted, though, and left over straw was used to feed animals or made into compost. Some settlements also had flour mills.

Grapes and olives were of course for the most part not eaten raw but consumed as wine and oil. Both were produced in presses. Various systems of weights, levers and presses, and crushing basins existed. Most olive presses were also public or community property. Wine presses might be public or private. The juice was stored in vats and after the first fermentation it was stored in jars in a cool place until it became wine concentrate. There can be no doubt about the fact that Jesus and his fellows would have been familiar with the nitty gritty of all of this.<sup>38</sup>

Most of the agricultural work was done by the farmer himself, sometimes with the help of immediate family or if additional help was needed, with a permanent or temporary worker. There were also specialized workers such as vegetable growers, date-palm planters, fig pickers, threshers, oxen-drivers etc. who helped the farmer when necessary. Most of the work, of course, was done locally. When it came time to sell the produce, the farmer usually marketed the produce himself, but there were exceptions and in more developed regions in terms of economy, there was more division of labor even in these agricultural fields.<sup>39</sup>

ED. Fishing

Fishing was no less physically exacting, although it was not as time consuming.<sup>40</sup> A telling description is found in Matt 13:47-48: "The kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad." This would have been done with a trammel net or a series of such nets, pulled along by a boat, perhaps similar to the "Jesus Boat" discovered in 1986, and pulled back in concert with those on shore. There were also smaller casting nets and one could also cast a hook (Mt. 17:27). While Jesus of Nazareth may not have known much about fishing, it is likely that Jesus of Capernaum and its environs would have picked up quickly on all this.<sup>41</sup>

#### FE. Crafts, Industry and Services

While most people in the rural sphere were involved in agriculture, it was not the only way to make a living.<sup>42</sup> There were different forms of crafts and industry found in both village and city. We shall stress those related to the rural sphere and in any case, they could often be found both in both the rural and in the urban spheres.

There were a number of industries in Palestine which were of importance such as textiles, pottery, glass, and perhaps paper. As we saw above, stoneware was also produced and stones were quarried for construction. Some of the production was for local needs, some regional and some might have even been appropriate for export.

The most important industry was probably the textile industry and the most important areas within this were the cultivation of flax and subsequent production of fibers and the grazing of sheep and production of wool. The textile industry also made use of cotton and silk. The labors included weaving, dyeing, washing and sewing. A good deal of this work was specific to women and there was often much more to it in terms of

larger issues of gender and sexuality, certainly beyond the tedium of these everyday labors.<sup>43</sup> Men involved in the textile industry might have come into more contact with women than was normally the case in everyday life and this could have caused problems.

Many of the utensils of everyday life were of pottery. They would have broken easily and have been difficult to clean, but the raw materials to produce new ones were easily found and labor was cheap. Broken pottery, at least of the local variety, could be tossed aside because it was far more convenient to buy new cheap local pottery than to repair old broken utensils. In the Galilee, for instance, one could have bought kitchen and dining pottery from Kefar Hanaia, the boundary point between Lower and Upper Galilee, or storage jars from Asochis (Shihin) in the Lower Galilee.<sup>44</sup> There were of course, also imported wares, as we mentioned above, but the vast majority of pottery in use in Jewish society was local.

While it is impossible to know how familiar Jesus and his circle were with the intricacies of the labors and industries just described, they were so common and so local, that it is impossible to think that they were not familiar with the basic workings of these industries. They certainly enjoyed the garments and utensils that would have been produced. They would have been less familiar perhaps with the workings of the glass industry, connected with the coast, or with cities, but we saw above that this industry might have existed in Cana and Jesus might have known of it. It is likely, though, that they were not overly familiar with the less extensive industries such as the metal industry and the papyrus industry. Rabbinic literature also mentions numerous other occupations such as leather workers, plasterers, shoemakers, blacksmiths, perfumers, builders, ditch-diggers, carpenters etc. While some would have been undertaken only in the cities, these

laborers would also have been found in larger villages. There was also much business in death with artisans preparing ossuaries at workshops or working on funerary art.

Jewish settlements also offered various services. Most villages probably had a public bathhouse, although there were also private ones. There would have been a public lavatory. One could find perhaps a "doctor", blood letter, scribe, and slaughterer, who served also as butcher. There might also be washer men (or washer women). While cities had a higher standard of living, those living in Jewish settlements, mostly rural, enjoyed a relatively high level of services.

## 6. Clothing and Jewelry

An important aspect of material life is the clothes that make the man or woman.<sup>45</sup> There is no doubt that garments, individual or even uniform, might be identity markers and today the study of clothing is considered vital for the understanding of society. The question, however, is whether there was any distinctive dress that could be described as an ethnic or religious identity marker. Was there Jewish dress or did the Jews dress similar to their non-Jewish neighbors?

There were two distinctive types of Jewish clothing: the *tsisit* or fringes attached to the four corners of a male's outer garment, and the *tefillin* or phylacteries, the leather containers strapped to one's arm and head containing excerpts from the Bible. Matthew reports Jesus speaking to a crowd and his disciples and accusing the Pharisees of various kinds of ostentation in religious practice.<sup>46</sup> "They make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long" (Matt 23:5). While this supposedly describes just the Pharisees, it is they who go to *extremes*, as it were, and there is no reason to assume that only the Pharisees "dressed" like this. In fact it is possible that Matthew depicts Jesus himself wearing

fringes (Matt 9:20; 14:36) and it is likely that he and his circle also wore phylacteries on those occasions when other Jews did.<sup>47</sup> The only other significant Jewish clothing marker would not be visible to the eye and that was refraining from wearing (and weaving) garments made of flax and wool because of the prohibition of "mixed kinds."

Differences in clothing and style probably reflected differences in socio-economic standing and not ethnicity. Clothes were a status symbol in Jewish society. Husbands were supposed to provide for their wives in terms of at least basic clothing and more if they could. Apart from the "Jewish" apparel mentioned above, there were not many differences in dress between Jews and non-Jews. Ancient authors provide no sources that Jews, men or women, were recognizable in their dress.<sup>48</sup> Men and women wore an outer garment or mantle (*talit*), with only the men attaching fringes. Underneath both men and women would wear a tunic (*haluq-kutonet*) and one might wear a number of them. The woman's tunic was usually longer than that of the man and might reach the ankles or feet. A strip of cloth could serve as a belt and the length and width was adjusted to allow the folds to serve as a purse. Underneath one wore some type of underwear or loincloth, but this was not always the case for men. Both men and women wore different types of caps and headdresses, sometimes veiled in the case of women. In Jewish society, children dressed basically in the same manner as "small adults". All of the above depended of course on having the means to make or buy clothing. The poor were often relegated to wearing rags.

Clothing was not the only external status marker. Those who could afford it (men, women and children), wore jewelry, although this was more popular among women, both in villages and cities,<sup>49</sup> and cosmetics of all kinds were popular among those who could

afford it. One gets the impression that physical "external" appearance was important and care was taken when possible to improve it.

## 7. Death

The final stage of material life was death and there was much that can be learned about life from the mechanics of passing over, as it were.<sup>50</sup> There were field tombs, shaft tombs (or dug out) tombs, *loculi* or rock-cut tombs, tombs with *arcosolia* (bench-like apertures with arched ceilings hewn along the length of wall), ornamental tombs and monumental tombs. One of the most popular modes of burial was in burial caves. From an external courtyard, the body would be brought into an internal one and placed in niches (*kochim*) carved in the cave. After a year what was left of the body would be placed in internment receptacles such as ossuaries or wooden coffins and the niche could be used again. The tomb might contain inscriptions and funerary art. Often a large stone was placed at the entrance of the tomb to prevent unlawful entry. Just about every step of the funeral and burial procedure, as well as the subsequent mourning had meaning regarding religion, social and economic status.

The monumental and most ornate tombs were discovered in and around Jerusalem and they are the exception rather than the rule, even if they make the most prominent remains. Most tombs of the times of Jesus were of the various rock-cut varieties, as indeed was the tomb of Jesus in Jerusalem.<sup>51</sup> There were also many shaft and field tombs. The tombs of first century CE Galilee, as of Judaea, apart from Jerusalem and its environs were of the simpler varieties.

## **Conclusion**

The material life of Jesus and his early followers was the material life of a Jew, and mostly a rural Jew. For the most part there was nothing unique in this and the everyday life of the Jews was not that different than that of their non-Jewish neighbors. However, occasionally religion, ethnicity and even politics resulted in change and there is no reason to assume that Jesus diverged in these matters from his Jewish neighbors.

His life and teachings evolved in the material milieu described above and while it is impossible to reconstruct all aspects of Jesus' everyday life, his words and teachings can be better understood through a better understanding of the material world in which he functioned.

## Discussion Questions

1. To what extent was the everyday life in "Roman" Palestine Jewish?
2. Describe an "average material day" of Jesus and his followers in Roman Galilee.
3. Bring examples of New Testament teachings and traditions that reflect on everyday life in Galilee

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, James H. Charlesworth (ed.), *Jesus and Archaeology* (Grand Rapids-Cambridge [UK]: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2006). See especially Charlesworth, "Jesus Research and Archaeology: A New Perspective," in *Jesus and Archaeology*, 11-63 and the bibliography cited there.

<sup>2</sup> Marianne Sawicki, *Crossing Galilee: Architectures in the Occupied Land of Jesus* (Harrisburg [PA]: Trinity Press International, 2000), 3, 7.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Richardson, *Building Jewish in the Roman East* (Waco [TX]: Baylor University; Supplements to the *Journal for the Study of Judaism*, 2004), 74.



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<sup>4</sup> Kim Bowes, "Early Christian Archaeology: A State of the Field," *Religion Compass*, 2/4 (2008), 575-619. Most work relates to structures and their relationship to other structures. While this is not totally devoid of material culture, the studies themselves express little interest in that field.

<sup>5</sup> On all of this see Joshua J. Schwartz, "The Material Realities of Jewish Life in the Land of Israel c. 235-638," in Steven T. Katz (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Judaism, Volume IV, The Late Rabbinic Period* (Cambridge [UK]: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 431-433. Limitations of space prevent us from expanding further on methodological issues. See also in detail Sawicki, *Crossing Galilee*.

<sup>6</sup> Schwartz, "Material Realities" 453-456 and bibliography. See also Jonathan L. Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus: A Re-examination of the Evidence* (Harrisburg [PA], Trinity Press International, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> Christopher Rowland and Christopher R.A. Morray-Jones, *The Mystery of God: Early Jewish Mysticism and the New Testament* (Leiden-Boston: Brill; Compendia Rerum ad Novum Testamentum, III, 12, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, Reed, *Archaeology*, 189-195 ("Q's Spatial imagery in a Galilean Context").

Agricultural metaphors pervade Q. Whether or not this proves a Galilean provenance for Q cannot be discussed here.

<sup>9</sup> See Sean Freyne, *Galilee and Gospel: Collected Essays* (Boston: Brill, 2000), 71. Jesus was not necessarily anti-city and pro-village, although he was critical of certain ideas related to the city. It cannot be coincidence that the Gospels do not have Jesus in either Tiberias or Sepphoris, cities certainly not that far from his Galilean stomping grounds. It should also be clear that we do not relate to Capernaum and similar settlements as cities. The lively scholarly discussion as to the level of urbanization of the Galilee is beyond the purview of our survey.

<sup>10</sup> An excellent survey of both archaeology and material culture in the Galilee can be found in Zeev Weiss, "Jewish Galilee in the First Century C.E.: An Archaeological Perspective," in Daniel R. Schwartz, *Flavius Josephus, Vita: Introduction, Hebrew Translation, and Commentary* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 2007), 15-60 (Hebrew).

<sup>11</sup> Weiss, "Jewish Galilee," 43.

<sup>12</sup> Schwartz, "Material Realities," 432-433.

<sup>13</sup> Schwartz, "Material Realities," 433-434; Weiss, "Jewish Galilee," 18-20. See also Peter Richardson, "Khirbet Qana (and other Villages) as a Context for Jesus," in Charlesworth, *Jesus and Archaeology*, 120-144. Cf. Zeev Safrai, *The Economy of Roman Palestine* (London - New York: 1994), 39-99.

<sup>14</sup> Schwartz, "Material Realities," 434-435.

<sup>15</sup> On children's play see Joshua Schwartz, "Jew and Non-Jew in the Roman Period in Light of Their Play, Games, and Leisure-Time Activities," in J. Harold Ellens et al. (eds.), *God's Word for Our World, Theological and Cultural Studies in Honor of Simon John De Vries* (London and New York: Clark International; Continuum, 2005), 128-140. On animals in the courtyard see Joshua Schwartz, "Dogs in Ancient Jewish Rural Society," in Aren M. Maeir, Shimon Dar and Zeev Safrai (eds.), *The Rural Landscape of Ancient Israel* (Oxford: BAR International Series 1121; Archaeopress, 2003), 127-136.

<sup>16</sup> See Reed, *Archaeology*, 159 on primitive locks on houses in Capernaum.

<sup>17</sup> Our discussion on houses is based mostly on Eyal Baruch, "The Dwelling House in the Land of Israel during the Roman Period: Material Culture and Social Structure," unpublished doctoral dissertation, Bar-Ilan University, 2008 (Hebrew). A revised version will be published as a monograph by Yad Ben Zvi.

<sup>18</sup> Others see the private *mikvaot* as reflecting wealth. Cf. Richardson, "Khirbet Qana" (n. 13 above).

<sup>19</sup> Avraham Faust and Eyal Baruch, "The Synagogue and the Rural Jewish Community in the Period of the Mishnah and Talmud: Financing the Construction and Maintenance of Synagogues as a Leveling Mechanism," *Cathedra*, 116 (2005), 49-66 (Hebrew). Needless to say, it is impossible to talk in terms of absolutes. Cf. Richardson, "Khirbet Qana".

<sup>20</sup> Schwartz, "Material Realities", 436-439.

<sup>21</sup> Hanan Eshel and Dina Avshalom-Gorni, "A Stand for a Sabbath Lamp from Hurvat Uza," *Atiqot*, 29 (1996), 57-61.

<sup>22</sup> Andrea M. Berlin, *Gamla I: The Pottery of the Second Temple Period, The Shmarya Gutmann Excavations, 1976-1989* (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority; IAA Reports, 29, 2006), 140.

<sup>23</sup> There were very few indoor kitchens in the Roman East. On an indoor kitchen in Qatzrin see Ann Killebrew and Steven Fine, "Qatzrin: Reconstructing Village Life in Talmudic Times," *BAR* 17 (1991), 51,55.

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- <sup>24</sup> Joshua Schwartz, "Material Culture and Rabbinic Literature in Late Antique Palestine: Beds, Bedclothes and Sleeping Habits," in Lee I. Levine (ed.), *Continuity and Renewal: Jews and Judaism in Byzantine-Christian Palestine* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi, 2004), 191-209 (Hebrew).
- <sup>25</sup> Joshua Schwartz, "Reduce, Reuse and Recycle' – Prolegomena on Breakage and Repair in Ancient Jewish Society: Broken Beds and Chairs in Mishnah Kelim" *Jewish Studies Internet Journal* (<http://www.biu.ac.il/JS/JSIJ/5-2006/Schwartz.pdf>).
- <sup>26</sup> Our discussion is based on Richardon, "Khirbet Qana". For a good discussion of public and private space in Capernaum see Reed, *Archeology*, 148-160.
- <sup>27</sup> Schwartz, "Material Realities," 439-441; Weiss, "Jewish Galilee," 45-48.
- <sup>28</sup> Much, but not all, of the kitchen work and cooking would have been "women's work". A full discussion of gender-specific labor is impossible within space restrictions of the study. On women in the kitchen see Judith Hauptman, "From the Kitchen to the Dining Room: Women and Ritual Activities in Tractate *Pesahim*," in Tal Ilan et al., *A Feminist Commentary on the Babylonian Talmud: Introduction and Studies* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 109-126. See also Tal Ilan, *Mine and Yours are Hers: Retrieving Women's History from Rabbinic Literature* (Leiden: Brill; Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums 41, 1997), 227-233 for more examples of "women's work" (raising children, food preparation, spinning and weaving, bewailing the dead, hairdressing, and inn keeping).
- <sup>29</sup> Cf., however, Weiss, "Jewish Galilee," 47-48 for other theories. Berlin does not deny that this should be seen as an ethnic marker, but she also sees it as a matter of local pride in using local Jewish wares as opposed to imported non-Jewish utensils. On Berlin see further below. This preference was also in keeping with preferences of Jews in Judaea and Jerusalem.
- <sup>30</sup> This is based mostly on Andrea M. Berlin, "Romanization and anti-Romanization in pre-Revolt Galilee," in Andrea M. Berlin and J. Andrew Overman (eds.), *The First Jewish Revolt: Archaeology, History, and Ideology* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 57-73 and *idem*, "The Pottery as Evidence for Life at Gamla," in *idem*, *Gamla I* (n. 22 above), 133-156.
- <sup>31</sup> Schwartz, "Material Realities," 441-443.
- <sup>32</sup> <http://pace.mcmaster.ca/York/york/showText?book=1&chapter=1&textChunk=nieseSection&chunkId=60&text=apion&version=&direction=&tab=&layout=split>.
- <sup>33</sup> Joshua Schwartz, "On Priests and Jericho in the Second Temple Period," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 79 (1988), 23-48.
- <sup>34</sup> Schwartz, "Material Realities," 442, Safrai, *Roman Palestine*, 104-162.
- <sup>35</sup> Safrai, *Roman Palestine*, 165-182.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 163-165.
- <sup>37</sup> Schwartz, "Material Realities," 443-445. The classic study on farming and agricultural technique is still that of Y. Feliks, *Agriculture in Eretz-Israel in the Periods of the Bible, Mishnah and Talmud*, new ed. (Jerusalem: Reuven Maas, 1990) (Hebrew).
- <sup>38</sup> Eventually, some of the labors associated with the presses would take on importance in Christian symbolism. See Joshua Schwartz, "A Holy People in the Winepress: Treading the Grapes and Holiness," in Joshua Schwartz and Marcel Poorthuis (eds.), *A Holy People: Jewish and Christian Perspectives on Religious Communal Identity* (Leiden and Boston: E. J. Brill; Jewish and Christian Perspectives 12, 2006), pp. 39-51. See also *idem*, "The Wine Press and the Ancient Judaeo-Christian Polemic," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 49 (1993), 215-228; 311-324.
- <sup>39</sup> Cf. Hayim Lapin, *Economy, Geography, and Provincial History in Later Roman Palestine* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck; Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 85, 2001).
- <sup>40</sup> R. Alan Culpepper, *John: The Son of Zebedee, The Life of a Legend* (Columbia [SC]: University of South Carolina, 1994), 7-15.
- <sup>41</sup> Sawicki, *Crossing Galilee*, 183 mentions an indigenous fishing industry there. Reed, *Archeology*, 144 writes of "fishing opportunities" to supplement the diet of local inhabitants.
- <sup>42</sup> The part of the discussion is based mostly on Safrai, *Roman Palestine*, 188-219.
- <sup>43</sup> See Miriam B. Peskowitz, *Rabbis, Gender, and History* (Berkeley: University of California; Critical Studies in Jewish Literature, Culture and Society, 9, 2007).
- <sup>44</sup> Weiss, "Jewish Galilee," 19-20, 45-46.
- <sup>45</sup> Schwartz, "Material Realities," 449-452.

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<sup>46</sup> Closely related to clothing is the issue of gesture and material culture. See, for example, Steven G. Matthews, "The Instantiated Identity: Critical Approaches to Studying Gesture and Material Culture," Paper presented in "The Materialisation of Social Identities" session at the Theoretical Archaeology Group conference, University of Glasgow, Scotland, 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> December 2004.

<sup>47</sup> Yehudah B. Cohn, *Tangled Up in Text: Tefillin and the Ancient World* (Providence [RI]: Brown University; Brown Judaic Studies 351, 2008), 109-111.

<sup>48</sup> Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California, 1999), 30-34.

<sup>49</sup> Ziyona Grossmark, *Jewelry and Jewelry Making in the Land of Israel at the Time of the Mishnah and Talmud* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Tel-Aviv, 1994) (Hebrew).

<sup>50</sup> Amos Kloner and Boaz Zissu, *The Necropolis of Jerusalem in the Second Temple Period* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi and the Israel Exploration Society, 2003) (Hebrew); Rachel Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs, Practices, and Rites in the Second Temple Period* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2005).

<sup>51</sup> I refer to the Tomb of the Holy Sepulcher. I make no attempt to adjudicate regarding recent discoveries such as the Talpiot Jesus Tomb (cf. James Tabor, "The Talpiot Jesus Tomb," <http://www.jesudynasty.com/blog/2007/04/09/the-talpiot-jesus-tomb-an-overview>) or the James ossuary (cf. *Archaeology*, June 18, 2003: <http://www.archaeology.org/online/features/ossuary/index.html>).