

# Bethsaida in Archaeology, History and Ancient Culture



Bethsaida in Archaeology,  
History and Ancient Culture:  
A Festschrift in Honor of John T. Greene

Edited by

J. Harold Ellens

**CAMBRIDGE  
SCHOLARS**

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P U B L I S H I N G

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I wish, as well, to declare my great esteem for the colleagues who have joined me in making this important scholarly work happen in honor of our esteemed friend, Professor Emeritus John T. Greene.

## FOREWORD

When I first visited et-Tell, sometime in the late 1960s, the site was pockmarked by concrete machine gun bunkers built by the Syrians (see *Report on the 2012 Excavations*, Fig. 6). That area is considerably changed now. A great portion of the site has been excavated at the top of the hill. The evidence of ancient cities is unmistakable and impressive.

### Literature

Three names define et-Tell. The ancient city named “Geshur” is first mentioned in the 14<sup>th</sup>-century El Amarna Letters. This name is also found in early passages in the Hebrew Bible (esp. 2 Sam). In the early decades of the first century CE, during the time of Jesus, the site was known as “Bethsaida.” After 30 CE, when Philip made it his capital, it was celebrated as “Julias.” The most important textual references are as follows:

*Geshur.* The author of 2 Samuel mentions Geshur. Note this excerpt:  
Sons were born to David at Hebron: ... the third, Absalom son of Maacah (מַעֲכָה), daughter of King Talmai of Geshur ... [2 Sam 3:2; NRSV].

*Bethsaida.* Luke preserves traditions about Bethsaida.

On their return the apostles told him (= Jesus) all they had done. He took them with him and withdrew privately to a city called Bethsaida. When the crowds found out about it they followed him; and he welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed to be cured. [Lk 9:10-11; NRSV].

In contrast to Luke, Mark does not indicate that Jesus went into a town or city; Mark simply claims Jesus and his apostles went to some unspecified place. Note his comment: “And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves” (Mk 6:32; NRSV). Matthew follows Mark’s lack of detail (Mt 14:13). John provides the following tradition: “After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias” (Jn 6:1; NRSV). Thus, Luke alone specifies that Jesus

went to “a city” and provides its name as “Bethsaida.” Unfortunately we cannot be convinced that Luke had access to historically reliable traditions.

*Julias.* In *Antiquities*, Josephus reports that Philip (4 BCE to 34 CE) elevated “Bethsaida” to the status of “a city” and renamed it “Julias.”

Philip also made improvements at Paneas, the city near the sources of the Jordan, and called it Caesarea. He also raised the village of Bethsaida on Lake Gennesaritis to the status of city by adding residents and strengthening the fortifications. He named it after Julia, the emperor’s daughter [Josephus, *Ant* 18.28; Feldman in LCL].

Pliny the Elder, who may have used Agrippa’s lost *Geography* as one of his sources, clarifies that Bethsaida is on the eastern portion of the Kinneret:

The Jordan River ... widens out into a lake which many call Genesar. This is sixteen [Roman] miles long and six broad, and it is surrounded by the pleasant towns of Julias and Hippos on the east, Tarichea (by which name some call the lake) on the south, and on the west, Tiberias, with its salubrious hot springs [*Natural History* 5.71].

Ancient authors, consequently, report that et-Tell was a well-known and influential city from the tenth century BCE (the time of David) to at least 70 CE (the burning of the Jerusalem Temple).

Summary and concerns. In summary, we possess three independent and important first-century accounts of Bethsaida: the Evangelist Luke, Josephus, and Pliny the Elder. Scholars have raised many questions about et-Tel. Here are some of them:

- Should et-Tell not be recognized as the Bethsaida (Syriac: “house [or place] of the fisherman” or “fishing place” [Mk 1:17 in the Peshiṭta]) that is famous from the New Testament accounts of Jesus’ ministry, or is that location not yet discerned on the northeastern shores of the Kinneret?
- Is et-Tell the location in which Jesus met Bartholomew and where the “Feeding of the Gentiles” is traditionally located, or is that text the creation of an Evangelist?
- Were five of Jesus’ Apostles – namely Andrew, Peter, Philip (Jn 1:44), and perhaps also James and John, the sons of Zebedee – from et-Tell?
- What do we learn about this Bethsaida and the Palestinian Jesus Movement from the fact that the five names of these disciples are Greek and not Semitic?
- Since Jesus did not call Gentiles to follow him, according to Matthew (cf. Mt 10:5), were these disciples Greek-speaking Jews

(possibly Hellenists) who lived in a territory populated by Jews, Syrians, and Greeks?

- Was Jesus successful with more liberal Jews, who lived in Migdal, Capernaum, and Bethsaida, and not with the conservative, wealthy, and established Jews who lived at Sepphoris, Gamla, and Tiberias, or are such categorizations in need of correcting in light of more recent archeological research?
- Do the lack of *mikvaot* (Jewish ritual baths) and the presence of pig and catfish bones (against the *kashrut* laws) indicate that conservative Jews who observed the *kashrut* traditions did not choose to live in Bethsaida?
- What is the historicity of Josephus' claims that he was injured during some unreported battle in or near Bethsaida and that the city was on the main road from Capernaum to Gamla?

Other traditions, but much later accounts of the northern shores of the Kinneret, help us understand "Bethsaida." Two are most important. About 530 CE, Theodosius informs us that as one moves northward from Tiberias one travels two miles from Tabga to Capernaum and then another six miles to Bethsaida. In about 725 CE, Saint Willibald reports that in Bethsaida there is a church commemorating the house of Peter and Andrew.

## Archaeology

For more than a decade leading archaeologists have unearthed the remains of a tenth-century city. There should be no doubt that it is the Aramean city named Geshur.

The most impressive and monumental aspects of et-Tell are a wall and city gate from the early first millennium BCE. These fortifications are clearly the most impressive found in Israel from the tenth-century. In places, the basalt stones of the northern wall rise above a glacis and extend to a width of about 21 feet. Well-placed cobble stones, forming a plaza of about 90 feet wide, lead up to the monumental Iron I gate. The gate is actually two sets of gates that are about ten feet wide. They are the most impressive Iron Age gates discovered in ancient Israel, and are similar to the Iron Age gate farther to the northwest at biblical Dan.

Further evidence that et-Tel is a site inhabited in the century before 70 CE is provided in Rami Arav's *Report on the 2012 Excavations*. Note the following in his report:

Bronze coin of Cleopatra VII (34/35 BCE)	Figs. 3, 55
Early Roman cooking pots	Fig. 8
Bronze coin, Tyche of Tyre (98-84 BCE)	Fig. 10
Early Roman cooking pot	Fig. 12
Early Roman lamp	Fig. 16
Early Roman cooking pots and Galilean bowls	Fig. 17
An iron fibula [most likely]	Fig. 22
Iron arrowheads	Figs. 44, 45
Basalt fishing net weight	Fig. 46
Various ceramic objects	Fig. 52
Hellenistic or Early Roman cooking pot	Fig. 51
Herodian oil lamps	Fig. 53, 54
Herodian Shabbat oil lamp	Fig. 56
Bronze coin of Caracalla	Fig. 57, 58
Early Roman cooking pot with tall neck	Fig. 61
Early Roman juglet	Fig. 62

The excavators would not agree with a judgment that has been too influential. The contributor to *Smith's Dictionary of the Bible* issued this judgment about Bethsaida: "its name and all memory of its site have perished," hence "no positive identification can be made of it" (vol. 1.1, p. 417).

## History

While Joshua is reported to have burned only Hazor (Josh 11:13), he and his descendants did not attempt to destroy the Geshurites as they did the Canaanites (Josh 13:13). The evidence of conflagration at Geshur is probably related to a later period, and perhaps to be associated with the conquest of the area by Assyrians under King Tiglath-pileser II in 734-732 BCE and during the time of Hosea (2 Kgs 15:29-30).

Now our imagination may be vividly enriched. We may contemplate the daily life of Maacha, one of David's wives and the daughter of King Talmai (a Hurrian name). She can be seen walking up the northern slope of et-Tell and sauntering into the massive Iron Age gates. Similarly, David's third son, Absalom, spent three years in Gesher before traveling to Hebron from which he organized a rebellion against his father (2 Sam 13:38; 15:7-12). Absalom frequently entered and exited the wide basalt gate.

After Jesus left Lower Galilee to celebrate Passover in Jerusalem, and was crucified, the village called Bethsaida became a city and was renamed

Julias. Philip (4 BCE to 34 CE) had built two new cities: Caesarea about 24 miles north of et-Tell and Julias at this site. Both cities honored the Emperor Tiberius. One bore his name, “Caesar,” and the other “Julia,” “Livia,” or “Julias.” Who is she? She probably is not Augustus’ daughter who was disgraced in 2 BCE. Is she Tiberias’ mother who died in 29 CE? Or is Josephus (*Ant* 18.27-28) correct that she is “Caesar’s daughter”?

Josephus, who wrote from the seventies to a little after 100 CE, calls the site not only Bethsaida but also Julias. Pliny also knows the name “Julia” or “Julias.” The Evangelists, who wrote from the sixties to the nineties, never call this site “Julia.” The only name they use is “Bethsaida” (Mt 11:21; Mk 6:45, 8:22; Lk 9:10, 10:13; Jn 1:44, 12:21). Specialists who are arguing for the reliability of oral traditions and the evidence of eyewitnesses in the Gospels would appreciate the possibility that the traditions in the Gospels about Bethsaida seem to be historically reliably, and perhaps pre-30 CE, because the canonical Evangelists always call the site “Bethsaida” and never “Julia.”

Josephus states that Philip was buried in a tomb in Julia (*Ant* 18.106-108). Why have no remains of Philip’s tomb been found? What was destroyed or carried away from et-Tell by the Syrian detachments who were ensconced in et-Tell from 1948 to 1967?

The archaeologists most likely have discovered the village cursed by Jesus because the inhabitants did not appreciate the mighty works he had performed there (Mt 11:21-23 and Lk 10:13-15). According to Mark, Jesus performed miracles in Bethsaida (cf. Mk 8:22-26). Cursing the site is a stunning tradition, since Bethsaida was the home of at least three disciples of Jesus.

## Conclusion and New Questions

These chapters in honor of John T. Greene help us remember his publications and many insights. In *The Role of the Messenger and Message in the Ancient Near East* (1989), in perusing evidence from 3000 BCE to 30 BCE, Greene provides a taxonomy for discerning a messenger and the message in the Ancient Near East, exposing many misconceptions and introducing his definitions of the ambassador, the emissary-courier, the envoy, the herald, and the harbinger. In *Balaam and His Interpreters* (1992), Greene argued that Balaam was a historical person who was known by many traditions (esp. J, E, JE, P, D, and R) in an expanded mythical form.

In *Unbinding the Binding of Isaac* (2007), Greene includes a foray into many pseudepigrapha and suggests the term “Interstitial Testament’s

Literature.” In *Probing the Frontiers of Biblical Studies* (2009), Greene imagines how the Qumranites created the *War Scroll* as they lived between the Maccabean Wars and the First War with Rome.

In *Eve: The Unbearable Flaming Fire* (2011), Greene, in a vein similar to the theodicy of the gifted author of 4 Ezra, asks troubling questions, including how we can honor our parents when traditions prove that they have sentenced all of us to death. In *Parables and Fables as Distinctive Jewish Literary Genres* (2011), along with his frequent collaborator, Mishael M. Caspi, Greene intimates how fables (Aesop) and parables (Jesus) were frequently the norm for expressing profound truths to all.

In *Problems in Translating Texts About Jesus* (2011), Greene rightly wonders if Cosimo Cavallaro’s chocolate and nude Jesus received protests because it was black. In *The Interpretation of Korah’s Rebellion* (2012), Greene suggests insightfully how one should contextualize Korah’s resistance to Moses and Aaron and how that story is therapeutic for our generation. Clearly, Greene’s *oeuvre* spans centuries and categories.

Scientific research may help us answer some questions, but often it brings into focus challenging, frequently new, questions. Here are some that are especially important:

- Did David not visit the Geshurites and see the home of his wife, Maacah?
- Is Philips’ palace located south of the Tell? Is that not likely, since one may make an analogy with the work of Antipas (4 BCE-39 CE) at Sepphoris? Under him the city expanded and extended down the hill.
- Did the Evangelists stress Jesus’ cures in Capernaum and Bethsaida because the towns were known to have physicians?
- Is the large “Fisherman’s House” the house of Zebedee?
- If et-Tell is Bethsaida, did Jesus and his disciples not see the majestic walls and gates of ancient Geshur?
- Could Jesus have been thinking about Bethsaida, which is built on basalt, when he spoke about a city built on rock?

Excavations need interpretations. These need to be debated. The goal is not consensus and agreement. Our task is to respect each other and work together for more informed insights and imaginations. It is no longer sufficient to read texts with only a lexicon open before us. Texts need contexts, as Greene showed; these are appearing at et-Tel. *Realia* and barks without astute imaginative reflections remain mute. This volume in

honor of Professor Greene gives et-Tell a voice - indeed, a strong and articulate one.

James H. Charlesworth  
30 May 2013  
Princeton



## INTRODUCTION

### JOHN TRACY GREENE PERSON, PROFESSOR, INTELLECTUAL, SCHOLAR, AND FRIEND

J. HAROLD ELLENS

John Tracy Greene is a truly awesome person. He taught Religious Studies at Michigan State University for an entire long career, while simultaneously achieving international fame as a field archaeologist and prodigiously published scholar. He was emeritated from MSU on February 16, 2007. John speaks fluently at least five modern languages as well as biblical Hebrew; and reads easily the literature of all the Germanic and Romance languages. I do not think that he has succeeded in getting himself quite up to speed as yet in Tagalog and Swahilli, but it is easy to cut him a bit of slack on that. John lives life with an irrepressible sense of humor and never forgets a charming story, a relevant detail of scholarly import, or a good friend. It is virtually impossible to fully appreciate and adequately describe the scope, courage, wisdom, prowess, and endurance of this man in his scholarly achievements, his daily personal life, and his devotion to his family.

John T. Greene was born in Memphis, Tennessee, on *Cinco de Mayo* in 1944. WW II was raging and every aspect of American life was conscripted and constrained by its demands. As soon as John turned 18 he took up the challenges of America's military operations as a Combat Medical Specialist. He was quickly promoted to Specialist Fifth Class. He served in that role for four years (1962-1966). He attended Officer Candidate School and graduated as a Second Lieutenant. He was soon assigned Unit Leader of the Armored Cavalry Reconnaissance Team as a First Lieutenant, serving as an officer for two years (1966-1968), for a combined service time of six years.

Professor Greene was born and raised in a family of esteemed virtue and values, with substantial cultural ideals. In consequence, he derived

from his parents and extended relations a sturdy appreciation for a good education. He graduated in 1962 from Manassas High School in Memphis. While deployed to the European Theatre of Operations in the US Army, he undertook his college education (1964-1966), attending the University of Maryland, European Division, in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. His course of study was in German Language and Literature.

In 1969 John enrolled in the University of Detroit and studied under the Jesuit Order, continuing his mastery of German Language and Literature as well as beginning his work in Ancient Near Eastern cultures and religions. He graduated with his BA, *Magna cum Laude*, in 1973. That summer he undertook a graduate course in the Introduction to Field Archaeology for the Study of Ancient Palestine (Canaan), under the aegis of Hebrew Union College, Nelson Glueck School of Biblical and Archaeological Studies, in Jerusalem. There he was a student in Field Archaeology at the site of Tell Gezer under the direction of Professor Dr. Joe D. Seger (University of Nebraska at Omaha).

In the fall of 1973 John returned to the University of Detroit Graduate School for a Masters Degree in Humanities, graduating in 1974 with his degree in Biblical Semitic Languages and Archaeological Studies. In the summer of 1977 he was again Student of Field Archaeology, participating in the Excavation of Tell Halif (*Khirbet Kuwalifeh*, Ancient *Ziklag*, and later Ancient *Rimmon*) under the direction of the Lahav Research Project, Lahav, Israel. Again the Director of the project was Professor Seger, then at Mississippi State University.

From 1976-1980 John undertook graduate work at Boston University and was concurrently cross-registered in courses at Harvard University. His work there was in Religious Studies: World Religions, History of Religions, Scriptural and Historical Studies in the Bible, Semitic Languages, Sanskrit Studies, and Field Archaeology. In 1980 he was awarded the PhD at Boston University in Scriptural and Historical Studies: History of Religions, and Ancient Semitic Languages. His dissertation, subsequently published in various forms, addressed *The Old Testament Prophet as Messenger in the Light of Ancient Near Eastern Messengers and Messages*. His supervising professors were James D. Purvis, ThD, and H. Neil Richardson, PhD.

He was appointed Assistant Professor of Religious Studies and Modern Hebrew Language at Michigan State University in 1980. In 1985 he undertook Post-Doctoral Study in Formative Judaism at the Judaic Studies Institute of Brown University under Professor Jacob Neusner, Ungerleider Distinguished Professor of Judaic Studies

Professor Greene's career at MSU involved his share of administrative as well as teaching assignments. He was well prepared for both. In the spring and summer of 1976 he had served as Director of Allied Health Career Programs at Lewis College of Business, Detroit, Michigan. From 1974-1976 he had served as Director of the Developmental Learning Skills Center of the University of Detroit, and Instructor of Linguistics in the Department of Languages and Linguistics of that Jesuit university. In 1986 he was promoted to Associate Professor in his department at MSU and in 1992 became full Professor of Religious Studies and Modern Hebrew Language.

In the spring of 1990 John was elected by the faculty to the new position of Chairman of the Department of Religious Studies and a Candidate for the new University-level position of Director of Integrative Studies. From 1990 to 1994 he served as the Director of Integrative Studies, Office of the Provost at MSU.

Professor Greene had numerous responsibilities in field archaeology and related teaching opportunities. In the summer of 1985 he served as Director of the MSU Archaeology, History of Religions, and Modern Hebrew Language Summer-in-Israel Program at the University of Haifa, doing archaeological excavation of Gamla on the Golan Heights. He spent the summer of 1988 as Director of that same program with excavations of Bethsaida-Julias, north of the Sea of Galilee, under the auspices of Haifa University and the Golan Research Institute. The summer of 1989 found him in the role of Director of the same MSU program and continuing excavation of the city of Bethsaida-Julias, with Haifa University and the Golan Research Institute.

For the summers of 1991-1994 he served as Co-Director of the Bethsaida-Julias Archaeological Research Project and the Director of MSU's Summer in Israel Program (Kibbutz Gadot, Galilee). The summers of 1995-1997 John was Co-Director of The Bethsaida-Julias Archaeological Research Project and Director of MSU's Summer-in-Israel Program (Kibbutz Ginosar, Galilee), and in the summer of 1998, Co-Director of the Bethsaida-Julias Archaeological Research Project (Kibbutz Ginosar, Galilee). The summers of 1999 and 2000 he was again Co-Director of The Bethsaida-Julias Archaeological Research Project (Kibbutz Ginosar, Galilee) and Director of MSU's Summer-in-Israel Program.

In 2000 he had the added responsibility of Invited Archaeologist, John and Carroll Merrill Cave of Letters Project 2000, Judean Desert, and in 2001, Co-Director of The Bethsaida-Julias Archaeological Research Project and Research Associate to the Cave of the Letters Project in the Judean Desert. From 2002 to 2005 John served again as Co-Director of

The Bethsaida-Julias Archaeological Research Project. During some of those years the MSU's Summer Program was suspended due to violence in the Middle East. In the summers of 2006-2011 Professor Greene was again Co-Director of the Bethsaida-Julias Archaeological Research Project (Kibbutz Ginosar, Galilee) and Director of MSU's Summer-in-Israel Program

Professor Greene enjoyed the awards of numerous grants and fellowships during his illustrious and intensely productive career. In 1973 he received the Lewis Perry and Beatrice Miller Grant for the Study of Field Archaeology at Tell Gezer, under the auspices of the University of Detroit and Hebrew Union College, Jerusalem. In 1976-1980 he was the recipient of the National Fellowships Fund, Atlanta, Georgia, in his Doctoral Program at Boston University, with concurrent study at Harvard. He won the 1977 Zion Research Foundation Grant for the Study of Field Archaeology at Tell Halif, Israel and in the summer of 1985 he received the prestigious National Endowment for the Humanities Grant to attend the Judaic Studies Institute at Brown University under its Director, Professor Jacob Neusner.

All of us who have known Professor Greene as friend, scholar, author, mentor, or source of inspiration, find his illustrious career of no great surprise. Others who may not know him personally will undoubtedly find themselves not only surprised but awestruck. His infinite capacity for meticulous work, unlimited imagination, and substantive achievement is quite unexcelled in his five fields of professional mastery. It is gratifying to observe that his prowess in his personal and scholarly world continues to be robust and full of grace as he savors the flavor of his status as Michigan State University Professor Emeritus. I have no other friend with such a wry and indomitable sense of humor, such phenomenal linguistic skills, such broad scholarly interest, and such a large capacity for fun and celebration. I am pleased to offer this testimony of profound appreciation of a truly amazing intellectual, scholar, and friend.

**PART I:**

**BETHSAIDA AND THE BIBLE**

## CHAPTER ONE

# A CHRONICLE OF INEVITABLE DESTRUCTION: STAGES IN THE CONQUEST AND DESTRUCTION OF BETHSAIDA BY TIGLATH-PILESER III

RAMI ARAV

It is with a great pleasure that I write this chapter in honor of my long-standing friend, John T. Greene. John and his students joined the expedition to Bethsaida in 1987 when we were at the beginning of exploring that city and had no clue as to what lay hidden under the huge mound of 20 acres with its thousands of tons of rock and debris. At that early stage we were true pioneers in that region. At our field camp at the bottom of the site we had the barest facilities and dined at a local cafeteria hidden among the trees of the park.

In his article entitled *Tiglath Pileser III's War Against the City of Tzer*<sup>1</sup>, Professor Greene analyzed the advance of Tiglath Pileser III in the Southern Levant suggesting that the Assyrian king attacked the Kingdom of Damascus, Bethsaida, and the northern Kingdom of Israel after he isolated and secured his flanks from east and west. According to his reconstruction of the campaign, Tiglath-Pileser III divided his army into two columns. While one column campaigned against Gilead, another column marched against the northern cities of Israel and against Aram Damascus, leaving Bethsaida to fall prey to the Assyrian army during that prong of the conquest.

This chapter attempts to zoom into the particulars of the conquest of Bethsaida through a careful scrutiny of the archaeological finds of that city.

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<sup>1</sup> J.T. Greene (2004), *Tiglath-Pileser III's War Against the City of Tzer*, in *Bethsaida A City by the North Shore of the Sea of Galilee*, Vol III, Rami Arav and Richard A. Freund, eds., Kirksville, MO: Truman State University, 63 – 82.

The campaigns of the king of Assyria, Tiglath Pileser III, have been discussed many times in the scholarly literature.<sup>2</sup> Stern (2001, 3,4) maintains that these campaigns, and that of his successor Shalmaneser V, were a phase among the three phases of Assyrian attempts to take over the Southern Levant (734 – 721 BCE). The phase discussed by Greene included the conquest of the Aramean Kingdom of Damascus and the northern parts of the Kingdom of Israel. The subsequent second phase lasted 16 years and featured the campaigns of Sargon II and Senacherib (721 – 705 BCE). During this phase the Assyrians established four satrapies in the Southern Levant which included Gilead, Megiddo, Dor, and Samaria.<sup>3</sup> The third phase included the reigns of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal (700 – 663 BCE). During this final phase the Assyrians completed the conquest of the Judean lowlands (Shefelah), Philistia, and finally reached as far as Egypt.

There is a scholarly consensus that Tiglath Pileser III's skill in constructing an organized military machine was efficient and sophisticated enough to defeat heavily fortified cities. That skill was the major factor in the success of these campaigns and created the conditions for the formation of the empire. His army included marksmen with the sling which fired basalt and flint stones, archers shooting arrows with heavy iron arrowheads from composite bows that were human-sized, maneuverable battering rams rolled on four to six wheels, war chariots, and cavalry. Additionally, they had sapper units consisting of diggers that undermined city walls and foot soldiers equipped with spears, shields, daggers and swords that stormed the cities through breaches in the walls, or upon ladders (Stern 2001, 4-13). Tiglath Pileser III was perhaps the first to employ engineering units that were supposed to remain in the evacuated conquered cities, to demolish them by fire, reducing them to their foundations (Frankfort 1969, 6-97).

In addition to the military force, there were court scribes who recorded chronicles of the war as well as court artists similar to military photographers of today. These artists sketched the events of the war so that when they returned home they could transfer their drawings to reliefs and murals. Scholars maintain that although their depictions of the cities under siege are not like photographic images of those cities, they are not imaginary depictions either, but more like an edited and adapted version of

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<sup>2</sup> See recently Tadmor 1994, Stern 2001, Na'aman 2005, Rainey and Notley 2006.

<sup>3</sup> There is no consensus among scholars about the number of the satrapies and the date of the foundation of the satrapies. Na'aman suggests that the Satrapies of Gilead and Dor were not established during the Assyrian rule (Na'aman, 2005, 223-225).

the cities that better suited the taste of the patrons of the artists (Read 1976, 103; Yaakobi 1989, 188-197). The best example of this is the relief of the city of Lachish that adorned the throne room of the palace of King Senacherib (Ussishkin 1982). In this Chapter, I will attempt to prove that one of the reliefs of Tiglath Pileser III might depict the siege of the city of Bethsaida.

As a result of the campaigns of Tiglath Pileser III, the kingdom of Damascus was destroyed and never recovered. During the same campaigns of 734-42 all the cities in Galilee and Gilead were conquered and thoroughly demolished. Archaeological excavations encountered destruction layers in 17 cities: Dan, Hazor, Kinneret, Bethsaida, Tel Hadar, Ein Gev, Megiddo, Kadesh, Beth She'an, Tel Rehov, Yoqneam, Qiri, Acco, Kisan, Shikmonah, Dor and Horvat Rosh Zait. This list is obviously not all the cities destroyed but only of those which were excavated and where a destruction layer dating from this period of time was found. The pictures of the destruction gained from these excavations are quite consistent, displaying deposits of a thorough and violent destruction followed by a long period of hiatus in the settlement that undoubtedly reflects a purposeful mass deportation of the population designed to prevent recuperation (Stern 2001, 7, Na'aman 2005, 2-201, Rainey 2006, 225-234).

In this aspect the military campaigns of Tiglath Pileser III differ from his predecessors. A century earlier, Shalmaneser III reached most of these same places, but the destruction layers that he left in the cities were not as violent, clear, and deep-seated as Tiglath Pileser III left. Indeed, the Assyrian king Addad Nerari III also launched a military campaign to the Southern Levant during the mid-8<sup>th</sup> century BCE, but no remains of that campaign have been discerned in archaeological excavations. Perhaps this can be explained because he managed only to put a siege on Damascus, and did not advance further south (Rainey 2006, 215, 216).

Not only were the fate of cities changed as a result of the military campaign of Tiglath Pileser III, but the geopolitical state of affairs was entirely different in the years following 732 BCE. The 9<sup>th</sup> century BCE Assyrian military campaigns were no more than raids which, on one hand, aimed at looting and gathering spoils and on the other to create vassal relationships with the local kings who would then pay annual tribute and demonstrate loyalty by other means as well. Tiglath Pileser III created a new reality; the territories conquered were transformed, by him or by his successors, into satrapies, headed by a satrap (*Saknu* or *Pihati*) who acted as regime commissioner (Roux 1964, 253). Disloyal kings were removed



and more trustworthy kings were installed. This was the way the new Assyrian Empire was established.

The military campaigns that followed Tiglath Pileser III emulated to a great extent his brutality and violence. They aimed to stabilize the political situation in the satrapies, to persecute kings suspected of treachery and to terrorize the population. They caused ferocious destruction and forced deportations. Shalmaneser V in 721/22 or perhaps Sargon II in 720, conquered Samaria and put an end to the Kingdom of Israel (Na'aman 2005, 76-93). Twenty years later Senacherib launched a campaign against Philistia and the lowlands of Judah, conquered 46 cities, defeated the kings of Egypt, put Jerusalem under siege, and then returned to his country after imposing a heavy tribute upon Hezekiah (Rainey 2006, 225-253). His destruction was discovered in the archaeology of the city of Lachish, stratum III, excavated and published by D. Ussishkin. Lachish was excavated in the 1930s, but Ussishkin's excavation in 1970's and 1980's established clearly that Stratum III was destroyed by Senacherib (Ussishkin 1982, 19-58, Zimhoni 1997, 179 – 210. Ussishkin 1990, 53-86).

The nature of the finds at Lachish did more than simply help to identify the destroyer of the town as Senacherib. It also enabled the researchers to discern the different stages in the conquest and destruction as well. In this respect, Ussishkin's discoveries do not have a parallel in archaeological excavations. Among the remarkable findings were remains of a siege rampart that the Assyrians amassed on the city walls. It is noteworthy that testimonies about the siege rampart are found not only in the archaeological finds but also from Senacherib's wall reliefs and from the Bible. As far we know now, it is not only the oldest siege rampart found in archaeology, but the oldest in military history.

The finds of Stratum V at Bethsaida are another step in understanding the process of conquest and destruction by the Assyrian military campaigns (fig. 1). The remarkable state of preservation of the city gate enables us to discern a number of stages in the conquest and destruction operation. The following description of the finds suggests that the destruction was not spontaneous or accidental but deliberate and presumably in response to a long siege. The destruction was carried out in a few stages soon after the conquest was completed, and lasted several weeks or perhaps even months. It was most probably carried out by special groups of people, probably captives, with some demolition experience.

Stratum V (fig. 2) at Bethsaida was built, approximately, in the mid-ninth century BCE, lasted about 120 years, and was the peak of the urban phase of the settlement (Arav 2007, 83-116). The settlement contained a

city gate complex, the largest of its kind ever discovered in the Southern Levant (Arav 2009, 1-122), and a palace in the Bit Hilani style (Arav 2000, 47-81). Its predecessor Stratum VI was built in the mid-tenth century BCE and served as the capital of the Geshurite kingdom. In approximately 850 BCE the kingdom was annexed to the kingdom of Damascus. That stratum was destroyed and on top of it Stratum V was built. It is possible that the reigning dynasty, which included Talmai, the father-in-law of King David, continued to rule over Bethsaida merely as vassal kings until the city came to its end, with the conquest of Tiglath Pileser III (Arav 2004, 1-48).

Bethsaida was founded on a basalt extension and was isolated and surrounded on all its sides by natural defenses. On the south and the southwest side of the city, the Sea of Galilee reached to the foot of the mound (Shroder 1995, 65-98; Shroder 1999, 74-115). On the east there was a deep gorge that separated the city from the hill to the east. The northeastern corner, which is part of the basalt extension that descends from the Golan Heights, is the easiest approach to the city and was the most vulnerable section of the city. The vulnerability of that section was apparently clear to the engineers of the city. Therefore they reinforced it by means of a sophisticated defense system designed to deter an attack from that direction. The system included two concentric parallel city walls. The outer city wall was about 2 meters wide and its estimated elevation was about 5-6 meters. Behind this wall there was a steep glacis embedded with crushed limestone and supported by a 2.5 meter revetment wall. Above the revetment wall there was a platform of about 2.5 meters wide, and behind it stood the inner city wall. This wall was 6 meters wide with an estimated height of 8 – 10 meters. On the northeastern side of the wall, exactly at the most vulnerable point, the inner city wall was reinforced by a strong tower 7 meters long and 8 meters wide and about 10 – 12 meters high. The first story of the tower was about 3 meters high and while the outer face of the wall was clad with very heavy basalt boulders the walls and towers were filled up to the first story (about 3 m.) with field stones of all sizes. No interior chambers were found in the towers and the city walls, something that would have impaired the impregnability of the walls. If there were any interior spaces most probably they were in the upper stories that were of brick construction.

The façade of city walls and the towers were all plastered with a thick plaster and were white washed. For an outsider it would have been impossible to discern what had a stone core and what had bricks. The sight of two city walls placed one behind the other, the inner looming high above the outer, was most probably very impressive and had a

psychological effect of deterrence. Indeed there were no remains of battle against the city walls in this section of the city. No projectiles were found and there was no sign of fire or destruction. In fact, this defense system lasted for one millennium. This can be inferred from structures built in the Hellenistic period that used the Iron Age city wall as one of their walls. The city walls likely finally collapsed during the earthquake of the fourth century CE (Arav 1999, 102-104).

In this respect the assault of Tiglath Pileser III on Bethsaida differs from the Senacherib assault on Lachish thirty one years later. Ussishkin observed five Assyrian sieging ramparts on the city walls of Lachish. The largest of them, which is preserved to the present day, was built against the southwestern corner of the city. The Senacherib relief shows that only the city walls were attacked and the city gate was spared. In the relief, it is through this open gate that citizens are seen leaving the city on their way to exile (Ussishkin 1982, 100, 121). It is reasonable to assume that attacking the walls without an attempt to attack the gate was employed due to the development of siege ramparts. Although battering rams were already known from the second millennium BCE, siege ramparts were probably developed during the 30 years between Tiglath Pileser III and Senacherib. It is presumed that had Bethsaida been attacked by Senacherib, he would have built a siege rampart against the northeastern corner of the city and would not have attacked a city gate that was extremely well protected and fortified.

Ussishkin suggested that the Assyrian camp at Lachish was located on the southwestern hill overlooking the city, but far enough away to be out of the Judahite projectile range (Ussishkin 1982, 49). The selection for the Assyrian camp at Bethsaida was probably similar. Opposite the city gate, at a distance of about 200 meters there is a barren hill far enough from the projectile range but sufficiently near to provide a good sight over the gate. Similar to Bethsaida, no remains of the Assyrian campsite at Lachish were discovered on that "campsite hill", but most likely an Assyrian relief in the British Museum that came from the palace of Tiglath Pileser III may shed light on this possibility. The relief in the British Museum is recorded as an unidentified city in Syria, and presents very similar features to Bethsaida (fig.3).

In the relief there is a palm tree rising high above the city houses. Palm trees are typical in warm weather like that of Bethsaida and the Jordan Valley, and quite rare in higher elevations conquered by Tiglath Pileser III, such as Gilead, Hauran, Bashan, and Damascus. In the foreground of the relief there is a road that descends to the right from the city gate located in the center of the picture. Two city gates are discerned in the

picture. One is the outer city gate that lines up with the city walls and above it and slightly to the left and behind, there is the inner city gate. Only from the eastern hill of Bethsaida would this view be possible. Only there may one see that the road ascends moderately to the city gate and only from this point of view would the inner city gate appear higher and slightly to the left of the outer city gate. If this indeed is Bethsaida, then the artist, as at Lachish, was located safely within the Assyrian campsite.

The city gate was indeed the most vulnerable part of the city and therefore the defense of it was meticulously designed (fig. 4). First and foremost, it was not situated at the northern part of the city where the approach to the city is the easiest. It stood on top of three sequential artificial terraces that were supported with strong walls about 25 meters above the bedrock of the ravine immediately to its east. Ground penetrating radar probes at the gate show that the gate is situated on 12 meters of fill! This has no precedence. The defense system was comprised of the following elements: 1) A north-south paved road ran right below the city walls and forced the enemy to go along it with their unshielded right side exposed to the defenders located above the city walls. The road led to a large plaza that served in times of peace as the city market. 2) The outer city gate was a massive structure defended on its east by a 10x10 meter solid tower which was filled to the top of its first story with field stones of various sizes (fig. 5). The entrance was placed within a series of niches and thus was very well defended. The threshold stones were raised above the passageway and indicated that the two wings of the doors opened to the inside into two shallow niches within the walls of the passageway. The width of the passageway was four meters and led to a spacious open air courtyard. 3) The courtyard extended over 155 meters<sup>2</sup> and was meticulously paved with medium size field stones and small stones were used to fill the gaps (fig. 6). 4) A six-meter-wide wall connected the sturdy northeastern tower of the outer city gate to another tower situated at the southeastern corner of the inner courtyard. Similar to the other walls, the outer face of the towers and the walls were built with large coarsely dressed heavy boulders. 5) Another 6-meter-wide wall connected the southeastern tower to another tower (10x 6 m) located at the southwestern corner of the courtyard. 6) Another tower (10 x 6 m) was located at the northwestern corner of the courtyard. The towers had at least three stories and they were extended in elevation to a height of about 10 meters. This can be deduced from the preservation of the first story of the chambers next to the towers. The first floor was preserved to a height of three meters and this was likely the elevation of each succeeding story. 7) The inner city gate occupied the entire façade of the western side of the courtyard.

These four strong towers together with the city walls were the main part of the defense system of the city gate.

The entrance to the city from the outer city gate to the inner city gate was in an  $\Gamma$  shape, which means that the entrees had to turn right 90 degrees at the courtyard in order to enter the inner city gate and the city proper. The inner city gate was large and very impressive. It was constructed in a four chamber pattern known from other locations. The geographically closest parallels to this gate are the city gates at Dan and Megiddo, Stratum IVA. The above described two towers flank the entryway with a nicely preserved sturdy threshold. The two door panels of the inner city gate were made of oak as can be deduced from the remains found near the threshold. These doors opened to reveal a passageway behind the threshold and between the four chambers of the inner city gate.

The four chambers are remarkably large, so large in fact that they are without precedent. Each measures 10 x 3.56 meters. Three were used as granaries and the northeastern one was used to store the offerings that were brought to the high places at the gate (fig. 7).

Five high places of three types were discovered at the gate. Two had steps leading to a podium and were dubbed Step High Places, and two lack these features and were dubbed Direct Access High Places. The largest of all high places was built against the back wall of the city gate and was designated for sacrifice. Next to it was a three-meter deep pit filled with bones and ashes of the victims. Adjacent to the four chamber city gate at the south, and sharing the walls with it, was a storage house that consisted of three long halls separated by walls. Entrances led from the central hall to the abutting halls. One hall was bisected into two chambers. This storage house contained large jars of several types that were arranged according to their types in the different halls. There were Hippo jars that are known from other sites, a large vat of unknown type, and very large jars with a wide opening (20 cm), as well as an unknown type unique to this site. Some of these jars had holes from having been deliberately pierced.

Perhaps the Assyrian siege lasted a very long time as can be learned from the content of the granary chambers of the inner city gate. Two of the chambers contained emmer wheat and one chamber contained barley. These granaries, if filled to the brim, could provide livelihood for about 2000 people for almost a full year<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> The granary could store 360 metric tons of grain. If one needs 0.5 kg of grain a day (1000 calories) the quantity is sufficient for almost one year. This is not the entire provision needed for living but it is assumed that the other calories could be obtained from fruits and oil stored in the storage house.

It is reasonable to believe that the siege did not come as a surprise and the granaries were filled facing the upcoming adversity. Yet while a very large quantity of barley was found in Chamber 3, Chambers 1 and 2 that had contained emmer wheat were found totally empty. However, it is also possible that the wheat was not totally consumed by the inhabitants of the city and what had been left over was taken as booty by the Assyrians.

Despite the heavy fortifications and the various obstacles the city did not withstand the siege and in the summer of 734, 733, or 732 BCE, the city ceded to the Assyrians and was captured. Dozens of iron arrowheads found in the inner city gate bear mute witnesses to a fierce battle that took place at the gate and that the Geshurites did not surrender easily (fig. 8). Some of the tips of the arrowheads were found bent as a result of hitting the walls, a testimony to powerful bows and short range shooting.

The above mentioned relief from the British Museum that depicts a city similar to Bethsaida shows the city after the conquest. The battle is not rendered but the results are shown. An unmanned battering ram is near the gate and a family is departing the city on a two wheeled cart (fig. 9). The father of the family drives the oxen, his wife and children are on the cart while Assyrian officials count the cattle and sheep that would perhaps be taken as booty (Frankfort 1969, 91-92; Moortgat, 1969, 144-145).

After the conquest was accomplished, the remaining citizens were expelled, their property confiscated, and the second phase of the conquest commenced. During this stage the Assyrians destroyed everything they did not take as booty. Chamber 4 and the storage house contained a large number of offering vessels and storage jars. The Assyrians shattered to small pieces all the vessels they found and scattered the shards in all the chambers. In one chamber we collected 17 baskets of shards, none of the dozens of vessels was found intact. The expedition's restorers invested painstaking effort to restore about 20 of the vessels from Chamber 4 and about the same number from the storage house (fig. 10). Even Hippo Jars that are known for their sturdiness and high quality were found smashed and their shards scattered all over the chambers. This fact indicates that the destruction was deliberate and not simply the result of the collapse of the buildings. In the next phase, or together with this one, all the human remains that were in the gate were removed and perhaps buried. During the excavation, we discovered only the skeleton of a cow in the plaza behind the gate and close to the sacrificial high place. The situation at Lachish was similar; no human remains were found at excavations of Lachish. Undoubtedly it indicates that the burning of the cities took place after the bodies had been removed. This was not always the case in the ancient world. Nineveh was destroyed in a systematic destruction in 612