

# THE GALILEAN ECONOMY IN THE TIME OF JESUS

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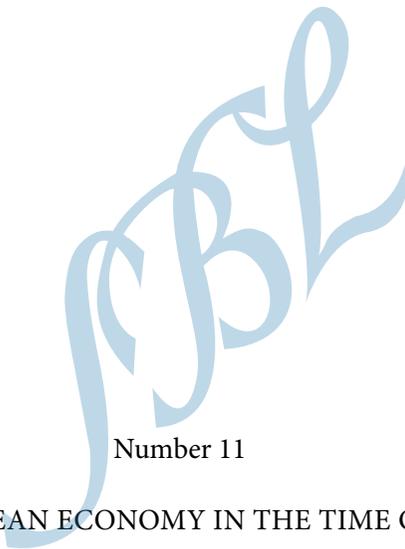


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THE GALILEAN ECONOMY IN THE TIME OF JESUS

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IN THE TIME OF JESUS

*Edited by*

David A. Fiensy and Ralph K. Hawkins



Society of Biblical Literature  
Atlanta

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## PREFACE

In March of 2009, at the business meeting of the Southeastern affiliate of the American Schools of Oriental Research, we were discussing ways to come up with a dynamic program for the next year's meeting, and we zeroed in on this issue of the socioeconomic situation of the Galilee during the time of Jesus. We had accrued about \$1,500 in our treasury, and we decided that we should spend it on a "big-name" speaker whom we would invite to deliver a plenary address and to whom we would invite other speakers to respond. James R. Strange, who was the president at the time, suggested four or five archaeologists who were doing important work in the field whose work might generate excitement. Since I was the incoming vice president in charge of the next year's program, I jotted these names down and immediately began contacting them to discuss the possibility of their participation in the 2010 program. To our delight, Mordechai Aviam agreed to come and discuss his findings at Yodefat and their importance for understanding the Galilean economy during the time of Jesus. We decided that, since much of this data is unpublished elsewhere, it would make an excellent topic for a plenary address. David Fiensy, Tom McCollough, and Doug Oakman, all of whom have been at the forefront of the discussion about Jesus and the archaeology of the Galilee, were invited to serve on a panel as respondents. Sharon Mattila presented a paper in another of our sessions, and it made important contributions to the conference's theme of the Galilean economy during the time of Jesus.

Afterwards we all agreed that the conference had been a great success and that the papers should be published. I asked David Fiensy to serve as a co-editor with me. Together we express our thanks to our graduate student, David Hunter, who assisted with several of the essays. The contributors and I all hope that these essays will further the discussion not only about the Galilean economy during the time of Jesus but about the

socioeconomic background of Jesus and the nature of his message and ministry.

Ralph K. Hawkins  
Averett University



## ABBREVIATIONS

<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
<i>CurBR</i>	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
ETS (A)	Eastern Terra Sigillata Ware
GCW	Galilean Coarse Ware
IAA	Israel Antiquities Authority
<i>JRA</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Archaeology</i>
<i>LA</i>	<i>Liber Annus</i>
<i>NEAEHL</i>	<i>The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land</i> . Edited by Ephraim Stern. 4 vols. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society & Carta, 1993



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## INTRODUCTION

*David A. Fiensy*

Scholars of classical history are going through a revolution in their thinking about the ancient economy. In particular, they are debating the usefulness of certain classicists' (e.g., Moses Finley's<sup>1</sup>) assumptions and methods for understanding and researching the Greco-Roman world. Those studying the economy of Galilee in the late Second Temple period are also involved in this debate but often unaware of its counterpart in classical scholarship. This volume will highlight areas of disagreement at play in the study of the economy of the Roman Empire which also play a role in the current debate over the historical Galilee.

In the contemporary quest for the historical Jesus, the socioeconomic background of Jesus and its impact on his message and ministry is the subject of intense debate. Among many, it is accepted that the Galilee in which Jesus was born and raised was plagued by grinding poverty, that his followers were primarily poor people, and that his audience was made up of the masses of the poor.<sup>2</sup> Others, however, have argued that Galilee was an egalitarian and economically prosperous society.<sup>3</sup> These contradictory

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1. Moses I. Finley, *The Ancient Economy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

2. John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991); idem, *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately after the Execution of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998); and Richard A. Horsley, *Galilee: History, Politics, People* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1995).

3. J. Andrew Overman, "Jesus of Galilee and the Historical Peasant," in *Archaeology and the Galilee* (ed. Douglas R. Edwards and C. Thomas McCollough; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997) 67–74; Douglas R. Edwards, "The Socio-economic and Cultural Ethos of the Lower Galilee in the First Century: Implications for the Nascent Jesus Movement," in *The Galilee in Late Antiquity* (ed. Lee I. Levine; New York: Jewish Theo-

viewpoints make it clear that the current quest for the historical Jesus is also by necessity a search for the historical Galilee.<sup>4</sup> The geographical and cultural location of Jesus' youth may help us understand his later message and/or his pattern of ministry. Certainly scholars of the past have thought as much; the current group seems to have the same opinion.<sup>5</sup>

The current quest for the historical Galilee is a study in contrasts: (1) Some look at Galilee through the lenses of cultural anthropology and macro-sociology; others look at Galilee through the lenses of archaeology and reject the use of social theories. (2) Some maintain that the relations between rural villages and the cities were hostile; others propose that the relationship was one of economic reciprocity and goodwill. (3) Some suggest that Galilee was typical of other agrarian societies with poor peasants who lived in the rural areas and exploitative wealthy people who lived mostly in the cities; others respond that life was pretty good for everyone in Galilee and that it was an egalitarian society. (4) Some regard Galilee as so hellenized that there were Cynic philosophers running around; others retort that Galilee was thoroughly Jewish. (5) Some think that the Galileans were politically and religiously radicalized and resistant not only to the Romans but also to the Judeans to the south. The essays that follow will at various points interact with these points of view.

In chapter 1 Mordechai Aviam, the experienced archaeologist, will set up much of the debate with his archaeological overview of Galilee. He will present to the reader not only his methodology (he will use archaeology but not the social sciences) but also his conclusions: Galilee was economically prosperous, and the Galileans did not have it too badly because of their vigorous manufacturing and trade. Further, the Galileans were not radicalized but were sympathetic with and basically identical to the Judeans in religion and politics. They were thoroughly "Jewish,"

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logical Seminary, 1992), 53–74; and Dennis E. Groh, "The Clash between Literary and Archaeological Models of Provincial Palestine," in *Archaeology and the Galilee* (ed. Douglas R. Edwards and C. Thomas McCollough; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 29–37.

4. Seán Freyne, "The Geography, Politics, and Economics in Galilee and the Quest for the Historical Jesus," in *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research* (ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig Evans; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 76; and Halvor Moxnes, "The Construction of Galilee as a Place for the Historical Jesus," *BTB* 31 (2001): 26–37, 64–77.

5. See the surveys in Moxnes, "The Construction of Galilee"; and Mark Rapinchuk, "The Galilee and Jesus in Recent Research," *CurBR* 2 (2004): 197–222.

that is, Judean in ideology, and were experiencing good times economically. He will cite many archaeological reports on many cities and villages but will lean most heavily on his own work at the village of Yodefat. The rest of the chapters will interact with one or more of his conclusions and will align with or reject Aviam's claims according to the author's own methods and evidence.

C. Thomas McCollough, also an experienced archaeologist, will follow Aviam's point of view in chapter 2 but restrict his argument primarily to two sites, Sepphoris and Khirbet Qana (Cana), the sites he has personally helped excavate. McCollough will support the claim that Galilee was economically prosperous though with a bit more caution than Aviam. The village residents were not destitute, but much of the architectural grandeur of Galilee came in the second century C.E., not in the first. Although several preliminary reports on the excavations at Khirbet Qana have already appeared in print, some of McCollough's information about Khirbet Qana is being presented to the general public for the first time.

In chapter 3 Sharon Mattila will challenge past analyses of Capernaum as a subsistence-level fishing village. She will argue that there was economic stratification and that at least some residents had attained a level of wealth. Her chapter follows Aviam and McCollough but is even more geographically restricted in making the general argument than McCollough, since she focuses on only one village. Mattila will press for the view that "at least some of the villagers in Jesus' Capernaum probably lived at a level significantly above subsistence." She will present four arguments for her thesis.

In chapter 4 Douglas Oakman will take issue with the first three chapters. His essay will revisit the question of "peasants." Oakman challenges Aviam's dismissal of the term and the category and urges caution in any belief in the higher standards of living proposed by Aviam, McCollough, and Mattila. Oakman will urge the use of the social sciences and their models (where appropriate) in understanding the Galilee of the late Second Temple period. He will offer two tables of comparison between peasants and modern farmers to explicate his definition. He will then present a sociological model to illustrate his thinking on how the ancient Galilean economy worked.

Finally, David Fiensy in the last chapter seeks to map five considerations in the contemporary debate about the ancient economies. These dimensions are evident or implied in each of the first four chapters. Very often scholars simply make assumptions about one or more of these

considerations without defending their assumptions. He will thus seek to contextualize Aviam's (and in turn each of the other authors') work. Fiensy will appeal to scholars to use critically both archaeology and social science models in the complex task of constructing the ancient economy. This essay stands ideologically rather midway between the first three and Oakman's chapter.

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