

Claudia Conesa

Professor Notley

New Testament Literature

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EXTRA CREDIT

Byzantine Bethsaida and the House of St Peter

Professor Notley starts the presentation by discussing the recent rediscoveries of archaeological sites in the Galilee region that are mentioned in both the New Testament and the Hebrew Bible. This rediscovery process that we have been in for the last past years, had led to new insights and understanding about the historical context in which Jesus lived.

Professor Notley specifically, mentioned the sites of Bethsaida and El-Araj in the 19th century. Edward Robinson identified one as Bethsaida but, Golltieb Schumacher said that El- Araj, should be the right location. Thus, this became a debate between scholars and researchers. The main issue with the location of Bethsaida, a possible site of Jesus's miracles. The site is about three kilometers or a mile and a half from the lakeshore, which is too far away for a fishing village. Schumacher, also expressed concerns about the distance. This contradicts all sources that describe Bethsaida as being on the lakeshore, where Jesus's disciples are coming from. The sources indicate that Bethsaida was a fish industry and people arrived there by boat (Mark 6:45: Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to the Bethsaida). Even though, the distance of El Araj from the lake was mentioned, the lack of evidence, therefore, the location of Bethsaida was reconsidered.

The historical records of Bethsaida are limited, with the last known mention of the site appearing in the *Animasticon*, a catalog of over 900 biblical sites compiled by Eusebius in the 4th century CE. Notably, Eusebius only quotes from John's gospel and Josephus when discussing Bethsaida, which could suggest that by that time the site had been abandoned and was not of significant importance. This is further supported by the lack of archaeological evidence from the Roman period at the modern-day site of Bethsaida, despite 30 years of excavation. These limitations in the historical and archaeological records make it difficult to fully understand the role and significance of Bethsaida in its time.

According to Dr. Notley, the church in Capernaum is one of the first churches that were allowed to be built in the Galilee region. This church, along with the Byzantine Basilica built at El Araj, are important sites related to the commemoration of Saint Peter's house.

On the other hand, and in addition to all this information, Dr. Motti Aviam talked that, in Jewish sources, it was always called by its Jewish name, Besada. There is a coin suggesting that Betsaida was transformed into Julius, and most people accept this idea. The text also mentions the archeological evidence found in a place called El-Araj, which has many architectural fragments on the ground, including a heart-shaped limestone pillar. This evidence suggests that El- Araj may be a better candidate for the location of Bethsaida than other places. Dr. Aviam also covers the findings of an excavation in the Bethsaida- Julius region which includes the discovery of various artifacts in the area, such as a coin from the city of Hippos- Sussita, a city in Israel, which dates back to the second century, and the latest coin from the Roman period, which dates back to the third century. Another important discovery that he mentions is decorated objects.

Lastly, he discusses the discovery of graffiti on pieces of plaster in an early Christian building, which mentions the name Simon but does not necessarily indicate that it was the house of Peter. Dr. Aviam also explains the concept of a "Crusader wall," which is a wall built during the Crusader period, and how archaeologists use pottery and coins to identify the different layers of a site.

Works Cited

“Byzantine Bethsaida and the House of St Peter.” *YouTube*, <https://youtu.be/PFs5VqqP8N8>. Accessed 13 April 2023.