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One Land – Many Cultures

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It is my privilege to present to you today the recently published volume in honor of Father Stanislao Loffreda - a great archaeologist of the Holy Land. As a matter of fact, I had planned — and would have liked — to be on the other side of this hall, namely, having an article of my own in this splendid volume. Indeed I was in the process of writing my contribution when I was summoned to the post of director of the National Library, and because of this heavy burden I was unable to complete the article on time. The name of Stanislao Loffreda became known to me and to my generation of young archaeologists already in the late 1960s, mostly through his work in Capernaum. In 1974 the second volume of the excavations at Capernaum was published: it was Loffreda's Cafarnao II: La Ceramica. In this volume Father Loffreda justly gained his reputation as one of the most prominent ceramicists, especially for Roman-Byzantine pottery. His book is taken into consideration and quoted again and again in every study concerning the pottery of Palestine and of the neighboring countries in the Late Roman and Byzantine periods. He has continued to excavate Capernaum, and has made this important village, with its church and synagogue, almost identified with his name. Among Loffreda's works we find also other sites in the Galilee, such as Magdala, Mount Tabor and Nazareth, as well as the fortress of Machaerus in Moab and Jerusalem. His fields of research are archaeology, biblical texts, and epigraphy (his studies on inscribed lamps are pioneer work of the most basic sort). The bibliographical list at the beginning of the volume, edited by Father Claudio Bottini, includes almost 100 books and articles, and reflects the wide range of his production during almost 40 years of research. Father Loffreda has added much to the knowledge of the past of ancient Palestine, and still does it today.

As it should be in the open market of scientific ideas, not everyone agrees with all his conclusions. I myself, for example, have raised questions concerning his chronology of the synagogue at Capernaum. But I can testify that the basis for drawing my own conclusions were Loffreda's meticulous reports, and I offered my criticism with a sense of admiration for his vast knowledge, profound scholarship, and for the high scientific quality of his critical approach. And above all stands his devotion to study the past of this country, the One Land and its many cultures.

While reading his short biography in this volume I learned that we both arrived in Jerusalem to study archaeology in 1960. But while I was a freshman, Loffreda had already completed his first degrees in theology and Bible and was about to complete his doctorate in biblical theology. We archaeologists of ancient Palestine must thank his great teachers, Fathers Saller and Bagatti, and his friend and mentor Father Virgilio Corbo, not only for their own contributions but also for encouraging Loffreda to devote so much time and effort to the study of ancient Palestine. We, archaeologists of ancient Palestine, therefore thank our senior colleague, Father Stanislao Loffreda, for his achievements and wish him with many more years of research and publications. Indeed, love and zeal for the history and archaeology of

the Holy Land is most probably what brought together almost three dozens scholars who contributed to this volume. The editors, Claudio Bottini, Leah Di Segni and Daniel Chrupcala, and the publishing house, the Franciscan Printing Press, merit all praises and thanks for their success in collecting and presenting this large amount of studies in one volume. The various studies are arranged geographically from north to south. My brief comments will follow the order of the articles within the book. First is a study of the chronology of domestic pottery in northern Judea-Palestine, by David Adan-Bayewitz. The author deals with the chronology and origins of the common local pottery of the Galilee, using, among others, the fine method of neutron nuclear analysis. In 1993 he published a book on this topic; here he widens the scope of his book by using material from new surveys and excavations, such as the settlements and synagogues of the Golan Heights and the city of Sepphoris. For the latter he uses the MA dissertation of Marva Baluka on the earthquake of 363 CE and the dating of local pottery production. Needless to say, Loffreda's excavations in Capernaum and other Galilean sites are widely referred to.

The second article, by Ermanno Arslan, is also very close to Loffreda's work. He deals with a group of small denomination coins, minted in Italy and Thessalonica, and refers them to a pilgrim who visited the holy site of Magdala in the 5th century. The article encloses a detailed catalogue of the coins.

Mordechai Aviam presents new material derived from excavations and surveys in seven churches and monasteries in western Galilee. In a previous work, published in a Festschrift dedicated to Virgilio Corbo, Aviam pointed out that the border line between Jewish and Christian settlements during the Byzantine period passed somewhere in central Galilee. The Christians concentrated in the west, in the province of Phoenice, where Christian churches and monasteries were excavated since the 1950s. The present article adds important information on the Christian settlement in Western Galilee.

Claudine Dauphin and Sean A. Kingsley discuss the finds from an old excavation of Dauphin, namely, the ecclesiastical estate at Shelomi in western Galilee, in the territory of Phoenice. The major issue is the chronology of the foundation and of the abandonment of the site. The authors investigate the pottery as well as the inscriptions, from which it appears that the farm, which belonged to a monastery, was founded in the late 5th or early 6th century. It was destroyed by heavy fire in 614 or a little later, probably during the Persian occupation of Palestine. A reoccupation of the site took place under the Umayyad dynasty, from the mid 7th century to the first half of the 8th century. Two other articles deal with a church discovered at Khirbet esh-Shubeika in western Galilee. Danny Syon, who carried out the excavation at the site, describes the basilical plan of the church, the mosaics and other findings that came to light there. The church was founded in the 6th century and the excavator traced four additional phases of occupation. The mosaic inscriptions were published by Vasilius Tzaferis. The latest inscription is most interesting. It dates the laying of the last mosaic floor in the year 6293 of the creation, namely around 785 CE, in the Abbasid period. This is an additional piece of evidence for the persistence of Christian life and the building of churches in western Palestine under Muslim rule.

Hamdan Taha presents a report on the discovery of a Byzantine rock-cut tomb in the

village of Atara, near Bir Zeit. The tomb consists of a central hall surrounded by arcosolia on three sides. Skeletal remains of 32 adults and children were discovered. The major group consists of adults aged between 25-40 years. The main body of the report is a catalogue and analysis of the numerous pottery vessels; among them many oil lamps, as well as glass vessels, metal objects and other miscellanea.

Shahar Batz contributes a report of his excavations in the cemetery near Khirbet Beit Sila, northwest of Jerusalem. He uncovered eight rock-cut burial caves, including a columbarium. After analyzing the findings he comes to the conclusion that the cemetery was used by Jews during the Second Temple period and not later than the Bar Kokhba revolt. Later it was used in the Byzantine-Early Islamic period, when the inhabitants of the village at Khirbet Beit Sila were Christians, as is indicated by a church excavated by Batz there.

Yitzhak Magen and Michael Dadon present a detailed report of their excavations at Nebi Samwil, the Crusader 'Mount of Joy'. Remains of a settlement of Iron Age and Persian period came to light there, and therefore the authors support an old suggestion of W.F. Albright to identify the site with biblical Mizpah. The extensive excavations on one of the most prominent hilltops around Jerusalem have revealed, beside the settlement from the Iron Age and the Persian period, also remains of settlement from the Hellenistic, pre Hasmonean period, and later traces of occupation in the Byzantine and early Islamic periods. Still, the main remains on the site belong to the Crusader period, when a fortress and a church were built. After the end of the Crusader period the latter was converted into a mosque with a venerated tomb.

Further to the southeast, on the eastern slope of Mount Scopus and along the ancient road climbing from Jericho to Jerusalem, a monastery was excavated, which was also the last station of pilgrims on their way to the Holy City. The excavators, David Amit, Jon Seligman and Irena Zilberbod, describe the remains that contained, among the rest, also a bathhouse, stables, and huge water installations. The site was founded in the Byzantine period but continued to develop during the Umayyad period. A mosaic inscription in the southwest wing says that 'the work was done under Theodorus, the priest and abbot, and the monk Kyriakos'. Leah Di Segni, who publishes the inscription, dates it to the Umayyad period, in the late 7th or early 8th century.

Gideon Avni and Jon Seligman present important finds within the compound of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. While excavating in the area belonging to the Copts, where large vaults of the Crusader period are located, north of the main basilica, the authors brought to light a church of the early Islamic period. They also discovered thick, superbly built walls from the early Byzantine period, which they consider as part of the Constantinian complex. A nearby large hall and a cistern are interpreted as the baptistery of the Holy Sepulcher, mentioned by several sources.

Another surprising discovery from Jerusalem is presented by Jodi Magness. She brings to our attention a large libation vase that was discovered and published in the late 19th century by Clermont-Ganneau, the French ambassador and a pioneer archaeologist. Magness discusses the rich molded decoration of human figures, deities and animals, and interprets it as containing Mithraic symbols. She suggests that the place where the vase was found, not far from the Flagellation Convent, was the

Mithraeum of Aelia Capitolina, particularly used by Roman soldiers. According to the author the vase, which follows a clear European prototype from the point of view of style and iconography, was produced in the military pottery workshop discovered at Binianei Haumah, west of Jerusalem. If Jodi Magness is right, we have here an important addition to our knowledge of religious life in Aelia Capitolina.

The famous octagonal church known as Kathisma, or 'the Seat', is located on the road between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, in the traditional place where Mary sat down to rest on her way to Bethlehem. The archaeologist who excavated the complex, Rina Avner, gives a preliminary report of her excavation and discusses the stratigraphy, architecture and art of this church, erected in the mid 5th century, as well as its influence on other octagonal churches in the region, such as that of Mary Theotokos on Mount Gerizim. The Greek inscription set in the mosaic floor of one of the outer rooms belongs to the early Islamic period. This too was read and interpreted by Leah Di Segni.

Yizhar Hirschfeld, the discoverer and excavator of many monasteries in the Judean Desert, contributes an archaeological report on Khirbet Jinjas, identified with the Laura of Heptastomos, known from the hagiographic writings of Cyril of Scythopolis. The extensive remains of this monastery, which belongs to the type of laura built on level ground, are surrounded by a wall. Hirschfeld describes the general plan of the monastery, the church and the cistern. Most interesting are the cells, spacious units of one or two rooms and a courtyard, scattered in the area at a distance of 35 to 110 meters from one another.

Yuval Peleg presents the results of his excavation of a group of burial caves at Khirbet Alya, south of Bethlehem. The article includes a description of the caves, accompanied by plans and sections, and a list of the small finds, among them fragments of ossuaries. The tombs were cut in the Late Hellenistic-Early Roman period, namely in the Second Temple period. They were reused in the Late Roman and Byzantine periods.

Of great interest is the report of Guy Stiebel on militaria from Herodium. The author, who specializes in military artifacts, weapon and signia, analyzes a rich collection of such equipment collected in two periods of excavations at Herodium, the earlier carried out by Virgilio Corbo and a later one by Ehud Netzer. The finds belong to both the first and the second Jewish revolt against the Romans. Among the artifacts are arrowheads, stone ballista balls, slingshots, arms, rolling stones, nails of sandals or caligae, daggers, swords, etc. This is, as far as I know, the most detailed assemblage of such material ever published from ancient Judea.

Yitzhak Magen returns to the precinct of Mamre in Ramet el-Khalil, north of Hebron, with particular stress on the early stage of the sacred precinct, from the time of Herod. Based on survey and plans made by Mader in the 1920s, Magen presents a new ground plan of the temenos and compares it with the Herodian structure of the Machpela Cave. The author emphasizes the significance of this temenos as an Edomite sacred place. The question whether the precinct was empty or housed a temple remains unanswered. The Edomites, as Magen says, are still enshrouded in mystery.

Anna de Vincenz publishes a unique large lamp with moldings of animals, which was discovered in ‘En Gedi. Amos Kloner and Boaz Zissu present a report on 14 sites with some 20 hiding complexes in the northern Shephelah. They date the finds to the Second Temple period and mainly to the time of the Bar Kokhba revolt. Eli Shenhav describes his excavation at Horvat Hanot, on the ancient road leading from Jerusalem to Eleutheropolis, giving a very short description of the Byzantine church and its mosaics, which are ascribed to the late 6th century. A Greek inscription discussed by Leah Di Segni probably refers to the redecoration of the church, in the early 7th century. Based on pilgrims' descriptions, Shenhav suggests that Horvat Hanoth was identified in Byzantine times as the place where Goliath was buried. It should be mentioned, however, that most scholars locate Goliath’s traditional burial place near Socho, further to the southwest. Ehud Netzer returns to the topic of synagogues of the Second Temple Period. He compares the buildings at Masada, Herodium, Gamla and the synagogue that was discovered by him near Jericho, and discusses a suggestion recently offered by Israel L. Levine, to connect the architecture of the early synagogues with that of city gates, because of the text in the Book of Nehemiah in which the Jerusalem community is described as gathering at the Water Gate. Netzer prefers other models, such as meeting halls.

Shimon Gibson presents a reassessment of the appearance of stone vessels of the early Roman period in Palestine and particularly in the Jerusalem area. The article deals with the geographical distribution of these vessels, chronological aspects, techniques of their production — by hand or with the help of a lathe. The author also discusses the various types of stone vessels and their function and purpose. He comes to a revolutionary conclusion that the production of stone vessels became common in Judea not earlier than 50 CE, some twenty years before the destruction of Jerusalem. The rest of the articles published in this volume deal with Jordan and Syria. Micelle Piccirillo and Zachariah al Qudah publish the results of their excavations at Wadi Rajib, near Ajlun in Jordan. Here they uncovered two chapels, both adorned with mosaics and inscriptions. They also report the discovery of a chapel in the area of Qal’at Rabad near Ajlun. The chapels are dated to the 6th and 7th centuries. Beside the Greek inscriptions, there was found a long foundation inscription in Syro-Palestinian Aramaic, which is published by Emile Puech. Puech also adds four other Syro-Palestinian Aramaic inscriptions from churches and monasteries in Jordan. As is well known, most inscriptions discovered in Palestine and Jordan are in Greek, although the language of everyday use, at least for a large part of the population, was Aramaic. These inscriptions are very important as they throw light on the colloquial language used in Palestine and Arabia.

Denis Genequand provides additional information about Machaerus in Moab, with his article on a hypogeum he excavated. It is a large rock-cut burial cave of the Herodian period, consisting of a square central hall with nine loculi along three of the walls. Intact skeletal remains of 26 adults and children were found in the loculi. The accompanying pottery is of the Early Roman period. The terminus ante quem of the tomb is the year 72 CE, when the Romans conquered Machaerus.

Zbigniev Fiema gives a preliminary report on the excavations on the top of Jebel Harun, the mount of St. Aaron, a traditional holy site near Petra. The Finnish expedition, of which Fiema is one of the directors, excavated a complex of church, monastery and pilgrimage center. This is a notable contribution to our knowledge of

Byzantine Petra. The expedition unearthed the large sacred complex and studied the chronology of the various stages of its use. Moreover, they dedicated much attention to the study of human occupation in the environs of Jebel Harun.

Two articles are dedicated to Byzantine finds in Syria. Pasquale Castellana publishes and analyzes four baptismal fonts — three cross-shaped and one polygonal — from the region of Aleppo in northern Syria. The author compares them to other well known baptismal fonts in the region, and comes to the conclusion that two practices of baptism, by immersion and by infusion, were used simultaneously.

Ignacio Peña describes his survey at Batrash, a Byzantine village also in northern Syria. The site is characterized by massive stone masonry and impressive architecture. The author compares the spacious houses, their plans and Christian decorations to other known monuments in Syria.

The last article is a short presentation, by Bruno Callegher, of a lead seal of unknown provenance, now in the Museum of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum in Jerusalem. One side depicts Mary Theotokos and the child Jesus, while the reverse bears a Greek inscription mentioning Leon Pereno, "magister and dux of the entire Occident". The seal is dated to the 11th century. Leon Pereneo was the commander of the western part of the Byzantine Empire, probably including at that time regions of southern Italy and western Greece. This review has been rather long; still it does not make justice with the individual articles, for it does not reflect the knowledge and wisdom found in each of them. I am confident that scholars will find many treasures within this volume. We, students and researchers of the history and archaeology of Palestine and the East, owe many thanks to the individual authors, and to the editors, Bottini, Di Segni and Chrupcala, for creating this rich and high quality Festschrift. The name of the volume, One Land – Many Cultures, reflects more than one sees at first glance. It points not only to the various cultures and periods that are discussed here. It also reflects the variety of scholars who participated in the volume. Among the authors we find Franciscans, Dominicans and other Christians, Israeli, Palestinians, and scholars from other countries. They are united by love and zeal for this land, its archaeology, history and cultures. For some the country is the Holy Land, for other is the Home Land, but the message remains clear: the present bitter and bloody war is not the only, inevitable way of life in this country. Tolerance and courageous generosity should be chosen as a better option. This is the human face of this magnificent volume, published in honor of Father Stanislao Loffreda for his seventieth birthday.