

“The Identification of Cana of Galilee”

from *Selective Geographical Problems in the Life of Christ*,

a doctoral dissertation by J. Carl Laney (Dallas Theological Seminary, 1977).

Cana of Galilee is an important place in the life of Christ. There at a wedding He began to authenticate His message to His disciples by turning water into wedding wine. Through the miracle He manifested His glory and His disciples believed (Jn. 2:1,11). Later Jesus performed His first “long distance” miracle at Cana, the home town of Nathanael (Jn. 21:2), when He healed the nobleman’s son who was sick at Capernaum (Jn. 4:46,54). The exact location of Cana in Galilee is still disputed with at least four sites vying to be acknowledged as the Cana of John's gospel, including Kanah, 'Ain Kanah, Kefr Kenna, and Khirbet Kana. Each of these sites must be critically examined with a view to identifying the Cana of Galilee where Jesus began His miraculous ministry.

Kanah

Joshua 19:28 refers to a “Kanah” on the northern boundary of the tribal territory of Asher. The name also appears in Egyptian sources dating from the time of Ramses II (1290-1224 B.C.).¹ This site (modern Qana), situated eight miles southeast of Tyre, has sometimes been confused with Cana of Galilee. Eusebius and Jerome make no distinction between this Kanah and the one further south in the Hill Country of Galilee, describing; this as “the Kana adjacent to greater Sidon in the tribe of

¹Aharoni, The Land of the Bible, p. 169.

Asher where our Lord made the water into wine.”¹ Eusebius knew of only the Phoenician Kanah near Tyre and simply identified it with the Cana of John’s gospel. Jerome in his Latin translation of the Onomasticon adds that the Kanah of Joshua 19:28 is called “the greater” to distinguish it from another smaller city by the same name.

It is quite improbable that the “Kannah” in the tribal territory of Asher is the Cana of John’s gospel. Though Jesus later ministered in the district of Tyre and Sidon (Matt. 15:21), His early ministry was directed to Jews, not Gentiles (Matt. 10:5-6). Also, Kanah would be too great a distance from Bethany beyond the Jordan for Jesus to have traveled there in the space of three days (Jn. 1:43, 2:1). He would have had to travel approximately 33 miles per day, a rate of travel quite unlikely in ancient times under normal conditions. In addition, it would be unlikely for Nathanael, a native of Cana (Jn. 21:2), to have been a close associate of Philip, of Bethsaida-Julias (Jn. 1:44), had the two cities been as far apart as et-Tell and Kanah. Finally, Kanah was in Phoenicia not Galilee during Roman times.² The descriptive phrase “of Galilee” would not have been appropriate for Kanah, a city in the vicinity of Tyre. There is clearly no evidence to support the identification of Kanah as Cana of Galilee.

’Ain Kanah

Another rather unlikely site for Cana of Galilee is ’Ain Kanah (Kanna), a village about 1½ mile northeast of Nazareth on the road to

¹Eusebius Onomastica Sacra 110, 3-6; 271, 50-53.

²Hoehner, Herod Antipas, pp. 43-45.

Tiberias. Having examined the sites of Kefr Kenna and Khirbet Kana, Conder sets forth this third site which had never before been noticed. He writes:

The little village of Reineh is on the road north-east of Nazareth, and only a mile and a half away; from it a main road leads to Tabor, and by this road is a fine spring called 'Ain Kanah, spelt as the Greek leads us to suppose the Hebrew form of Cana must have been. In the absence of more definite indications, it seems to me that this third site may well rank with either of the others before mentioned.¹

Conder describes 'Ain Kanah as a site with a good perennial water supply, a flowing stream in the valley.

It seems quite improbable that 'Ain Kanah is to be identified with Cana of Galilee. Conder makes the suggestion only because he is not convinced by the evidence in favor of the other sites. He offers nothing positive in support of the identification from the standpoint of ruins, topography, or tradition. The site would certainly not fit with the data of Josephus which places Cana in the Plain of Asochis, known presently as Sahl el-Battauf or the Bet Netufa Valley.² There is no evidence from tradition that 'Ain Kanah is the site of biblical Cana, and no report of ancient ruins there. Cana of Galilee must surely be found elsewhere.

Kefr Kenna

Kefr Kenna ("the village of Kenna"), just four miles northeast of Nazareth, makes a fairly convincing claim to be Cana of Galilee. There a Greek Orthodox church has preserved ancient storage vats reputed to have been used by Jesus when He turned the water into wine. The Franciscan

¹C. R. Conder, Tent Work in Palestine: A Record of Discovery and Adventure, 2 vols. (London: R. Bentley, 1878), 1:153.

²Josephus Life 86, 207.

church in the heart of the village makes the same claim for an old jar it possesses. The Franciscans believe their church to be built on the actual remains of the house in which the miracle took place. Since Kefr Kenna is the site tourists are shown as the place of Christ's first miracle, this claim must be examined in detail.

Of the two main sites vying to be acknowledged as the Cana of John's gospel, Zeller believes that the geographical situation of Kefr Kenna is most suitable.¹ The village lies on a hill gradually sloping towards the west so that the houses, built in terraces up the slope, receive the cool west wind which blows from the Mediterranean inland through the Bet Netufa Valley and Tur'an Basin. At the south of the village is a copious spring yielding a plentiful supply of water. At the time of Zeller's article the village contained only about 200 houses, but he found sufficient evidence that in former times the village was at least three times as large. Comparing the geographical situation of Khirbet Kana with the traditional site, Zeller concludes that Kefr Kenna is the more suitable situation for a nice village. The pleasant situation of Kefr Kenna, however, is not convincing evidence that the village must be identified with the Cana of Galilee of ancient times. Zeller is simply saying, "Kefr Kenna has the nicer setting, so it is the probable site."

Another argument for Kefr Kenna based on its geographical situation is that the village in ancient times was at the crossing of a country road used by Hebrew herdsmen and peasants, and an imperial road used by Romans. Dixon explains:

¹D. Zeller, "Kefr Kenna," Palastine Exploration Fund, Quarterly Statement 1 (1869): 71-72.

The country road led from Nazareth, and other open towns and villages, through Cana, to Magdala, Capernaum, Bethsaida, and other water-places on the lake. The Roman road ran from Acre (then Ptolemais) to Sephoris, the old Greek capital of Upper Galilee, and thence through Cana to Tiberias, the new Roman capital of Lower Galilee. Thus, Cana was a station on the road between Sephoris and Tiberias, very much as Rochester is a station on the road from London to Dover.¹

Dixon then seeks to demonstrate from John 2:12 and 4:49 that Cana stood on the road from Nazareth to Capernaum, and that Kefr Kenna would best fit this situation. However, no biblical text indicates that Jesus ever traveled from Nazareth to Cana, and on to Capernaum. The establishment of His home in Capernaum after His rejection at Nazareth (Lk. 4:16-31, Matt. 4:13-16) followed His second miracle at Cana (Jn. 4:46-54) in the winter or early spring of A.D. 31. While Jesus may have traveled this route at some time, no gospel text ever indicates that He actually did journey from Nazareth to Capernaum via Cana. The mere fact that Kefr Kenna was an important crossing for Romans indicates that this village, like Sephoris and Tiberias, would be an unlikely place for Jesus to frequent.

Dixon argues as well that Josephus' geographical references to Cana point to the village of Kefr Kenna.² In order to keep an effective watch over the rebellious cities of Sephoris and Tiberias Josephus fixed his camp at Cana. When John of Gischala induced the Jews of Tiberias to rise against Silas, Josephus says he left Cana with 200 men and made a night march down the hills and came to Tiberias at dawn.³ Dixon argues that such a night march from Kefr Kenna to Tiberias, approximately twelve miles, is quite possible, but would be impossible from the site of Khirbet Kana. However, Khirbet Kana is only two or three miles further from

¹W. Hepworth Dixon, "Itineraries of Our Lord--Cana of Galilee," Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement 10 (1878): 70.

²Ibid., p. 71.

³Josephus Life 86-91.

Tiberias if the route through the Bet Netufa Valley to the Sea of Galilee is followed. There would have been no need, as Dixon argues, for Josephus to have taken his men through Sepphoris to reach Tiberias, for a more direct route was available. Josephus could have followed the Bet Netufa Valley to Hattin, and then followed the Wadi Abu el'Ames to the shore of the Sea of Galilee just north of Tiberias. This fifteen mile night march would have been no problem for seasoned soldiers, and Josephus specifically states that they marched "all night long."¹ Dixon's arguments for Kefr Kenna on the basis of its geographical position are questionable. He has offered no positive basis for the identification of Cana with Kefr Kenna.

Another argument set forth in favor of Kefr Kenna is based on archaeological remains. Zeller reports that traces of ruins at Kefr Kenna are very distinct and of considerable extent.² At the foot of the hill are the ruins of a "church" with a foundation of very large, well-cut stones. West of this ruin is the remains of the house of Samaan (the traditional father of the bridegroom), which Zeller believes are of the same period as the church. However, under the ruins which Zeller identified as a church, a mosaic floor of a Jewish synagogue dating from A.D. 500 was later discovered. Obviously Jews would not choose as a site for their synagogue a place sacred to Christians on account of the first miracle of Jesus.

Zeller also reports ruins about half a mile west of Kefr Kenna where he discovered the foundations of walls built with large well-dressed stones. This he identifies as the monastery called "Architriclinium" mentioned by Saewulf (A.D. 1103). However, Saewulf describes Cana as

¹Josephus Life 90.

²Zeller, "Kefr Kenna," p. 73.

situated north of Nazareth and Roma (modern Rummana), and thus could not be referring to ruins near Kefr Kenna.¹ Zeller describes other ruins about a mile west of Kefr Kenna as further evidence for the antiquity of the site.² There is no evidence, however, that these sites were in any way connected, or that the ruins there date to the Roman period. While Kefr Kenna may look old, appearance can be deceptive. The dilapidated Arab houses to the southeast of Jerusalem on the Mount of Offense appear quite ancient, but it is well known that this village was established only in recent times. There is at present no archaeological evidence to demonstrate the antiquity of Kefr Kenna.

The third argument used to support the identification of Kefr Kenna with Cana of Galilee is the place-name. Dixon argues that “Cana” is a proper name and “Cana of Galilee” a descriptive phrase.³ Robinson, who heard the name “Cana of Galilee” (Kana el-Jelil) applied to Khirbet Kana, is then accused of treating “Cana of Galilee” as a proper name and incorrectly identifying the two names with one place—Khirbet Kana. Dixon affirms that if “Cana of Galilee” is not a proper name, then Robinson's inference is unsound. He goes on to show, quite correctly, that Josephus and John use “of Galilee” as a descriptive phrase, not a proper name. However, Robinson, it seems, has been misrepresented. He simply observed that native Arabs in Galilee referred to Khirbet Kana as Kana el-Jelil; a name uniformly found in the Arabic New Testament wherever “Cana of Galilee”

¹E. W. G. Masterman, “Cana of Galilee,” Palastine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement 46 (1914): 182.

²Zeller, “Kefr Kenna,” p. 73.

³Dixon, “Itineraries of Our Lord—Cana of Galilee,” p. 69.

occurs (Jn. 2:1,11, 4:46, 21:2).¹ He has not argued that the name given him was a proper name, but simply observed the connection between the name of the site in the Arabic New Testament and the name given him by an Arab at Khirbet Kana. While W. T. Pilter, a former missionary in Palestine, also questions Robinson's identification, he admits:

...if Kana el-Jelil were the original native name of the now ruined northern village, it would need very cogent evidence indeed to prevent us from identifying it with the Cana of Galilee of John's Gospel.²

A fourth argument enlisted to support the identification of Kefr Kenna with Cana of Galilee is tradition. Dixon boldly declares, "The evidence of history, as regards Cana of the marriage feast, is a chain in which there is no missing link."³ This is an overstatement to say the least. The tradition which supports the identification of Kefr Kenna with Cana of Galilee is quite late, beginning long after the Crusades. After a long break in Christian tradition, Quaresmius, guardian of the Holy Sepulchre from 1627 to 1629, investigated the two sites and decided in favor of Kefr Kenna.⁴ The publication of his comprehensive topographical work led many later pilgrims to this site. From that time onward the pilgrims only describe a Cana lying to the northeast of Nazareth, clearly Kefr Kenna. Undoubtedly the real turning point in tradition was in 1620 when the Franciscans came to Nazareth and acquired the shrine of the Annunciation. Later in 1641 they purchased a house in Kefr Kenna near

¹Robinson, Later Biblical Researches in Palestine, p. 108, n. 4.

²W. T. Pilter, "Where is Cana of Galilee," Palestine Exploration Fund, Quarterly Statement 15 (1883): 143.

³Dixon, "Itineraries of Our Lord—Cana of Galilee," p. 72.

⁴Kopp, The Holy Places of the Gospels, p. 152.

the city mosque. Only in 1879 were they able to purchase the mosque itself, where they erected the Franciscan church with its red dome. This is now believed to be the place of Christ's first miracle. The evidence of tradition, however, offers only meager support for identifying Cana of Galilee with Kefr Kenna. The tradition dates from the seventeenth century. Until then, all the evidence of tradition points to Khirbet Kana as the correct site for Cana of Galilee.

Khirbet Kana

The uninhabited mound of ruins known as Khirbet Kana ("ruin of Cana") which lies 8½ miles north of Nazareth makes the strongest claim to be John's Cana of Galilee. This ancient site lies along the north edge of the long depression known as the Plain of Battauf or Bet Netufa Valley. It is strategically located on the ancient road from Ptolemais to Magdala (Tarichaea) on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, and was also near the road leading from Nazareth north through ancient Sepphoris to Jotapata, the chief fortress of the Jews in northern Galilee and where Josephus was taken prisoner by the Romans.¹ While early pilgrim itineraries favor this northern site, it was long forgotten until Khirbet Kana was pointed out to Robinson by his Arab friend Abu Nasir as "Kana el-Jelil," the precise rendering of Cana of Galilee in the Arabic New Testament.² Robinson also traces the early tradition regarding the site of Cana of Galilee and argues rather convincingly that the Cana of the New Testament must be found at Khirbet Kana. Other geographers, including Thomson, Albright, and Baly,

¹Josephus War iii. 141-339; Life 188, 414.

²Robinson, Biblical Researches in Palestine, 2:346-47.

have confirmed Robinson's identification of Khirbet Kana as Cana of Galilee.¹

There appears to be abundant evidence from the name, position, remains, and tradition, that Cana of Galilee is to be found at the ruined site of Khirbet Kana. The Greek name "Kana" transliterates the Hebrew *kānāh* which means "place of reeds." The name is entirely appropriate, for nearby in the Bet Netufa Valley there are marshy stretches where reeds still abound. Masterman also points out that the Arabic name "Kana" clearly represents the Hebrew "Kānāh" (corresponding to the Greek "Kana"), while the doubling of the middle letter in "Kenna" makes it much less like the place-name "Cana" of Galilee.² Evidence from the name, then, would point to the site of Khirbet Kana as the Cana of John's gospel.

There is also evidence from the geographical position of Khirbet Kana that it should be identified with the place of Christ's first miracle. Masterman surveyed the site and notes its very strategic situation—isolated on all sides, though connected by a low neck with the mountains to the north. The steep slope meant it could be easily defended, an essential characteristic of an ancient fortress. Masterman judges that Khirbet Kana is one of the strongest natural sites in the area.³ Its strategic position would favor it as the Cana in Galilee where Josephus had his headquarters.⁴

¹Thomson, The Land and the Book, 2:303-04; W. F. Albright, "A Tour on Foot Through Samaria and Galilee," Bulletin of the American School of Oriental Research 4 (1921): 8; Baly, The Geography of the Bible (1974): 163.

²Masterman, "Cana of Galilee," p. 180.

³Ibid., pp. 180-81

⁴Josephus Life 86.

Josephus' further statement concerning his place of residence in "the great plain, called the plain of Asochis"¹ also helps us identify the site. The Plain of Asochis has been identified as the Sahl el-Battauf or Bet Netufa Valley where Khirbet Kana is situated. Josephus writes that his quarters were in a "village of Galilee called Cana," and later locates this site in the Plain of Asochis. These references clearly link Cana of Galilee with Khirbet Kana in the Bet Netufa Valley.

A third argument for Khirbet Kana based on its geographical position is that it lay in the center of the most thoroughly Jewish population of Galilee, situated on the road from Capernaum to Jotapata and Chabulon (Kabul).² Codex Medicero-Laurentianus and Codex Vaticanus readings of Josephus' Life actually mention this road between Cana and the eastern Galilee fortress of Gamala.³ All indications point to this as a characteristically Jewish road as contrasted with the Roman highway from Sepphoris to Tiberias. Because Khirbet Kana was on a characteristically Jewish road while Kefr Kenna lay on a Roman road, it is more probable that Jesus performed His first miracle and ministered at the former rather than the latter site. The preponderance of evidence from the geographical position of Khirbet Kana would link it with Cana of Galilee.

Archaeological evidence also supports the identification of Khirbet Kana as the Cana of the gospels. Archaeological survey has determined that a village stood at Khirbet Kana during the Israelite, Roman, and Arab periods.⁴ Masterman visited Khirbet Kana and discovered a number of ancient

¹Josephus Life 207.

²Masterman, "Cana of Galilee," p. 182.

³Josephus Life 398.

⁴Aapeli Aarisalo, "Topographical Researches in Galilee," The Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society 9 (1929): 39-40.

tombs, cisterns, and wall foundations. He reports:

The whole surface is covered with small fragments of Roman pottery. There can be no question that this site was occupied by a very considerable population in Roman, and probably too in earlier times.¹

G. Ernest Wright also reports the ruins of an ancient town and considerable Roman and Byzantine pottery at Khirbet Kana.² Though excavation, which could further illuminate the history of the site, has not been carried out, surface exploration at Khirbet Kana has revealed extensive ruins and certain occupation during the Roman period. The remains from antiquity at Kefr Kenna, on the other hand, have been very meager. The Franciscans have picked up coins there from the time of the Maccabees, and from the Roman and Byzantine periods as well, but no substantial evidence of occupation during the Roman period—such as that a Khirbet Kana—has been uncovered. While the evidence of Roman remains at Khirbet Kana cannot prove its identification as Cana of Galilee, the archaeological evidence does tend to support the identification.

The evidence of tradition is also on the side of Khirbet Kana. While tradition can actually be used to support either site, it is quite clear that the earliest pilgrim tradition favors the northern site of Khirbet Kana. Theodosius (A.D. 530) reports that “It is five miles from Diocaesarea to Cana of Galilee. From Diocaesarea to Nazareth is five miles.”³ Diocaesarea is to be identified with Sepphoris which, in the time of Hadrian, changed its name. Khirbet Kana alone fits the description being situated

¹Masterman, “Cana of Galilee,” p. 181.

²G. Ernest Wright, Biblical Archaeology, 2nd ed. (London: Gerald Duckworth and Co., Ltd., 1962): 239.

³Kopp, The Holy Places of the Gospels, p. 150.

approximately five miles to the north of Sepphoris with Nazareth lying about four miles to the south of Sepphoris. Anonymous of Piacenza (A.D. 570) traveled from Acre (Ptolemais) to Diocaesarea (Sepphoris) and reports, “Three miles further on we reached Cana where the Lord attended a wedding....Then we arrived at Nazareth.”¹ This points to the northern site since Khirbet Kana lies on the Acre, Cana, Sepphoris, Nazareth road.

The monk Epiphanius (A.D. 750-800) notes that the distance from Tiberias to Mount Tabor is a day's journey, and from Tabor to Cana in Galilee it is another day's travel. The distance from Tiberias to Tabor is about twelve miles, and that is also the distance from Mount Tabor to Khirbet Kana. Saewulf (A.D. 1103) also supports the northern site describing Cana as north of Nazareth and Roma (modern Rummana).² Two Florentine maps of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are witnesses to Khirbet Kana, for they set Sepphoris between Cana and Nazareth.³

While there is some evidence for tradition in favor of Kefr Kenna before Quaresmius (A.D. 1616-29), the change in tradition from Khirbet Kana to Kefr Kenna is due largely to his topographical work. He began to re-investigate the traditional sites, for many had been lost through the break in the succession of pilgrims on account of the dangerous state of the land. He discussed the two Canas and decided in favor of Kefr Kenna which was more conveniently located along the pilgrim route from Nazareth to Capernaum and had the support of the Franciscans who had acquired the

¹Kopp, The Holy Places of the Gospels, p. 150.

²Masterman, “Cana of Galilee,” p. 182.

³Dalman, Sacred Sites and Ways, p. 102.

Shrine of the Annunciation in 1620.

The evidence, then, clearly favors the identification of Khirbet Kana with Cana of Galilee. Yet there are some weighty objections which have been raised regarding this identification. Can these objections be satisfactorily answered?

The major objection raised against locating Cana at Khirbet Kana is that no spring is found at the site. While no spring is presently at Khirbet Kana, Masterman reports that the top of the mound “is pierced in all directions with ancient cisterns.”¹ Beginning in Israelite times plastered cisterns were used to store collected rain water, and sites in the Hill Country without springs became inhabitable places. Masada had no spring, but large cisterns sustained the Jewish Zealots there for a period of at least three years during the First Revolt. The cisterns at Khirbet Kana could have easily provided the 130 gallons of water for Jesus’ first miracle.

Another objection is that Cana is not located along the shortest route from Nazareth to Capernaum. The false assumption at the basis of this objection is that Jesus proceeded from Nazareth to Cana, where He did the miracle, and then journeyed on to Capernaum. The fact is, nowhere is it stated that Jesus journeyed from Nazareth to Capernaum by way of Cana. Dixon also objects to Khirbet Kana stating that Jesus could not go “down to Capernaum” (Jn. 2:12) from that site without going up to Sepphoris first.² This is incorrect, for a road led directly east from Khirbet Kana through the Bet Netufa Valley to the western shore of the Sea of Galilee.

¹Masterman, “Cana of Galilee,” p. 181.

²Dixon, “Itineraries of Our Lord—Cana of Galilee,” p. 71.

Elsewhere John speaks of Jesus going from Galilee up to Jerusalem (Jn. 7:1, 10) and this would have required going down first. Ancient travelers simply thought of Jerusalem as being “up” in the mountains, and lakeside communities as “down” in a depression.

The size of Khirbet Kana is another objection raised against the site. Thomson estimated that there were never more than 50 houses at the site,¹ and Pilter does not see how such a small village could have accommodated Josephus and his soldiers.² However, Thomson observed only the ruined Arab houses on the southern slopes of the mound and was apparently unaware of the considerable remains from antiquity on the roughly level hilltop. The extent of the modern ruined village is not a sound basis for judging the size of the ancient city of Khirbet Kana.

One final objection to the site is raised by Turner who questions how a site where Helena built a church could have been so easily forgotten by Christian pilgrims from that day to the present.³ Queen Helena, Constantine’s mother, did find many churches when she visited the Holy Land in the fourth century A.D., but only two medieval sources attribute to her the building of a church in Cana of Galilee.⁴ These sources point to the existence of a church building at the site, but it is questionable as to whether it can be attributed to Helena. The sources are late, and no previous pilgrims attribute this building to Helena.

¹Thomson, The Land and the Book, 2:303.

²Pilter, “Where is Cana of Galilee,” p. 147; Josephus Life 86.

³George A. Turner, Historical Geography of the Holy Land (Washington D. C.: Canon Press, 1973): 91.

⁴Kopp, The Holy Places of the Gospels, pp. 151-52.

Steps Toward A Solution

While the evidence points to Khirbet Kana as being Cana of Galilee, it would be well to check this by following Albright's steps to site identification¹ before deciding it to be conclusive. First, we must evaluate the textual evidence of the written sources in which the place-name occurs. The name "Cana of Galilee" is found in John 2:1,11, 4:46 and 21:2, and there are no textual problems in these references. Josephus also makes one certain reference to Cana, a village in Galilee.² Two late manuscripts (14th and 15th centuries), generally considered inferior, mention a road between "Cana" and the eastern Galilee fortress of Gamala.³ The better reading is "Seleucia" (Selukiyeh), northeast of Bethsaida-Julias.

Next, the approximate location of the site from the documentary sources must be determined. The descriptive phrase "of Galilee" would indicate that the city should be found in the territory of Galilee, distinguishing it from the Kanah in nearby Phoenicia. Cana must have been within three day's walk from Bethany beyond the Jordan (Jn. 2:1), and within a day's walk of Capernaum (Jn. 4:46, 52). Josephus also indicates that Cana is within a night's march of Tiberias.⁴ Both Kefr Kenna and Khirbet Kana would meet these requirements. Josephus, however, narrows the vicinity of the site further when he refers to Cana as his military quarters, and then later designates the Plain of Asochis, that is the Bet Netufa Valley, as the place of his quarters.⁵ These references would eliminate Kefr Kenna as a possible site for Cana of Galilee. An additional

¹Albright, "The Rediscovery of the Biblical World," pp. 13-14.

²Josephus Life 86.

³Ibid., 398.

⁴Ibid., 87-91.

⁵Ibid., 86, 207.

consideration is that the Plain of Asochis was part of the royal domain of the Herodians. Tenants, supervised by royal officials, worked these royal (later imperial) estates in the Jezreel Valley and Plain of Asochis, and this would further explain the presence of the royal official (“king’s man”) at Cana (Jn. 4:46-50).¹

A third consideration in determining the location of the site is toponymy, or the analysis of the place-name. “Cana” simply transliterates the Hebrew *Ḳānāh* which means “place of reeds,” an appropriate name for a village near the marshy Bet Netufa Valley. The site of Khirbet Kana is known by native Arabs as “Kana el-Jelil,” the precise rendering of Cana of Galilee in the Arabic New Testament.

While archaeology is often useful in identifying a site, this factor is of little help in determining the site of Cana, for neither of the two competing sites have been excavated. However, surface exploration has led to the discovery of ruins from the Roman period, and a number of ancient tombs, cisterns, and wall foundations at Khirbet Kana. The evidence of habitation at this site during the Roman period does lend support to its identification with Cana of Galilee.

The final factor used to determine the location of a site is tradition. This must be used with caution and carefully evaluated for tradition can be used to support either Khirbet Kana or Kefr Kenna. The earliest pilgrim tradition, however, does point to the northern site of Khirbet Kana. How, then, was the tradition changed? Traditional sites in the Holy Land were sometimes changed after a break in succession of

¹Avi-Yonah, “Historical Geography,” p. 105.

pilgrims to a site on account of the dangers surrounding it. Place-names were frequently transferred to a younger, inhabited site after the demise of a city or village. Kopp offers this helpful explanation for the change in tradition from Khirbet Kana to Kefr Kenna:

The true reason was the utter degeneration of the genuine Cana which, as Roger (1631) says, had become a “den of murderers,” where pilgrims had to pay tribute of a zechine, the equivalent of about ten gold pieces. This certainly helped the transference of tradition to the more hospitable Kefr Kenna, which was also commended by a certain similarity in the sound of the name. And moreover, the place had the advantage of lying on the road from Nazareth to Tiberias; and so pilgrims, en route for the Lake Gennesareth, could conveniently picture to themselves Jesus’ first miracle in this place.¹

Not until the 17th century did Kefr Kenna, more conveniently located on the pilgrim route from Nazareth to Tiberias and favored by Quaresmius, become associated by the pilgrims with the site of Christ’s first miracle. While Kefr Kenna is regarded by most tourists as the place where Christ turned pure water into wedding wine, there is little substantial evidence to support the identification. The abundance of the geographical evidence and early pilgrim tradition points to Khirbet Kana as the most probable site of Cana of Galilee.

¹Kopp, The Holy Places of the Gospels, pp. 151-52.