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A Preliminary Report on the *Miqwaʿot* of Migdal

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ABSTRACT: In recent excavations at Migdal/Magdala, situated between the Sea of Galilee and Mount Arbel, three water installations were exposed in the late Second Temple period village. In each, a wide staircase descends to the bottom. The staircases and the lower part of the walls are constructed of basalt ashlar. These installations should be identified as *miqwaʿot* (ritual baths). Significantly, none of them were plastered. As they make use of groundwater, which infiltrates into them through their unplastered bottoms (in the winter of 2012 they were observed full of water), they are the first of this type to be discovered.

INTRODUCTION

THE Jewish community in the Land of Israel of the late Second Temple period (first century BCE–first century CE) made use of a unique type of water installation: the *miqweh* (ritual bath), which enabled religiously observant Jews to maintain ritual purity (Reich 1990; 1997; 2000a; 2013). To date, some 800 *miqwaʿot* have been uncovered, in all contemporary Jewish settlements in Judaea, Galilee and Peraea (Reich 2013; Adler 2011), while none have been found in cities with a pagan population, such as the ones along the Mediterranean coast. Thus, the *miqweh* has become the most important architectural indicator for a Jewish presence.

Migdal, on the western coast of the Sea of Galilee, had a Jewish population in the late Second Temple period (Tsafrir, Di Segni and Green 1994: 173); consequently, one would expect *miqwaʿot* to be uncovered there. However, despite 30 years of intensive study of *miqwaʿot* in the Land of Israel, none have been identified yet in sites excavated around the Sea of Galilee, such as Tiberias, Hammath, Bethsaida, Capernaum and Migdal. There is a simple explanation for this: these sites' close proximity to the Sea of Galilee made *miqwaʿot* redundant, as its waters could be used for ritual purification.

Nevertheless, three water installations exposed in recent excavations at Migdal¹ are, in our opinion, *miqwaʿot*. As they are of an unknown type — namely,

¹ The Magdala Archaeological Project is directed by Universidad Anáhuac, México Sur, in agreement with the Instituto de Investigaciones Antropológicas (UNAM) and a subsidiary of the Israel Antiquities Authority. It is part of the Magdala Center of the Arke New Gate Company. The Magdala Archaeological Project is carried out within the framework of an international project that includes geophysical survey, extensive