

**KURSI: EXCAVATION 2001**  
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The original Kursi Excavation was directed by Vassilios Tzaferis for the Israel Antiquities Authority. These excavations took place during 1971-1974. Throughout these seasons the majority of the work of the Kursi excavation focused on the church and chapel. In Area C, away from the church to the northwest, a staircase was found leading down to some unknown area. It was decided that this area would not be explored at this time due to lack of funding and other commitments. However, Professor Tzaferis determined that one day this area would be excavated.

An underground room was accidentally discovered behind the apse of the church in 1998. Again we determined that one day we would open this area and see what we might find in this location, Area D.

By accident, luck, or providence, I happened upon two generous families who donated the funding for our excavation in 2001. After speaking with Vassilios we decided to make a new excavation in these areas (C and D) in September 2001.

In area D the work was very slow in the beginning. The team working there had to dig through thick stone and plastering. Eventually they were able to open the underground room and enter it. What they found was an empty room used for some unknown purpose. Later similar rooms were discovered in Area D which led us to the conclusion that this area was once used as the necropolis of the monastery. We will continue to explore this area in September 2002.

Area C proved to be more interesting and challenging. Our original intention was to explore the staircase and where it might lead. However, on the first day of the excavation walls began appearing very quickly and near the surface. We decided to follow the walls and to see what they might tell us about a building that had obviously been located here in antiquity.

On the second day of the excavation an shaft was exposed that was apparently connected to the staircase. We decided that on day three we would put some of our team in the staircase and remove as much dirt as possible from the lowest level and that we would follow the steps down. The team worked here for two days and we decided that there might be a danger of the ground collapsing into the staircase and the team was removed. We determined that any subterranean rooms would have to be entered from above (through the roof or ceiling).

In the meantime more walls were appearing every day. Soon we began to discover drain pipes, pools, and water drainage channels. Eventually we found two rooms containing hypocausts and we concluded that we had found a part of a bath complex. We had located the caldarium of the bath complex.

Why a bath complex in a Byzantine monastery? This was a curiosity for me and did not seem consistent with other Byzantine monasteries or churches found in Israel or

neighboring countries. In fact, I can think of no other Byzantine monastery in Israel with a bath complex.

Through research we discovered that this area, the area of Biblical Gergesa, was a very important pilgrim site during the Byzantine Period in Palestine. This area is the first place in the Gentile world to be exposed to the teachings of Jesus. Jesus' first Gentile convert was the demoniac of Gergesa (see Matthew 8, Mark 5, Luke 8). He later became the first Christian, Gentile evangelist (Mark 8). Therefore, this place had and has tremendous importance for Gentile Christians.

During the Byzantine Period, Western Christian pilgrims refused to visit Capernaum or Chorazin. "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, on the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will be brought down to Hades. For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I tell you that on the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom than for you." (Matthew 11: 21-24). Jesus condemned Capernaum and Chorazin. Therefore, Western pilgrims would visit two different sites to memorialize Jesus' ministry in this region. One site, Tabgha, is on the western shore of the Kinneret. The other, Kursi, is on the eastern shore of the lake.

The presence of the bath, discovered in our 2001 excavation, suggests that there might also have been an inn or hostel here. The monks provided a place of shelter and even a bath complex for their pilgrim guests, and, perhaps, earned income for the monastery from these.