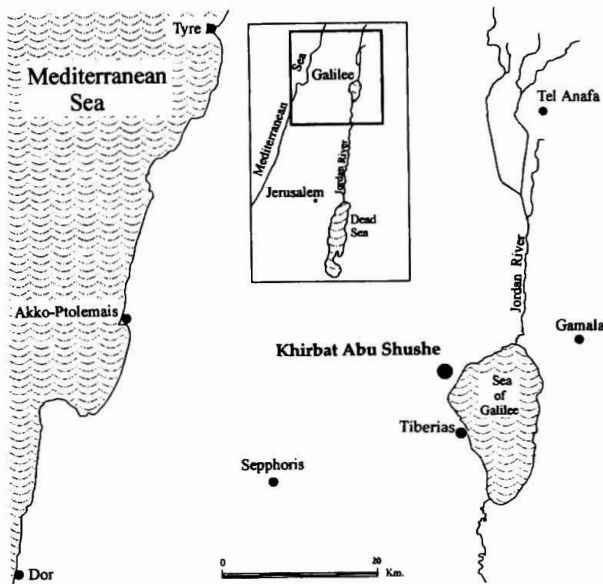


# Identifying Gennesar on the Sea of Galilee

Uzi Leibner



General orientation map of the region.

On the morning of the June 24, 1875, the French researcher V. Guérin climbed up a small hill in the 'el-Ghuweir' valley on the W shore of the Sea of Galilee. At the top of the hill stood the grave of Sheikh Abu Shushe, after whom the surrounding ruins were called Khirbat Abu Shushe ('the ruins of Abu Shushe'). Guérin wrote the following in his notebook:

Quant à celle-ce [i.e., Kinneret], qu'il ne faut pas distinguer de Ginesar, Gennésar ou Gennésareth, je ne vois pas où elle pourrait être mieux placée que sur la colline d'Abou-Choucheh. Les ruines qui couvrent cette hauteur sont sans doute insignifiantes actuellement, et le miserable village arabe dont on y trouve débris ne donne guère l'idée d'une ville forte qui se serait élevée jadis en cet endroit. Mais Kinnereth a été probablement détruite depuis de longs siècles. Combien de villes importantes et autrefois fortifiées n'ont pas laissé d'ailleurs en Palestine des traces plus considérables que celles qui existent à Abou-Choucheh! (1969, vol. 6, 211-12).

Thus Guérin put forth a single identification to solve the riddle of the disappearance of two settlements, Kinneret and Gennesar, that had lent their names to the Sea of Galilee over the course of many generations.

My aim is to evaluate the literary sources and present archeological data that provide support for part of Guérin's intuition — his placement of Gennesar on the hill of Abu Shushe.

## Literary sources

M. Nun (1977, 65-67) and Z. Safrai (1985, 81-82), who have studied the evolving name of the Sea of Galilee, demonstrated that the lake's name changed from one era to another according to which major settlement existed near it. Thus, in Biblical sources it is called the 'Sea of Kinneret', after the Kinneret mentioned in the Book of Joshua (19:35); a town identified today with Tell el Oreimeh on the N border of the el-Ghuweir valley (Albright 1923, 14; Fritz 1990; id. 1993b, 299-301). In sources relating to the Hellenistic and Early Roman periods, it is called the 'Sea of Gennesar'. In later sources its name is the 'Sea of Tiberias', after the city founded by Herod Antipas sometime between A.D. 17 and 20. In the late 1st c. A.D., Pliny the Elder (*NH* 5.71) noted that there were those who called it 'Lake of Tarichea' (=Magdala); it appears that this was during a period when Tarichea was the main settlement in the area, before Tiberias rose to major status. Aside from a few sources from the Middle Ages that call the lake 'Bakhar e-Sinn-en-Nabra' after the settlement of Sinn-en-Nabra (Sinnabray) to its south, all the sources designate it by the names of settlements on the W shore, despite the flourishing for centuries of cities such as Susita/Hippos on the E shore, or Philoterea situated apparently at Tel Beit Yerach, south of the lake. It would appear therefore that use of the name 'Sea of Gennesar' was in effect during the period when a settlement of that name was the most important locally.

The name 'Gennesar' as an appellation for the lake is found in one source from the Late Hellenistic period, and it is common in sources dating from the Early Roman. But none of these sources mentions a settlement of this name; it is used only as a designation for the lake or for the