

Cana of Galilee

By

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On

Cana

Cana of Galilee (= CG) appears only in the gospel of John. This town was little known except for the first sign of Jesus, the turning of water into wine (Jn 2:1-11). It is in this same village that Jesus healed the son of the 'royal man' (Jn 4:46-54). And Nathanael was a native of this place (Jn 21:2). The fourth evangelist always calls it "of Galilee" (cfr. Jn 2:1, 2:11, 4:46, 21:2) in order to distinguish it from the Kanah of Asher (Josh 19:28).¹

Identification²

CG is identified with today's modern village Kefar-Kanna, 6 km North of Nazareth.³ This identification was not accepted by many scholars. There is a Franciscan Church in this small village of Kefar-Kanna. Today this Church in Kefar-Kanna is the only place visited by pilgrims in memory of the first sign of Jesus.⁴ The identification of this place was a disputed question for a long time. According to J.F. Strange, there are three sites proposed as the probable location of CG: "*Ain Qana*, 1.5 km N of Nazareth next to the village of Reina [...]; *Kafr Kanna*, also known as Kefr Kenna, a major village about 5 km NE of Nazareth [...]; and *Khirbet Qana*, a small ruin on a prominent mountain spur about 14 km N of Nazareth".⁵ The excavations and the historical researches support

¹ J. F. STRANGE, *Cana of Galilee* (The Anchor Bible Dictionary, Vol. 1, edited by D.N. Freedman et al., New York 1992) 827.

² The identification of CG is not known for sure. Most modern scholars argue in favour of Kafer-Kanna as the most probable site where Jesus performed his first miracle. It is worth mentioning here a critical study of the sources on Cana: J. HERROJO, *Cana de Galilea y su Localizacion. Un examen critic de las Fuentes* (Paris: J. Gabalda et C^{ie} Éditeurs, 1999). Also see footnote n. 6 of this article for a list of some other authors.

³ For more details about this Kafer Kanna, see R. RIESNER, *Cana* (Grande Enciclopedia illustrata della Bibbia, Vol. 1, Piemme, Casale Monferrato [AL] 1997) 244-245.

⁴ B. BAGATTI, *Ancient Christian Villages of Galilee* (Franciscan Printing Press, Jerusalem 2001) 41.

⁵ J. F. STRANGE, *Cana of Galilee*, cit., 827. Mentioning these three probable sites, he also presents the authors who propose these different sites: P. THOMSEN, *Loca Sancta: Vereichnis de rim 1. bis 6. Jahrhundert n. Chr. Erwähnten Ortschaften Palästinas mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Lokalisierung der biblischen Stätten* (Leipzig 1907); B. BAGATTI,

the proposal that the CG is to be identified with Kafer-Kanna.⁶

CG in Later Writings

CG is mentioned in the writings of Flavius Josephus: "Now at this time my abode was in a village of Galilee, which is named Cana" (*Life* 86, 206). Presenting a brief history of CG, J.F. Strange writes: That the priestly course of Eliashib settled in Cana suggests that Cana was a

Jewish village, not a gentile or mixed village. By A.D.200 there was a question of ritual cleanliness about a certain "Qini," "...but Rabbi (Judah the Prince) and his law court voted to decide about 'Qini' [Qana?] and

declared it clean" (*m. Ohol.* 18.9; Neubauer 1868: 276). Cana is mentioned in the Jerusalem Talmud (*j. Ter.* 46b) as the village of origin of a famous 3rd century robber, Eli of Cana.⁷ J. Herrojo, in his critical study of the sources mentions the following historical documents (biblical, literary, and geographical) where CG is mentioned:

Jesus did his first sign at Cana of Galilee and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him (Jn 2.11). 'Believing' (pisteuein) is one of the major theological themes of the fourth gospel.

Antichi Villaggi Cristiani di Galilea (Jerusalem 1971); E. ROBINSON, *Biblical Researches in Palestine, Mount Sinai, and Arabia Petraea*. Vol. 3 (Boston 1841); G. Dalman, *Orte und Wege Jesu*. 3rd ed. (Gütersloh 1924).

⁶ Apart from B. BAGATTI, "Le Antichità di Kh. Qana e di Kefr Kenna in Galilea", in *Liber Annus* XV (1964-1965) 251-299, the following are some of the other authors who were already in favour of 'Kafer-Kanna' as the place of the first sign of Jesus: E. TESTA, *Maria Terra Vergine* (Jerusalem 1985) 59-68; E. GEISSLER, "Das wahre, biblische Cana in Galiläa im heutigen Kefer Kana", in *Die Posaune des heil. Kreuzes* (Wien 1901) 59-64; W.T. PILTER, "Where is Cana of Galilee?", in *Palestinian Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement* (=PEFQS) (1883) 143-148; E.W.G. MASTERMANN, "Cana of Galilee", in *PEFQ* (1914) 179-183; E. GEISSLER, "Il Venerabile Santuario Principale di Cana-Galilea", in *Diarium Terrae Sanctae* 5 (1885) Nm. 2-3, pp. 96-114; G. PERRELLA, *I Luoghi Santi* (Piacenza 1936) 119-127.

⁷ J. F. STRANGE, *Cana of Galilee*, cit., 827.

"A. Fuentes bíblicas.

B. Fuentes literarias.

1. Patrísticas: Eusebio y S. Jerónimo (ss. III-IV).
2. Itinerarios y descripciones de peregrinos:
 - occidentals: de Sta. Paula (386) a Maundrell (1697).
 - orientales: de Epifanio (s. IX) a Basilio (1465).
3. Fuentes judías: de Epifanio (s. IX) a Basilio (1465).
4. Fuentes musulmanas: de Khosrau (1047) a Sahin ad- Dahiri (1467).
5. Fuentes documentales:
 - Cartulario de la Orden Hospitalaria de San Juan.
 - Documentos del período otomano (1552-1615).

C. Fuentes geográficas:

- Musulmanas: de Yaqût (1225) a Sahin ad-Dahiri (1467).
- Cartografica: del s. XII en adelante".⁸

Apart from these above-mentioned literary sources about CG, we also have the writings of the medieval period, post crusader and modern times in which CG has been mentioned.⁹ These writings throw light on various details about CG and help us understand the importance of this place in these periods.

Excavations

The objects that we find in the Franciscan Museum in Nazareth, "enlighten the history of the village as far back as the Bronze age. The remains of buildings which have been studied, however, are not older than the Roman period".¹⁰ In the excavations done by B. Bagatti since 1955, distinct marks of an ancient synagogue were found.¹¹ B. Bagatti gives interesting and useful conclusions as a result of the excavations he made.¹² From 20th March to 10th May 1969, S. Loffreda made excavations in the

⁸ J. HERROJO, *Cana de Galilea y su Localizacion*, cit., 13.

⁹ For more details regarding this, see B. BAGATTI, "Kafr Kanna: The Village of the Wedding Feast" in *Ancient Christian Villages of Galilee* Franciscan Printing Press, Jerusalem 2001) 41-45.

¹⁰ Ibid., 41.

¹¹ B. BAGATTI, "Le antichità di Kh. Qana e di Kefr Kenna in Galilea", in *Liber Annuus XV* (1964-1965) 251-292.

¹² Ibid., 291-292.

Franciscan friary at CG. He found an Aramaic inscription (4th century) on the pavement. Almost all the guide books mention this inscription.

One who reads the event (Jn 2.1-12) that took place at Cana certainly feels invited to have faith in Jesus and follow him. Thus CG invites us to grow in our faith in Jesus who constantly manifests his glory.

After the excavations, he presents the results of his study, with a clear exposition of maps, figures and photos of the Franciscan friary and its surroundings where he made excavations.¹³ These excavations made by S. Loffreda in 1969 throw some light on the results of the excavations done earlier by B. Bagatti.

The Authenticity of CG

The site of Jesus' first sign at a wedding, Kafer Kanna has sufficient historical and archeological supports for its authenticity as ancient Cana. The following are some of the factors for its authenticity: "1. Kafr Kanna is located on the main road between two important cities in the region (Sepphoris and Tiberias) and is not far from Nazareth. 2. The ruins on this site indicate the presence of a town in the time of Jesus (they span the Persian to Byzantine periods). 3. The site has no running spring water, so in ancient times water would have had to be brought from cisterns or from the valley below and stored in stone jars such as those mentioned in the miracle story. 4. Christian pilgrims have revered this site as the place of Jesus' first miracle from an early date. Ancient graffiti can be seen on one of the grottoes".¹⁴

Theological Importance of Cana¹⁵

Cana: A New Sinai

A well-known Biblical Scholar, A. Serra says that Sinai and Cana have a strong theological link and Jn 2.5b is a reflection of

¹³ P.S. LOFFREDA, "Scavi a Kafr Kanna", in *Liber Annus* XIX (1969) 328-348.

¹⁴ <http://www.sacred-destinations.com/israel/cana.htm>

¹⁵ In this part, I have reproduced a few things from my article: "The first Sign of Jesus at Cana. An Exegetical Study of the Function and Meaning of Jn 2.1-12", in *Marianum* 68 (2006) 17-116.

the words pronounced by the people of Israel at the Sinai event (Ex 19:8, 24:3, 24:7).¹⁶

Ex 19:8	<i>"Whatever Yahweh has said, we will do"</i>
Jn 2:5b	<i>"Whatever he might say to you, do it"</i>

The reasons for calling CG as a new Sinai are: 1) The oath formula of the people of Israel reflect the words of Mary (cfr. Ex 19:8 and Jn 2:5b). 2) The Sinai event takes place on the third day; also the Cana event takes place after three days. 3) In Sinai, the Lord Yahweh manifested his glory to his people. And here at Cana, Jesus manifests his glory to his disciples. 4) At Sinai, the Lord Yahweh makes a covenant with his people; here at Cana, the presence of Jesus indicates the beginning of the new covenant. 5) In both the events there are three main characters: at Sinai, the Lord Yahweh, his people, and Moses, the mediator; at Cana, the Lord Jesus, his disciples, and Mary, the mediatrix between Jesus and his disciples.

Cana: A Symbol of Faith

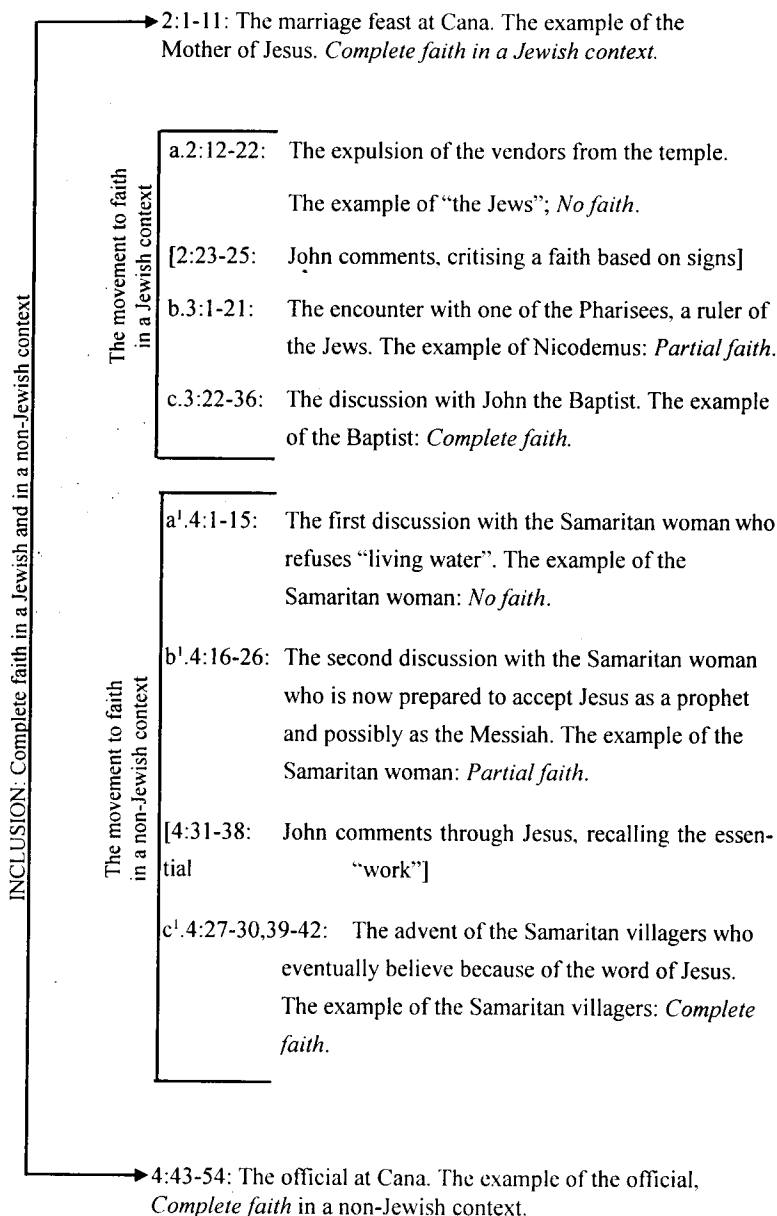
Jesus did his first sign at Cana of Galilee and manifested his glory; and his disciples *believed* in him (Jn 2.11). 'Believing' (*pisteuein*) is one of the major theological themes of the fourth gospel. This verb is used 98 times in the gospel of John. The importance given to 'faith' in the fourth gospel is also clear from its concluding verse Jn 20:31.

The emphasis the evangelist gives to this theme is very clear from the fact that he concludes many episodes with a note of faith. For example, in the first two signs of Cana the disciples believed in him (2.11) and the royal official and his family became believers (4.53). F. J. Moloney explains how this important theme (faith) is gradually developed by the evangelist in these two Cana episodes, with the help of the following literary structure of Jn 2.1-4.54:¹⁷

¹⁶ A. SERRA, *Maria a Cana e presso la Croce* (Roma: Centro Cultura Mariana « Madre della Chiesa », 1991) 34-37.

¹⁷ F. J. MOLONEY, "From Cana to Cana (Jn 2:1 – 4:54) and the Fourth Evangelist's Concept of Correct (and Incorrect) Faith", in *Salesianum* 40 (1978) 840.

FROM CANA TO CANA (Jn. 2:1-4:54)



Noting the literary structure of the 'from Cana to Cana section' (2.1-4.54), so carefully designed by the evangelist, F.J. Moloney concludes that it leads the reader through a series of examples of faith.¹⁸ He interprets 2.11 as a "consequence of the 'faith in the word' of the Mother of Jesus, leading to the faith of others, just as the faith of the official led to the faith of his household (4.53)".¹⁹ In his opinion, the purpose of the 'from Cana to Cana passage' is primarily to lead the readers to a gradual understanding of what true faith means.

These instances show "how necessary it is not only to believe Jesus' words, signs and works to acknowledge him as the Christ and the Son of God but also to commit oneself actively to his person".²⁰

Mariological Significance of Cana

Many mariologists (e.g. A. Serra)²¹ say that the mariological character of Jn 2:1-12 is very significant and important, without negating the primary importance of the person of Christ and the Christological emphasis of the evangelist.

E. Hoade writes: "Cana hears the first intercessions of the Virgin Mary with her divine Son. At the mother's prayer the Saviour works his first miracle, which by its nature and surroundings produced so great an impression in the whole of Palestine. At Cana Jesus showed that he wanted to confer upon his mother the

¹⁸ Ibid., 842.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ G. MLAKUZHIL, *The Christocentric Literary Structure of the Fourth Gospel* (Analecta Biblica 117; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1987) 291.

²¹ A. SERRA, *Contributi dell'antica letteratura giudaica per l'esegesi di Gv 2, 1-11 e 19, 25-27* (Herder: Roma, 1977); IDEM, *Maria a Cana e presso la croce*. Saggio di mariologia giovannea (Gv 2,1-12 e Gv 19,25-27) (Centro di Cultura Mariana "Madre della Chiesa", Roma, 1991) 7-78; IDEM, "...ma lo sapevano i servi che avevano attinto l'acqua". Gv 2, 9c e le tradizioni biblico-giudaiche sul pozzo di Beer (Num 21, 16-20)", in *Marianum* 53 (1991) 435-506; IDEM, "Vi erano là sei giare...". Gv 2,6 alla luce di antiche tradizioni giudaico-cristiane relative ai 'sei giorni' della creazione" in IDEM., *Nato da donna...* (Roma: Cens Marianum, 1992) 141-188.; IDEM, "Temi di Gv 2,1-12 alla luce della letteratura giudaica", in *Theotokos* 7 (1999) 195-212; IDEM, "Giovanni 1.19-2,12. Cana e il Sinai. Cana e la creazione" in IDEM., *Maria e la pienezza del tempo* (Maria di Nazaret 8; Milano: Paoline, 1999) 76-90.; Idem, "A Cana Gesù inaugura la nuova alleanza (Gv 2,1-12)", in *Parole di Vita* 49/1 (2004) 16-25.

patronage of all who are in misery, want and suffering: new mother of the poor banished children of Eve."²²

The emphasis that the fourth evangelist attaches to the figure of 'the mother of Jesus' is clearly evident from the following facts: 1) This miraculous event of Jesus' changing water into wine takes place because of Mary's initiative; 2) The evangelist has designed his gospel in such a way that Mary, the mother of Jesus, is present at the beginning of Jesus' ministry at Cana and also at the end of his earthly life. This explains the importance of Mary's role in the earthly life of Jesus; 3) The fourth evangelist never mentions the proper name 'Mary'; he always calls her 'mother of Jesus'. This is not without any theological intention. This is not simply 'Mary' but the '*mother*' of Jesus. This title has been deliberately repeated in the fourth gospel in order to emphasize the maternity of Mary.

Taking into consideration these elements and the important role Mary plays in the fourth gospel, mariologists are convinced that anyone who reads this passage cannot and should not miss the mariological connotation of Cana.

Conclusion

At the end of this article, I would like to highlight a few points: Though CG has been mentioned only a few times in the Bible, it is of a great theological importance. CG was so privileged to witness the first miracle of Jesus. The manifestation of the glory of Jesus at CG makes it a symbol of Mount Sinai. CG becomes the place of the new covenant. CG presents Mary as our loving mother who intercedes with her Son for us. One who reads the event (Jn 2.1-12) that took place at Cana certainly feels invited to have faith in Jesus and follow him. Thus CG invites us to grow in our faith in Jesus who constantly manifests his glory. ●

²² W. HOADE, *Guide to the Holy Land* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1984) 717.

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