On a cold, cloudy day in early February 1985, Shelley Wachsmann, then resident nautical archaeologist for the Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums, drove to Kibbutz Ginosar, an agricultural settlement near the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Two brothers, avid amateur archaeologists, had found a boat buried in the lake, its outlines revealed by receding lake waters.

The boat was "possibly ancient," according to the handwritten note placed on Wachsmann's desk a day or two before. Nautical archaeologist Wachsmann in 1986 led the Israeli team that excavated a fishing boat that may have plied the Sea of Galilee in the time of Jesus. Discovered by kibbutz members on the sea's muddy floor, the 26-foot-long vessel, built mainly of Lebanese cedar and oak, has been radiocarbon-dated to roughly 15 B.C. (give or take 85 years).

An arrowhead like those used by Roman archers in the First Jewish Revolt was found on the boat, leading to speculation that the vessel was used by Jewish rebels in the naval battle of Migdal (birthplace of Mary Magdalene), when Roman soldiers slaughtered some 6700 Jews in 67 A.D. Although this "generic fishing boat" cannot be definitively linked to either the Gospel stories or the Jewish rebellion in Galilee, Wachsmann’s engrossing account of its excavation and restoration, enlivened by photographs and drawings, provides a well-positioned window on the biblical past.