

Aspects of the Impact of Christian Art and Architecture on Synagogues in Byzantine Palestine

Volume I: Text

A thesis submitted for the award of the degree

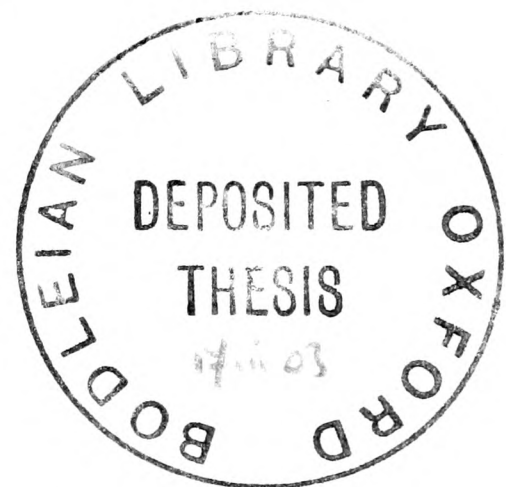
Doctor of Philosophy in Archaeology

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Abstract

This thesis examines the relationship between Jews and Christians in the Holy Land from the age of Constantine the Great to the conquest of the eastern provinces by the Arabs from an archaeological viewpoint. At stake is a better understanding of how Jews adapted to changing times, particularly during the rise of Christianity in Palestine. Whereas earlier scholars have viewed the growth of the Byzantine empire as time of persecution toward the Jews, a re-evaluation of the archaeological evidence indicates that Jews prospered along with their Christian neighbors.

In scope, this dissertation aims first to re-evaluate how many ancient building remains can be classified as synagogues, and how many of those can be accurately dated. For only after a solid body of archaeological research is firmly established can further progress be made toward our better understanding of the ancient world.

Diversity in contemporaneous synagogue layouts, rather than a linear development throughout this period is the norm. Yet, in the sixth-century, one-third of all known synagogues in Palestine bear similar features to early Byzantine churches: basilical layouts, mosaic floors, apses, and chancel screens. Since no single fourth-century synagogue had an apse or chancel screen in its repertoire of furnishings, a reform must have taken place, which ultimately enhanced the synagogue.

It has long been held that this change had originated under the influence of the growing Christian population in the Holy Land. Examining the nature of early Christian liturgical practice throws light on these changes to synagogues. For the focal point of the early Christian basilica, the altar in the sanctuary, separated from the hall by a chancel screen, was adapted by these Jewish communities. By placing the Torah Shrine in the apse of synagogues, the sacred nature of the Five Books of Moses was glorified.

In focusing on the apse and niche it is suggested that rather than a positive influence toward the Jews, the deeply-rooted rivalry between Christianity and Judaism was the main implement for change. Jewish leaders built synagogues with apses and chancel screens to amplify and venerate the most important object in the hall – the Torah Scrolls – kept in the Torah Ark. Unlike earlier buildings, the Torah Shrine was set in the same position as the altar in churches, in the apse. Renovating interiors, changes to entrances, and new types of furnishings in synagogues were the physical changes to this institution which reflect the impact of Christian art on synagogues.

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Abbreviations of Often-Cited Sources:

Journals:

Atiqot	<i>Atiqot</i> -Journal of the Israel Antiquities Authority
BASOR	Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research
EI	Eretz Israel
IEJ	Israel Exploration Journal
ESI	Excavations and Survey in Israel
LA	Liber Annuus-Studium Biblicum Franciscanum
PEFQS	Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement
PEQ	Palestine Exploration Quarterly
Qadmoniot	<i>Qadmoniot</i> -Journal of the Israel Exploration Society
ZDPV	Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina Vereins

Books:

AS	<i>Ancient Synagogues: Historical Analysis and Archaeological Discovery</i>
ASI	<i>Ancient Synagogues in Israel</i>
ASR	<i>Ancient Synagogues Revealed</i>
BT	Babylonian Talmud
DASI	<i>Die antiken Synagogen in Israel</i>
HSA	<i>Handbook of Synagogue Architecture</i>
NEAEHL	<i>New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land</i>
PT	Palestinian Talmud
SLA	<i>The Synagogue in Late Antiquity</i>

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Aspects of the Impact of Church Architecture and Art on Synagogues in Byzantine Palestine

Introduction

This study re-assesses several aspects of the impact of Church art and architecture on synagogues in Byzantine Palestine from the mid-fourth to the early seventh centuries, when the eastern provinces were lost to the Arab conquest (Map 1). As the Church grew in strength, new concepts of liturgy and new forms of ecclesiastical buildings evolved. Distinct building types became standardised over the Empire, such as the basilica for parish churches or, in the East, centrally planned round or octagonal pilgrimage shrines (martyria).¹ Eventually, several hundred churches, imperial endowments included, stood not far from scores of synagogues. By the mid-fourth century, Jewish liturgy and basic types of synagogues were well established in the country too.² Literary and archaeological evidence present opposing pictures. According to textual sources such as the Theodosian Code, imperial restrictions allowed only renovations to existing structures.³ However, archaeological evidence seems to indicate otherwise, as we will point out in Chapter Two.

¹ Shrines were built not only as sanctuaries for a martyr, but also on sites referred to in the NT, such as the Nativity in Bethlehem, Krautheimer, 1986, 94; Mango, 1976, 44-6.

² Literature on the ancient synagogue is extensive and growing. For recent works on the state of research, see for example: Safrai and Stern, 1976; Hüttenmeister and Reeg, 1977; Schürer, 1979; Meyers, 1980; Gutmann, 1981; Levine, 1981b; Meyers and Strange, 1981; Chiat, 1982b; Meyers, 1987; Levine, 1987; Ilan, 1991; Urman and Flesher, 1995; Fine, 1996b; Fine, 1999a; Levine, 1999.

³ For collected references to Jews in the ancient world, see: Linder, 1987, esp. 287-289 (edict from 423 CE). We hope to shed light on the question whether these restrictions in fact were followed (Chapter 2).

Some scholars have seen growing imperial oppression in the early fifth century, epitomised in the abolition of the Jewish patriarchate, as the reason why fewer synagogues were built. By the sixth century, though, restrictions on building of synagogues seem to have been relaxed. Several new foundations, as well as renovated synagogues, are known from this period both in the north, in Palaestina Secunda, and in central Palestine, Palaestina Prima. It is peculiar that at a time when Jews were allegedly being downtrodden by the Christian Empire, several Jewish communities near large cities decided to forego long-standing tradition. These communities made radical changes to the interior layouts and furnishings of their prayer halls. By the sixth century, plans of twelve excavated buildings out of thirty-five synagogues in Palestine bear features typical of the early Byzantine church: in lay-out, in architectural ornamentation, in floor mosaics, in furniture, or occasionally in combinations of these features. The aim of this thesis is to determine as precisely as possible what can be learned from the archaeological evidence in particular, and to suggest possible motives for these fundamental changes to synagogues.

Mapping sites in Palestine where fourth- to sixth-century churches and synagogues have been found provides visible evidence for the distribution of Christians and Jews (Maps 2 & 3). Churches are concentrated on the coast, in cities (Jerusalem, Scythopolis, and Sepphoris); by the Sea of Galilee (Capernaum, Tabgha), and at other important Christian sites (Nazareth, Kefar Kana).⁴ Constantine's mother Helena played a major part in constructing churches at the major pilgrimage sites, such as the Holy Sepulchre, the Ascension in Jerusalem, and the Nativity in Bethlehem. These imperial foundations were large, well-funded churches. From both excavations and pilgrim's accounts such as Egeria's (end of the 4th century) however, it seems that most village churches in Palaestina Secunda were not constructed prior

4 Tsafir, DiSegni and Green, 1994.

to the late fourth-early fifth centuries.⁵ Money brought into the country by European pilgrims began to make its mark from the early fifth century onward.⁶

In contrast to this picture, synagogues dating from the fourth to sixth centuries are concentrated in Upper and Lower Galilee, and later in the Golan. Synagogues have also been found in and near large cities, for example at Caesarea, Scythopolis, and Gaza Maioumas. Four Samaritan synagogues are found near Mount Gerizim, but two have been found elsewhere (Tel Qasile, Beth She'an North). Another concentration of four synagogues has been found in the Judaeian Hills.⁷ In light of this archaeological evidence, contact between Jews and Christians would seem to have been mainly in cities and large towns where both churches and synagogues have been found (Map 4).⁸ However, owing to the little material evidence which we have, it is premature to assume that a Galilean village where a single synagogue exists was exclusively Jewish.⁹

The institution known as the synagogue played a cardinal role in the development of Judaism both before and after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE. The synagogue had numerous functions, both religious and secular: reading and teaching of the Law, and later, for communal prayer. As secular buildings, synagogues were places for legal questions to be answered, for civil administration, for communal meals, and also provided hospitality for visitors. Some written sources attest to one communal official, known as a *hazan*, who resided in the synagogue complex.¹⁰ Synagogues were unlike the Temple in other ways too. Synagogues could be built anywhere. Worship by a small group of priests was no longer limited to Jerusalem. Sacrifice at the Temple ceased after 70 CE.

5 Wilkinson, 1981, 14; Stemberger, 1987, 65; Aviam, 1999, 283.

6 Ovadiah, 1970, Dauphin, 1998.

7 Amit and Ilan, 1989; for possible differences in first-century religious customs between Galilee and Judaea, see: Goodman, 1999.

8 Stemberger, 1998, 133.

9 Isaac, 1998, 73; Fine, 1999b; Taylor, 1993; Urman, 1995; Dauphin, 1993; Dauphin, 1998; Dauphin and Gibson, 1994.

10 Krauss, 1922, 126-128; Schürer, 1979, iii, 14, 34.

The origins of the synagogue are as yet unclear. The earliest reference to assemblies comes from the Bible, where several passages mention groups of Jews who would gather to hear the prophets. In the 6th century BCE, Ezekiel pressed hard in these assemblies for the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem during the Babylonian exile.¹¹ Synagogues in Palestine as well as in the Diaspora are referred to numerous times in the first century CE by Philo, Josephus, and in the New Testament. Philo, the head of the Jewish community in Alexandria, describes details of the synagogue there.¹² Josephus writes of the synagogue in Tiberias, where meetings were held following a service.¹³ In the NT, synagogues are mentioned often. A centurion, whose servant Jesus healed, built a synagogue at Capernaum.¹⁴ In Acts, the synagogue of the freedmen (Libertini) is referred to in Jerusalem, where foreigners frequently arrived.¹⁵

The earliest epigraphic evidence for the existence of the synagogue however, comes not from Palestine, but from mid third-century Hellenistic Egypt, where dedicatory inscriptions from Shedia, Nitria, Athribis, and Arsinoe-Crocodilopolis mention Jewish buildings, referred to as a *proseuche*.¹⁶ It must be emphasised that this term is found on inscriptions outside of Palestine.¹⁷

11 Ez. 11:16 "I will remove them far off among the nations and scatter them among the countries and I will be a little sanctuary (*miqdash me'at*) to them in the countries where they are scattered". This passage is far from sufficient evidence for the claim that synagogues existed during the Babylonian exile.

12 Philo, *Caius* 156, *Moses* 2:216, *Dreams* 2:156.

13 Josephus, *Life* 277.

14 Matt. 8:5; Luke 7:5.

15 Acts 6:9.

16 Shedia (SW of Alexandria, after 246 BCE):

Ἑπὲρ βασιλέως
Πτολεμαίου καὶ
βασιλίσης
Βερενίκης ἀδελ-
φῆς καὶ γυναικὸς καὶ
τῶν τέκνων
τὴν προσευχὴν
οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι

"On behalf of king Ptolemy and queen Berenice his sister and wife and their children the Jews (dedicated) the *proseuche*" CIJ II, 1440 (=Lifshitz 92; Horbury and Noy, 1992, 22);
Arsinoe (246-221 BCE):

The most important Greek inscription found in Jerusalem from the first century CE describes a synagogue built by Theodotus the priest and head of the synagogue, the *archisynagogos*: (Fig. I:1) ¹⁸

Ὑπὲρ βασιλέως
Πτολεμαίου τοῦ
Πτολεμαίου καὶ
βασιλίσης
Βερενίκης τῆς
γυναικὸς καὶ
ἀδελφῆς καὶ τῶν
τέκνων οἱ ἐν Κροκ[ο]-
δίλων πόλει Ἰου[δαί]-
οι τὴν προ[σ]ε[υ]χὴν]

“On behalf of king Ptolemy, son of Ptolemy, and queen Berenice his wife and sister and their children, the Jews in Crocodilopolis (dedicated) the proseuche” (Lifshitz 99; Horbury and Noy, 1992, 117);

Nitria (2nd century BCE): CIJ II 1442 (=Lifshitz 94; Horbury and Noy, 1992, 25);

Athribis (early 2nd century BCE): CIJ II 1443, 1444 (=Lifshitz 95, 96; Horbury and Noy, 1992, 27,28).

17 Josephus uses *proseuche* to describe the synagogue at Halicarnassus (Ant. 14.258) and at Tiberias (Vita 277, 280, 293), but not the synagogues at Dora, Caesarea, and Antioch. Tiberias in the first century was a new Hellenized settlement. For the geographic distribution of these two terms: Hengel, 1975, and also Reisner, 1995, 183.

18 The inscription was found by Weill mixed with rubble in a cistern, who believed that it belongs to the first century on paleographic grounds, see: Weill, 1920. CIJ II, 1404 (=Lifshitz 79). This inscription is critical for an understanding of the synagogue in Jerusalem before the destruction of the Temple. Kee unfortunately proposed to date this inscription in the second century, an idea rejected by Sanders, Riesner, and others, see: Kee, 1990; Sanders, 1990, 341; Reisner, 1995; and Van der Horst, 1999; For an overall re-assessment of this inscription, see: Kloppenborg Verbin, 2000.

Θ[ε]όδοτος Οὐεττήνου, ἱερεὺς καὶ |
ἀ[ρ]χισυνάγωγος, υἱὸς ἀρχισυν[αγώ]γ[ο]υ, υἱωνὸς
ἀρχισυν[α]γώγου, ᾧκοδόμησε τὴν συναγωγὴν εἰς
ἀν[άγν]ω[σ]ιν νόμου καὶ εἰς [δ]ιδαχ[ή]ν ἐντολῶν,
καὶ | τ[ό]ν ξενῶνα, κα[ὶ] τὰ δώματα καὶ τὰ χρη
σ[τ]ήρια τῶν ὑδάτων εἰς κατάλυμα τοῖς
[χ]ρήζουσιν ἀπὸ τῆς ξέ[ν]ης, ἣν ἐθεμελ[ί]ωσαν οἱ
πατέρες [α]ῦτοῦ καὶ οἱ πρε[σ]β[ύ]τεροι καὶ
Σιμων[ί]δης

Theodotus, son of Vettenos priest and archisynagogos, son of an archisynagogos and grandson of an archisynagogos, had this synagogue built for reading of the Law and instruction in the commandments, and also the guest lodgings, and the rooms and the water systems for the accommodation of those who come from abroad and need [accommodation]. [This synagogue] was founded by his ancestors, the elders, and Simonides.

This inscription makes clear some of the functions that the synagogue had, as well as the titles of its leaders.¹⁹ These include study of the Law and instruction in the commandments. Interestingly, prayer is not mentioned at all. The building also served as a hostel. Those who come from abroad surely refer to pilgrims. Water installations probably refer to ritual baths (Hebrew: *miqvah*; pl.: *miqvot*), a necessary facility for pilgrims wishing to visit the Temple.

The earliest archaeological evidence for a possible synagogue building dates to the first century BCE at Delos.²⁰ Four buildings thought to be synagogues from the first century CE are known from Palestine: at Gamla, Herodion, Masada, and Magdala. These halls are thought to be synagogues on account of the benches along their walls, and the location of columns supporting the roofs.²¹ At Masada, a genizah containing several scrolls was found buried in the north-western room.²² At both Masada and Herodion the buildings have ritual baths nearby, further evidence suggesting that these two, at least, could have served as synagogues.²³ A small water installation was also found in the north-west corner of the building at Gamla.²⁴ Recently, two additional buildings thought to be synagogues and contemporaneous with Delos have been excavated in Palestine. One was excavated at Jericho, near the Hasmonean winter palace, and the second, in a small village in the foothills on the

19 On the archisynagogos as a title, see: Rajak and Noy, 1993; Brooten, 1982, 17.

20 Bruneau, 1970.

21 The origin of this type of plan has been sought in Greek assembly halls, such as the *bouleuteria* and *ecclesiasteria*, in Nabatean temple courtyards, and in Herodian *triclinia*; see: Foerster, 1981a, and Netzer, 1981.

22 The genizah related to the second stage of this building contained the remains of scrolls of Deuteronomy and Ezekiel. Netzer rejects the idea that the first phase was a synagogue, and suggests its first use was a stable; Netzer, 1991, 402-413, especially 410.

23 Foerster, 1981c, 26.

24 Gutman, 1981, 32.

road to Jerusalem.²⁵ In all these buildings however, no decoration or specifically 'Jewish' artifact has been found attesting to their function as a synagogue. This is one example of the difficulties involved in the study of ancient synagogues.

In the early part of this century, rabbinic Judaism (i.e. 'normative Judaism') was understood to have been followed by all Jews, an idea given full account by Moore.²⁶ Moore's 1927 publication *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era*, received immediate acclaim. However, the picture created by Moore and others after him has two basic inaccuracies: first, that this kind of Judaism was 'normative' (i.e. normal or authentic); and second, Moore did not use all the available texts to hand, but choose only those rabbinic texts which helped create his picture of a religion followed by all Jews.²⁷ Sukenik relied on Moore when he proposed his typology of ancient synagogues.²⁸

A second problem in modern research relates to an understanding of the role of the Byzantine Empire in local affairs. Avi-Yonah thought that the pressure of tyrannical local authorities, coupled with economic hardship, underscored the relation of Jews to the state in Byzantine times.²⁹ This idea has its origin in an over-reliance on early Jewish rabbinic literature, such as the Mishnah (redacted in c. 200 CE), the Tosephta (variously dated from the third to sixth centuries) and the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds (redacted from c. 400 and 500 CE respectively).³⁰ Too little weight had been placed on the fact that, in the Talmud, opinions are contravened by other rabbis. Scholars have found it difficult to accept the view that the rabbinic

25 Both these buildings are identified as synagogues on account of circumstantial evidence, as no positively identified Jewish motif has been found in either, see: Netzer, Kalman and Loris, 1999, Netzer, 1999, and Magen, Zionit and Sirkis, 1999. Ma'oz suggests that the building at Jericho is a portico with a central garden, similar to the small first-century BCE palace at Horvat El-Muraq in the Hebron hills, Ma'oz, 1999, 121.

26 Moore, 1927.

27 Cohen, 1999, 925; Horbury, 1998, 4; Freyne, 1998, xv; Hoppe, 1994, 19-25; Neusner, 1966; Neusner, 1980.

28 Sukenik, 1934, 2.

29 Avi-Yonah, 1984.

30 For some of the problems in dating these works, see: Stemberger, 1991, 133-140; 152-155; 170-171; 194-197 respectively.

writings may not even be representative of the majority of Jews living in Galilee.³¹ Furthermore, we have little written evidence from non-Jewish sources about Jews living in this area. Consequently, archaeological evidence has been a boon, supplementing and sometimes contradicting the information provided by the Jewish sources. For example, in the Tosephta it is written that synagogue entrances are to face east, as the Temple doorways did.³² Very few excavated synagogue entrances in fact face east, while most of those in Galilee face south.

In modern Israel, over one hundred buildings that have been surveyed or excavated are thought to be synagogues. The synagogue building here refers to a structure whose main function was a place for the worship service. Validation of the identity of these buildings as synagogues is only one of the problems faced in interpreting archaeological evidence. By using the term validation, we mean that some Jewish symbol, whether painted, inscribed, or found in relief on some architectural member of the building must have been found at the site. These symbols include the *menorah* (seven-branched candelabra), the *shofar* (ram's horn for blowing), *etrog* (citron fruit), or inscription. On the basis of their Samaritan inscriptions, remains of six buildings are thought to be Samaritan synagogues.³³ Numerous large structures found by excavation and understood by some to be synagogues need not necessarily be included in our category of verified synagogues unless positive artistic or epigraphic evidence shows this to be so. With this in mind, whereas several ancient buildings allegedly used as synagogues may be excluded from our total number of positively identified synagogue sites, in no case should a building that is not a synagogue be included in our list. One disadvantage of this view

³¹ See: Neusner, 1976.

³² Tos. Meg. IV; 22.

אין פותחין פתחי בתי כנסת אלא למזרח, שכן מצינו בהיכל שהיה פתוח למזרח.

³³ These are: Sha'alivim, Tel Qasile, Beth She'an North (?), Zur Natan, Khirbet Samara, and El Khirbe; Magen, 1992; Magen, 1993; Pummer, 1999.

is that we have no means of being certain that *each* ancient synagogue left material remains indicating that building's function as a synagogue.

Modern understanding of the development of the synagogue from the first century to the Persian conquest has followed a long and winding path. In the early work of Sukenik and others, an attempt was made to construct a typological overview of synagogue development in terms of architectural history. This methodological approach follows a long tradition of 19th- and 20th-century scholarship. In the mid-nineteenth century, Fergusson treated the development of Gothic churches with their huge enclosed spaces in the Middle Ages as 'Progress in Art'.³⁴ These churches follow a similar progression from simple to more complex, both in overall form and architectural details.

On the development of synagogue layouts, the 'three-types' theory posited chronological groups of buildings according to certain characteristics. According to this theory, those of the 'early' type were considered to be the long basilica ('Galilean'), with three decorated entrances in the short, southern wall. These buildings typically had flagstone floors, and one or two rows of benches along the walls for seating. This type of building was dated to the second/third century, for example, the synagogue at Capernaum. The 'transitional' broad house type (or 'Judaean type') of synagogue had its entrances in the short east wall, with no columns or roof supports in the prayer hall. Instead, massive external walls supported a flat roof. This type has been dated to the fourth century, and is typified by the synagogue at Eshtemo'a with its broad hall. Those of the 'late' type were basilical, but had an apse in the short, southern wall, and usually had floors covered with mosaics. Often an atrium was found to the north of a small narthex, which led to the entrance. Typical of this type is the synagogue at Beth Alpha (fifth/sixth century). While not completely invalid, this theory needs to be qualified.³⁵ It is true that basilical

34 Fergusson, 1849; Steadman, 1979, 79-82.

35 Foerster, 1995.

synagogues with apses do appear in the fifth and sixth centuries, but other types are not confined to a particular century or area.

A wealth of recent discoveries runs against the geographical distribution as well as the dating criteria proposed by this theory. Reasons why the theory should be abandoned are abundant, even though some scholars continue to uphold its tenets.³⁶ This theory had its origins in Moore's inaccurate understanding of 'normative Judaism', where all Jews pursue (more or less) a single way of life. With all Jews coherently following the same religious precepts, a progression of synagogue 'types' from the second to sixth centuries neatly fits architectural facts into the 'normative' theory. Sectarianism is not even considered part of the Jewish tradition, although even the Jewish writer Josephus (late first century) speaks about four 'philosophies' in the Jewish world.

Moreover, the 'three-types' theory was advanced when excavation methods were unsophisticated, and little account was taken of numismatics, ceramic evidence, or stratigraphy. Several buildings thought to date from the second to third century in fact were constructed two hundred years later (or more), such as the synagogues at Capernaum and Bar'am. Furthermore, inscriptions are rare, while unreliable material has sometimes been used as evidence for the absolute dating of a particular building. For example, coins found underneath flagstone floors do not necessarily provide the exact date of construction, but instead provide only a *terminus post quem* for the floor. Determining the 'deposition date' of a coin within an archaeological context is far from an exact science. The limitations of archaeological evidence cannot be overstated. In this work, we follow a restricted interpretation of archaeological evidence for synagogues concerning both identification of a building and its dating.

Nevertheless, even with its inherent disadvantages, numismatic evidence is typically considered a relatively secure tool for the archaeologist to use in dating ancient buildings. Both the construction date and period of use need to be determined.

36 For example: Foerster, 1989b, and Tsafir, 1995b.

When few coins are found, the average deposition date, and thereby the date at which one may assume the coins were dropped, is considered by Orton to be 40 years after the date of the latest coin.³⁷ For places where many coins are found, this number drops to 28 years. However, there are many other factors that must be considered in using coins for dating purposes. The mechanisms whereby coins travel are yet not fully known. Coins found in excavations must have either been dropped on purpose, or by chance.³⁸ Nor can we be certain of the length of time that coins were in circulation.

In discussing the dating of the synagogue at Khirbet Shema', Magness explored the difficulties involved in basing site chronologies on numismatic evidence alone.³⁹ Kingsley points out that in the Sumaqa synagogue, coin and pottery evidence for occupation of the site diverges.⁴⁰ Only two percent of the coins date from the mid-fifth to mid-seventh centuries. However, at this site, imported fine wares increased in the same period as the number of coin finds decreased. An over-reliance on coin finds for dating is common in archaeological reports dealing with synagogues.

As stated above, layouts of several fifth- and sixth-century synagogues in Palestine conform to the plan of the early Byzantine mono-apsidal church. These synagogues were often aligned along the longitudinal axis: an atrium, a narthex, a prayer hall with the nave and two or four lateral aisles, and at the end of the hall, an apse. In six examples an apse was added to an existing structure, as for example at Ma'oz Hayyim (phase II) near Scythopolis, where an opening was constructed in the south wall to allow an apse to be built, probably in the late fourth or early fifth

³⁷ Orton based these figures on work in England which may not be fully relevant to sites in Palestine. More research is needed in this field; Orton, 1980, 103.

³⁸ Ariel points out that small coins found at the synagogue of 'En Nashut were almost valueless, owing to inflation; Ariel, 1987, 148.

³⁹ Magness, 1997, 217. For the problems of mis-dating ceramic forms: Magness, 1993, 165. In a recent paper, Magness re-dated the forts at Ein Boqeq and Upper Zohar to the mid-sixth century by isolating and examining sealed deposits (including both ceramics and coins) beneath plaster floors; Magness, 1999, 198.

⁴⁰ Kingsley, 1999, 264-266. Many of the reservations expressed by Kingsley for using numismatic evidence are dismissed by Safrai in his study on the decline of Palestine in the fifth century, Safrai, 1998, 19-21.

century. The inclusion of the apse in the synagogue marked an abrupt departure from former conventions, which either set a raised platform against the back wall of the hall (as at Ma'oz Hayyim, phase I), or alternatively, fixed raised platforms between doorways of the front wall, as in the basilical synagogue at Meroth in Upper Galilee.

In chapter two we discuss over twenty sites where synagogues have been found and excavated. These sites have well-documented excavation reports that provide a basis for evaluating their date. Additionally, in the Catalogue (Volume III), over one hundred synagogues from Palestine are collected, showing plans and describing details of the archaeological evidence used for identifying and dating each. For full descriptions of these sites, the reader is referred to any one of the *corpora* of ancient synagogues, such as Hüttenmeister's *Die Antike Synagogen* (1977), Chiat's *Handbook of Synagogue Architecture* (1982), Hachlili's *Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology in the Land of Israel* (1988), Ilan's *Ancient Synagogues in Israel* (Hebrew, 1992), the *New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* (1994) or Dauphin's *La Palestine Byzantine* (1998).

Chapter three investigates the reason for changes in synagogue architecture in light of the contradictory explanations for the direction of prayer given by the rabbis concerning the location of the 'Divine Presence,' that is God's manifestation on earth. When the Roman Legio X Fretensis destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE, the Divine Presence was thought to have lost its supposed dwelling. From the second century on, some rabbis believed that the location of the Divine Presence shifted from the Temple in Jerusalem to synagogue buildings themselves. Other rabbis believed that the Divine Presence was inside the synagogue, in the Torah Ark together with the Scrolls. Even others believed (as many do today) that the Presence did not abandon Jerusalem at all, but resides in the Western Wall – part of the surviving temenos enclosure on the Temple Mount. This ambiguity over the location of the Divine Presence might have led to confusion over direction of prayer in synagogues, and ultimately to modern pre-conceived ideas over both the layouts of ancient synagogues and the furniture within.

Again, the most important objects in the synagogue were the Torah Scrolls, the Five Books of the Old Testament. The scrolls were either kept in a container of some sort, which was then brought to the prayer hall when needed, or possibly placed in some receptacle or shrine within the prayer hall. However, we do not know how many scrolls or texts were kept in a typical synagogue.⁴¹ At present, archaeological evidence provides an important additional means for our understanding of how scrolls were stored or displayed. Therefore, it is worth examining plans of synagogues to look for nearby rooms where the scrolls might be placed while not in use in the service. One synagogue at Naro (Hammam Lif) in Tunisia has a room attached to the prayer hall. On the mosaic floor of this room is a depiction of an open text, which has been interpreted as indicating that this room is the place where the scrolls were kept.⁴²

Mosaic depictions of a shrine for keeping the scrolls are examined in Chapter Four. The Shrine motif appears in six synagogue mosaic pavements, but as well as on stone, glass, and ceramic lamps. In its generic form, the motif is composed of a pediment supported by two columns flanking a central object or person. On most pavements two doors are depicted between columns. In Byzantine art, a similar motif is used to decorate silver book covers, ivory diptychs, gold glasses, and illuminated manuscripts. These Christian objects were clearly not meant to evoke images of the Torah Shrine. Instead, the generic motif, when found in Jewish contexts, is one of the means by which we can ascertain that a pavement belongs to a synagogue and not a church. What does this motif represent? According to one school of thought, this motif is allegorical, representing the Temple façade in Jerusalem or perhaps the Tabernacle. According to a second school of thought, this motif is decorative, representing some kind of container for the Torah Scrolls, either a movable wooden

⁴¹ In comparison, the fragmentary seventh- or eighth-century Leiden papyrus gives an inventory of 26 books for an unknown monastery in Egypt. The actual number of books in this monastery is estimated at 75-100. See: Van Minnen, 1992, 229.

⁴² Goodenough, 1952, II, 89-100.

cabinet or a stone-built Shrine. The mosaic pavement at Sepphoris suggests that there might be some truth to both.⁴³

In Chapter Five we consider ecclesiastical furnishings in synagogues, including the raised platform known as the *bema*, smaller platforms similar to the *ambo*, and chancel screens. Several synagogues have remains of single raised platforms to one side of the main entrance. Other sites have two platforms flanking the main entrance. These platforms are thought to be the bases for a wooden cabinet in which the Torah Scrolls were kept, a base for a stone aedicule, or possibly the location where the scrolls were set during the prayer service. This arrangement for the platforms flanking the main doors would have positioned the Torah Ark against the entrance wall of the synagogue. At least three synagogues dating not earlier than the fifth century show that the main southern doorways were blocked at a later stage, and the entrance of the prayer hall shifted to the north wall, opposite their original location.⁴⁴ However, the platforms next to the original doors were not moved.

Concerning furniture in synagogues, the ‘Seat of Moses’— an elaborate chair carved out of stone for the Elders – was found in two synagogues in Palestine. Only one was *in situ*. This chair recalls the Christian bishop’s throne in form and in function. More striking are the remains of chancel screens that have been found in nine synagogues, most of which have apses. The chancel screens in these synagogues are located in a position similar to those found in early Byzantine churches. The decoration of chancel screens uncovered in synagogues also shows stylistic affinities with that found in early churches. The introduction of chancel screens into synagogue prayer halls considerably altered the traditional arrangement in the interior of the synagogue, for the Torah Ark in the apse was now separated from the congregation. This arrangement in synagogues is similar to the layout of an early Byzantine church.

⁴³ For the recent discussion, see: Levine, 2000, and especially Talgam, 2000, 95-104.

⁴⁴ These include Tiberias, Hammat Tiberias, Ein Gedi, and Meroth.

The appearance of an apse in synagogues reflects the influence of Christian architecture, which we consider in Chapter Six. While the apse is a feature of several fourth-century imperial church foundations in Palestine, such as the Holy Sepulchre Martyrium in Jerusalem, the Eleona Church on the Mount of Olives, or the church at Mambre, it does not appear in any synagogue dating earlier than the second half or even last quarter of the fourth century CE. No synagogue with an apse has yet been uncovered in one of the small villages in Upper Galilee or the Golan, where the largest concentration of Jews apparently dwelt. Apses are found in synagogues that were located near sizeable non-Jewish communities, such as the synagogue at Ma'oz Hayyim, near the city of Scythopolis. We compare the functional aspects of the apse in churches with synagogues, in particular, its use as an architectural means to focus attention. Evidence from five synagogues uncovered with apses, raised *bemas* and chancel screens suggests that the Torah Ark became the sole focal point of liturgy, following the model of the altar in church architecture.

The change in synagogue layouts from rectangular prayer halls without apses to those with apses might have occurred because those Jewish communities felt that their synagogues lacked features that nearby churches possessed. Modern theories for this change have focused on the interaction of Jews and Christians in larger cities in Palestine. The most recent hypothesis understands the chancel screen as a barrier to the Scrolls from 'unclean eyes', perhaps a reflection of changes in the liturgy. In Chapter Six we discuss possible reasons for the shift from synagogues without apses to those having an apse in light of the early Eucharistic liturgy in the Eastern Church.

One final aspect of Christian art and its relationship to synagogues is considered in Appendix A. This concerns the application of identical geometric and modular patterns in planning *naoi* of churches and prayer halls of synagogues from the fourth to the sixth centuries. These six buildings are part of a larger *opus* concerning the metrological analysis of individual churches and synagogues in the

region (Table A.1).⁴⁵ The measured plans of five churches and a synagogue from Syria Secunda, Palaestina Secunda and Palaestina Tertia are compared. In four of these, identical dimensions are found in several critical lengths: the inner length of the *bema* church at Sugane and the inner length of the church at Nawa are both 16.00 m. Similarly, the inner width of the church at Mamphis in Palaestina Tertia is 10.65 m. and the inner width of the church at et-Tuba are both 10.60 m. (a difference of 5 centimetres).

The common denominator is the application of patterns and harmonic proportions as recorded by Vitruvius that were used throughout the early Roman Empire. Identical dimensions are the clue that point to fundamental design similarities in building in Byzantine Palestine and Syria. Apparently, Roman rules of proportion and geometric patterns were followed by those who constructed both churches and synagogues.

45 For Illyricum see: Spremo-Petrovic, 1971. For Palestine: Chen, 1989b; Chen, 1990b and for Syria: Wilkinson, 1984b. Analysis of the church at Mamphis and the synagogue at Ma'oz Hayyim can be found in: Chen, 1981, and Chen, 1988.

Chapter One

Evolution and ancient synagogues

1.1 Re-assessing past scholarship

Since the first remains of ancient synagogues were identified in the nineteenth century, attempts have been made to categorise these buildings. By the turn of the twentieth century, eight had been discovered with a similar form and layout. These ‘Galilean’ synagogues had basilical interiors, finely-cut masonry walls, stone floors, entrances in the southern walls, and elaborately decorated lintels and door-jambes.

By the 1930’s, numerous synagogues with different features had been uncovered. They have mosaic floors, chancel screens and apses. These features were previously unknown in synagogues, but are common in churches. Several theories were advanced to explain the introduction of ecclesiastical furnishings in synagogues. One theory was that synagogue layouts evolved from one form (or ‘type’) to another during the second to the seventh centuries.¹

The idea of an evolutionary development of synagogue buildings owes its underpinning to an inherently flawed, nineteenth-century concept of Jews and Judaism in the aftermath of the Jerusalem Temple’s destruction.² This concept held that all Jews followed a similar Jewish way of life, as is inferred from the Jewish written sources. The ‘evolutionary’ concept was popular in the late nineteenth

1 This concept is tenaciously held even today by some Israeli scholars, but has been rejected by others, see: Chiat and Mauck, 1991, 70-71; Meyers, 1996, 24; Chiat, 1981, 56.

2 See below, section 1.3; Neusner, 1980, 142.

century, especially after Darwin's 1859 publication of *On the Origin of Species*. Already in the mid 1800's, the term 'evolution' was applied to artifacts as well as buildings, even before it was used to explain the development of animal and plant populations.³ In fact, the idea of evolution in medieval churches was a general idea that can be found, for example, in Fergusson's *An Historical Enquiry into the True Principles of Beauty in Art* published in 1849. According to him, technical progress in building was considered to be:⁴

...the product of extended historical processes of trial and error by many generations of architects and craftsmen...In every case it is not the contributions of individual geniuses alone which are the source of progress; it is the existence of an organised system in which each generation builds on the achievements of its predecessors, and knowledge and skill are built up cumulatively.

This evolutionary concept underlies the three types model of ancient synagogue development.

Archaeological evidence points to a much more complicated picture than previously thought. The variety of excavated synagogue plans suggests a diverse development, with many layouts and forms co-existing, rather than simple evolution from one form to another.⁵ This variety is corroborated in the modern understanding of progressive sectarianism in the ancient Jewish world.⁶

1.2 'Normative Judaism' and the forbidden image

At this point we must consider a general theory regarding Jews and Judaism in the first centuries of our era. In 1927, Moore's seminal work discussed the character of Judaism from the first century on. According to Moore, the reason that Judaism alone outlasted all the pagan religions is because:⁷

3 Steadman, 1979, 78.

4 Steadman, 83.

5 Levine, 1981a, 10.

6 Baumgarten, 1997, 11-18; Miller, 1999, 60.

7 Moore, 1927, 109.

... it succeeded in achieving a unity of belief and observance among Jews in all their wide dispersion then and since. The danger of a widening gulf between Aramaic speaking Jews and Greek speaking Jews... was completely overcome.

Moore traced the conformity in Jewish observance in the dietary laws and in worship. He believed that as a consequence of the destruction of the Temple, Jewish sectarianism ceased. This means that when the Pharisees gathered together in Yavneh after the fall of Jerusalem, a new orthodoxy was formed, excluding all others. The Sadducees (the priestly class), not having a Temple, no longer had a livelihood. The Essenes disappeared after the war, and the Christians were excommunicated. The Pharisaic sect was the only group of Jews left. Moore's concept of 'normative Judaism' was widely accepted.⁸

Similarly, the known rabbinic literature opposes figural representation, or approves of it, *ex post facto*. Under the 'normative' view, it was held that Jews did not have figurative art, since the Second Commandment forbids the depiction of human or animal forms.⁹ Archaeological remains of synagogues from the third century onward demonstrate the opposite, namely, that Jews did use figurative art.

1.3 Synagogue scholarship in the early 19th century

In exploring the archaeological aspect of synagogue studies, we will look back two centuries, to see how explorers' views of these buildings changed over time. Accompanied by teams of scholars, geographers, and engineers, Napoleon's 1798 expedition to Egypt elevated interest in sites of the ancient world from simple lore to critical scientific enquiry. In the 1800's, explorers' accounts of the Holy Land, such as that of the German Ulrich Seetzen, the Swiss Johann Burckhardt and the American Reverend Edward Robinson provoked great interest and marked a turning point in the study of the topography of the area. Robinson's massive *Biblical Researches in*

8 Cohen re-enforces Neusner's arguments in refuting Moore on the basis of methodology and scope. Cohen also points out that the Jewish Mishnah preserves the earliest account of conflicting legal opinions by named individuals who belong to the same fraternity. Different sects "agreed to disagree", see: Neusner, 1966; Neusner, 1980; Neusner and Frerichs, 1985; Cohen, 1984, 29.

9 Ex. 20:4-5.

Palestine first brought archaeological remains in Palestine to the attention of Europeans and Americans after it was published simultaneously in the United States, Germany, and England.¹⁰ Although Robinson's primary goal was to study the physical geography of Palestine, at the same time he hoped to identify sites mentioned in the Bible, as the title of his book implies. Robinson saw numerous ruins in 1838, but not until his second trip in 1852 did he identify some of those ruins as synagogues.¹¹

In 1861 a French team led by the biblical scholar Ernest Renan was able to correctly read a number of synagogue inscriptions.¹² Hebrew inscriptions on the standing façades at Bar'am and Nabratein provided the clue to the identity of these buildings. At Gischala (Gush Halav), Renan dated the Hebrew inscription mentioning Yose bar Nachum to the fourth or fifth century.¹³ Three years later, British explorers under the aegis of the Palestine Exploration Fund set out to discover the boundaries of the Biblical twelve tribes, and to map the routes of the campaigns of Joshua and David. On 12 May 1865, at the meeting held in the Jerusalem Chamber of Westminster, the prospectus of the Palestine Exploration Fund was drawn up. It states:¹⁴

¹⁰ Robinson, 1867.

¹¹ Robinson did not know that *tels* were the stratified remains of ancient settlements. Instead, he thought these sites were natural formations, and therefore was unable to identify some sites. See the observations by King, 1983, 2-5.

¹² Renan read the now-missing Hebrew inscription at Bar'am as: "Peace be on this dwelling-place", and dated the building to the first century CE; Renan, 1864, 770.

¹³ Renan, 770.

¹⁴ Conder and Kitchener, 1881, I, 7.

No country should be of so much interest to us as that in which the documents of our Faith were written, and the momentous events they describe enacted. At the same time no country more urgently requires illustration. The face of the landscape, the climate, the productions, the manners, dress, and modes of life of its inhabitants, differ in so many material respects from those of the Western world, that without an accurate knowledge of them it is not too much to say the outward form and complexion of the events and much of the significance of the records must remain more or less obscure. Even to a casual traveler in the Holy Land the Bible becomes, in its form and therefore to some extent in its substance, a new book. ... Who can doubt that if the same intelligence, zeal, knowledge, and outlay were applied to the exploration of Palestine that have recently been brought to bear on Halicarnassus, Carthage, Cyrene—places without a single sacred association and with little bearing on the Bible—the result would be a great accession to our knowledge of the successive inhabitants of Syria—Canaanite, Israelite, Roman?

The Survey of Western Palestine found a total of twelve structures which, owing to several Hebrew inscriptions and similarities in style of their plans and decoration, were understood to be synagogues.¹⁵ However, the dating of these structures was still unknown. In 1878, Claude Conder discussed his basis for dating the ‘Galilean synagogues’ to the second century.¹⁶ The architectural remains at Capernaum, Chorazin, and others were so similar to the Roman temple at Kadesh that all were probably from the second to third century CE.¹⁷ This tenuous dating of the Galilean synagogues has had an enormous impact on studies dealing with ancient Judaism.

1.4 Beginnings of the evolutionary theory of synagogue plans

In 1875 Victor Guérin visited numerous sites, including Capernaum, Chorazin, and Arbel. By that time, the site of Tell Hum had generally been accepted as that of the New Testament village of Capernaum where Jesus preached, and where a centurion built a synagogue (Luke 7:5). Guérin’s excitement at visiting the site on the 25th of June is preserved in his report:¹⁸

15 These were: Bar’am (2 synagogues), Nabratein, Meiron, Gush Halav, Khirbet Sumaqa, Capernaum, Horvat ‘Ammudim, Chorazin, Arbel, Sufsaf, and possibly at Khirbet Shema’.

16 Conder, 1878, 32.

17 Conder, 1878, 32. For a preliminary report on the modern excavations at the site and discussion of the identification of the god worshipped here, and its dating, see: Fischer, 1984, 167-169; Aviam, 1985; Magness, 1990.

18 Guérin, 1880, 229.

Si Tell Houm, en effet, est l'antique Capharnaüm, comme beaucoup de critiques le supposent, opinion que je partage pleinement, la synagogue dont les ruines nous occupent en ce moment peut très bien être celle qui fut bâtie par ce centurion. Capharnaüm, à cause de sa petitesse, ne devait avoir qu'une synagogue, ainsi que l'atteste d'ailleurs saint Luc dans le texte grec.

Attribution of the building remains at the site of Capernaum to the first century was made by Captain Wilson in 1866, and repeated, without serious question, for nearly 100 years. From this point on, Capernaum, Chorazin, Meiron, Arbel, and Bar'am became part of the early group known as Galilean type synagogues.

1.4.1. 'Galilean' synagogues – the 'early' type

The earliest collective work of uncovering ancient synagogues was undertaken by the German Oriental Society, when in 1903 Hölscher and Thiersch traveled to Palestine to identify the most important sites for excavation. In 1905 and 1907, H. Kohl, E. Hiller, and C. Watzinger explored nine buildings in Galilee and two in the Golan thought to be synagogues. In 1916 the first accurate plans of these buildings as well as descriptions of a number of architectural members at each of the sites were published.¹⁹

Kohl and Watzinger noted the striking similarities of these buildings in their architectural decoration, their layout and their orientation. These synagogues have the following characteristics: ashlar masonry (square stone blocks laid without mortar), ornately decorated façades facing south (toward Jerusalem), flagstone floors, a basilical layout with a third transverse row of columns in the north, and some with benches along the eastern, western and northern walls. No receptacle or shrine was found for the Torah Scrolls. Of the eleven synagogues partially cleared by Kohl and Watzinger, eight had a similar layout, and were grouped together as one type. Stylistic similarities of architectural features, such as the geometric mouldings of their main entrances, with those of monuments in Roman Syria and Nabatea indicated a second-

¹⁹ These synagogues include: Capernaum, Nabratein, Horvat Ammudim, Bar'am, Chorazin, Meron, Gush Halav, Arbel, ed-Dikke, Umm el-Kanatir, and Horvat Sumaqa. Kohl and Watzinger, 1916.

third century date. Dating of these buildings was therefore based mainly upon stylistic considerations.

Analysis of the plans and decorated elements, supplemented by plans and photos was the methodology employed for dating. Since occupational levels and debris were not treated as important aids to a chronological framework, precise dating was difficult, at best.²⁰ Dating of these synagogues to the 2nd-3rd century and the weak methodology on which it is based has held fast even today.²¹

The assignment of Galilean type synagogues to the second to third centuries seemed to be supported by historical evidence. This evidence includes the Severan dynasty's lenient policies toward the Jews and the rise of the Jewish Patriarchate. The theory quickly gained scholarly approval. Indeed, as Chiat has pointed out, if all Jews followed 'normative Judaism,' (i.e. the Judaism known from the Mishnah), then the archaeological evidence fits well with the theory.²² However, an increasing number of excavations from the late 1920's and 1930's uncovered synagogue buildings unlike the Galilean type. These new buildings did not conform to the accepted concept of normative Judaism.

1.4.2. Synagogues with apses – the 'late' type

From the 1920's onward, excavations of ancient synagogues continued at an ever-increasing rate. In 1921 Vincent published the synagogue at Na'aran, where the plan with a central nave, flanking aisles, and a possible niche or apse in the south surprisingly resembled a church.²³ Inside, the remains of a mosaic pavement were found depicting a zodiac, Daniel in the Lion's den, and the Torah shrine flanked by menorahs. In 1922 the Franciscans began partial excavation of the synagogue at

20 For a concise evaluation of the development of archaeological method in Palestine: Moorey, 1981, esp. ch. 2, 20ff.

21 For Israeli scholars upholding this dating, see: Tsafir, 1981; published in English as: Tsafir, 1995a; and also Tsafir, 1989 and Foerster, 1989b.

22 Chiat and Mauck, 1991, 70.

23 The southern section of the building was washed away by the Wadi, therefore it is impossible to ascertain whether this side of the building was enclosed by a simple flat wall or, perhaps by an apse. For the archaeological report, see: Vincent and Carrière, 1921; and Benoit and Vincent, 1961.

Capernaum – the same site previously visited by the German Oriental Society. In 1926, partial excavations were carried out at Chorazin.²⁴ By then, all but one of the ancient synagogue buildings uncovered in Palestine had plans consisting of simple, rectangular basilical halls, often with entrances in the wall facing Jerusalem.

A second synagogue with mosaics was uncovered at Beth Alpha in December 1928.²⁵ While digging an irrigation ditch for the kibbutz there, a mosaic pavement was found. Excavations revealed a synagogue surprisingly similar to the one at Na'aran near Jericho – both had a central nave flanked by aisles, and three large mosaic panels in the nave of the synagogue surrounded by floral and geometric motifs.²⁶ The pavements at both synagogues depicted a zodiac in the centre panel with personifications of the four seasons at the corners and a chariot driven by Helios in the centre. At Beth Alpha, the Torah Ark flanked by 7-branched menorahs is depicted in the southern panel nearest the apse. In the northern panel nearest the main door is a depiction of the binding of Isaac. A Greek inscription names the artisans who made the mosaics, Marianus and Hanina, while a partially preserved one in Aramaic mentions the making of the mosaic in the days of 'Justinus the King.'²⁷ On the basis of the excavation, the inscription, and the similar synagogue at Na'aran, the excavator believed these finds indicated renewed building activity of synagogues in the sixth century. The find at Beth Alpha was soon followed by the discovery of another synagogue with a similar plan at Hammat Gader, south east of the Sea of Galilee. The mosaics in its central nave incorporate five Aramaic inscriptions naming donors to the synagogue, where they were from, and the amount of money donated.²⁸

24 Crowfoot and Hamilton, 1929, 211.

25 Excavations were carried out in 1929; Sukenik, 1932, 5.

26 Sukenik surmised that the synagogue at Na'aran also had an apse in the south, but this section had been washed away by the nearby wadi; Sukenik, 1932, 32.

27 Justinus the King could refer to either Justin I (518-527 CE), or Justin II (565-578 CE). In the final publication, Sukenik is not committed to either. Gutman, on account of similar mosaics recently discovered in Jordan, argues for Justin II. See: Sukenik, 1932, 58; Gutmann, 1995, 227.

28 For example, Kyris Hoples, Kyra Protone, Kyris Sallustius, Comes Phroros Kyris Photios, and Kyris Haninah gave 5 gold denarii; Rav Tanhum gave one tremissis; see Volume III catalogue, and Sukenik, 1935, 129-147.

Following the work of Kohl and Watzinger and adding new discoveries at Beth Alpha and at Hammat Gader, Sukenik's *Ancient Synagogues of Palestine and Greece* divided the then-known ancient synagogues into two distinct groups or 'types'. The early group had already taken on the name 'Galilean type', and a second group, later in date, was typified by the sixth-century synagogue at Beth Alpha. Thus, a total of two buildings, and possibly a third, at Na'aran, were all the evidence that Sukenik had at the time. Again, the later buildings were church-like in layout, with an apse in the south, a raised *bema*, (one had chancel screens, but fragments were known from elsewhere), and mosaic floors.²⁹

The 'Galilean type' had entrances in the south wall, whereas the sixth-century late group had entrances in the north wall. In the two 'late' synagogues at Hammat Gader and Beth Alpha, mosaic pavements decorated the floors, while the 'Galilean type' had flagstone floors. As the wall construction of the two 'late' synagogues was made of fieldstones rather than cut limestone blocks, this too was seen as a criterion distinguishing the two groups. The most important change from the early to the late type, however, was the addition of an apse. The reason for this change, according to Sukenik, was the reasonable claim that the apse was used as a permanent place within the synagogue for the Torah Scrolls. The early type had no apse and, therefore, no permanent place for the Scrolls. This change was a justifiable enhancement from the second-third century Galilean type. As there was a particular type of building for the second-third centuries, a different type for the fifth-sixth centuries caused no great conceptual challenge, as long as one considered a change in plan as an 'evolutionary' step. By defining the newest discoveries as an improved version of the synagogue (i.e. the late 'type'), the concept of 'normative Judaism' remained intact.

29 Sukenik concluded his archaeological survey of ancient synagogues confident that the 'normative Judaism' theory was sound: "New discoveries are constantly being made, in Palestine as well as in the centres of the Diaspora, which will undoubtedly add new details to our conception of the early synagogue. But even now we may safely predict that these details will not change *the conception as a whole*." [italics mine, D.M.] Sukenik, 1934, 78.

1.4.3. Broadhouse synagogues – the ‘transitional’ type

By the time Goodenough published his first volume of *Jewish Symbols* in 1953, another group was added to the known synagogue types.³⁰ This was the ‘broadhouse type’, typified by the synagogues at Eshtemo’a in Palestine, Hammam Lif near Tunis and Dura-Europos in the Diaspora (Fig. 1:1).

This type of synagogue plan was found south of Jerusalem at Eshtemo’a soon after Sukenik’s 1934 publication of *Ancient Synagogues in Palestine and Greece*. This synagogue was excavated by Mayer and Reifenberg of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.³¹ It did not have doorways facing Jerusalem, as did those in the Galilee, nor did it have an apse as at Beth Alpha or Hammat Gader. Instead, this large open hall had three entrances on the short eastern wall and small niches in the northern wall closest to Jerusalem. Not only was the plan considered unusual, but the layout—with prayer directed toward the long, northern wall—has been mistakenly called a ‘broadhouse’.³² In fact, the plan follows the definition of a ‘longhouse’ (or *Langbau*), but the direction of prayer was towards the long, north wall.

Because this building was unlike the Galilean synagogues but similar to the synagogue at Dura-Europos, scholars added another group.³³ The ‘transitional synagogue’ type dates to the late third- fourth century. The direction of prayer is indicated by a niche facing Jerusalem in the north wall, while the doors are in the east wall. The synagogue at Eshtemo’a represents the ‘broad-house’ type since the niche is in the long wall instead of a short wall. Goodenough called these the ‘broadhouse’ type, which conveniently fit between the early second-third century ‘Galilean’ and

30 In 1934, after the discovery of the synagogue at Dura-Europos, Sukenik introduced the three-types theory by referring to this building as an “intermediate” stage in the development of ancient synagogues; Sukenik, 1934, 164; Goodenough, 1952, 225f.

31 Although identified in 1934, excavation began a year later, in the winter of 1935-6, but was postponed after riots broke out, see: Mayer and Reifenberg, 1941, 316.

32 The term “broadhouse” was first used to refer to Greek temples having the main doorway was in the “broad”, or long wall. Discovery of the synagogue at Dura-Europos added a further evidence for a specific type, see: Kraeling, 1934, 19; Wilkinson, 1984a, 23.

33 At the time of its discovery, Kraeling considered the synagogue at Dura-Europos to be one of the earliest of all “types”; Kraeling, 1934, 19.

fifth-sixth century 'late' types of synagogues.³⁴ By adding a new type to the first two, the concept of 'normative Judaism' was not challenged.

Even in 1971, as archaeological evidence for dating the Galilean synagogue at Capernaum to the late fourth or early fifth century began to appear (two hundred years later than the original German dating), several Israeli archaeologists still clung to the belief in a unified concept of Jews and Judaism. For as long as the 'concept' was sound, new archaeological evidence was made to fit with the theory, rather than causing the 'concept' to be challenged. Avi-Yonah fit the standard typological classification for ancient synagogues into a historical framework.³⁵

More recently, some Israeli scholars have challenged Corbo and Loffreda's revised dating of Capernaum to the fifth century to buttress the outmoded 'three types' theory.³⁶ Tsafirir writes:

... it is better to maintain a general conception and seek a way to reconcile the contradiction that exists between the new facts and the general concept so that the new information does not destroy the old structure. ³⁷

As stated above, modern understanding of ancient Judaism is predicated upon a diverse mixture of communities, governed by no single body. It would be much better to let archaeological evidence attesting to variety in synagogue architecture help create a new 'general concept' and allow the contradictions to disappear.

34 Goodenough, 1952, 225. Avi-Yonah called this type of building an 'an experiment' during which period mosaics begin to appear: Avi-Yonah, 1973a; reprinted in Gutmann, 1975, 95-109.

35 About Avi-Yonah's contribution to the study of synagogues, Hachlili writes: 'a major breakthrough in synagogue archaeology was the typology of synagogue architecture developed by the eminent archaeologist Michael Avi-Yonah... This typology was ultimately discarded.' Hachlili, 1996, 99.

36 In Foerster's 1971 article 'Notes on Recent Excavations at Capernaum', a concerted attack began on the methodology and conclusions of the Franciscan excavators. Foerster suggested that 4th century coins found below the sealed floor level were in fact a result of repairs and renovations, not to be confused with the original construction of the building. Foerster, 1971; reprinted in Foerster, 1981b, 59.; Foerster, 1986; Foerster, 1989b; Foerster, 1992; Tsafirir, 1981; Tsafirir, 1984; Tsafirir, 1985; Tsafirir, 1987; Tsafirir, 1989; Tsafirir, 1995a; Tsafirir, 1995b.

37 Tsafirir, 1995a, 75. From the 1980's a growing opposition to the theory has taken root. See for example: Levine, 1999, 299; Magness, 1997, 212; Meyers, 1996, 14-17; Chiat and Mauck, 1991, 72, and Seager, 1989, 85.

1.4.4. How the theory has effected synagogue studies

The '3-types' theory was a bold academic exercise designed to create order among the synagogue layouts found until that time. Order was created through evolution: the Galilean type evolved into the broadhouse type, which was eventually superceded by the late type, that is a basilica with an apse. We will summarise each of the criteria on which the theory fails in the light of stylistic analyses, inaccurate typologies, and evidence for the direction of prayer.

One must be wary of theories based on meagre evidence. There were very few examples of each synagogue type. The total number of 'broadhouse' synagogues known from Palestine, on which the 'transitional' category of synagogues was based, on two buildings, those at Horvat Susiya and Eshtemo'a in Judaea. A third, at Nawa in Syria, was photographed but neither excavated nor published. In 1934, Sukenik knew of only two or possibly three late types. By 1953, in Goodenough's *Jewish Symbols*, there were 36 buildings of the early type, three transitional, and eight of the late type.

Categorising ancient synagogues into these three types caused more difficulties as an increasing number of synagogues did not fit into the correct group (see Chapter 2). One problem with this typology was that the criteria used for defining these three types did not take into consideration firmly established chronologies defined by archaeological evidence. Instead, this system relied heavily on stylistic analyses, which provide only approximate dates for some architectural elements. Another problem is that scholars often confuse the issue of direction of prayer with the orientation of the building (see Chapter 3). The interior and the exterior of synagogues give clues to both the direction of prayer and orientation. For example, a decorated southern façade like in the synagogue at Capernaum is thought to indicate a 'southern' orientation. On the other hand, orientation might be indicated in the interior of a synagogue by the presence of an aedicule, apse, niche or possibly by the direction of depictions on a mosaic pavement. The synagogue at Eshtemo'a has its

entrances in the short, eastern wall, and a niche in the long, northern wall. Thus, it is 'oriented' to the east, but the direction of prayer is towards the north.

1.5 Galilean regionalism

As the archaeological evidence for a much later date for the construction of the Capernaum synagogue began to surface, in 1970 an American team started the Meiron Excavation Project. Led by Meyers, Strange, and Groh, the aims of the Project were to gather sample sherds from a surface survey of 20 sites in Upper and Lower Galilee and the Golan. According to the archaeologists, the survey showed distinct differences in assemblages of ceramic forms between Upper and Lower Galilee.³⁸ Upper Galilee seemed linked to Tyre and the Phoenician coast, on the strength of the large number of Tyrian coins found at the four sites.³⁹

However, the methodology used in Meyers's approach to the Galilee has been seriously questioned.⁴⁰ Horsley points out that Meyers sometimes overstates the available evidence. For example, Meyers believes that the archaeological material shows that Meiron was at its height between 250 - 365 CE, and calls the site "a center of learning" on account of the archaeological material and one reference to the site in the Tosephta. Meyers recognized his error, and responded that this statement was an exaggeration.⁴¹ Furthermore, according to Horsley, the idea that there is a particular 'Jewish' material culture is overblown. Instead, indigenous pottery types and imported building styles seem to constitute what was once thought of as essentially Jewish.⁴²

38 The Meiron Excavation Project excavated four synagogues at Horvat Shem'a, Meiron, Gush Halav, and Nabratein, see volume III (Catalogue) and: Meyers, Strange and Groh, 1978, 10; Meyers, 1987, 128; Meyers, 1996, 15-17.

39 Hanson, 1980, 53; and also: Hanson, Meshorer and Raynor, 1988.

40 Horsley, 1995b, 13-14.

41 Meyers, 1995.

42 Horsley, 1995a, 13.

1.6 Recent Publications

Several catalogues of evidence for ancient synagogues have appeared in English and Hebrew. Saller's original catalogue of ancient synagogues (in alphabetical order) had a total of 95 sites, his revised catalogue, 134 sites. In 1977, F. Hüttenmeister and G. Reeg published their *Die antiken Synagogen in Israel* in two volumes. This work was meant to be a complete catalogue of: 'all the archaeological and literary material referring to synagogues, Torah schools and law courts in Israel from the first century AD until its conquest by Islam in the seventh century AD'⁴³

In 1981, the Israel Exploration Society published *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, a collection of articles published for the first time in English, as well as a number of conflicting views concerning the study of ancient synagogues in one volume.⁴⁴

In 1982, Chiat published her dissertation as a *Handbook of Synagogue Architecture*. This important work, more critical than Hüttenmeister's work for the identity and chronological setting of each synagogue, has 173 sites identified in three major groups.⁴⁵ The first group are called 'validated' synagogues, which are buildings with a Jewish inscription and/or Jewish motif; the second group, called the 'attested' group refers to decorative fragments from a synagogue in cases where the exact location of the building is unknown; the third group considers 'disputed' buildings, without any inscription or motif. According to Chiat, there are 40 buildings in the validated group, 57 in the attested group, and 76 in the disputed category. This work fills a need for the more accurate presentation of archaeological evidence, as it provides an important source of already critical information regarding the identity and date of individual buildings.

43 Hüttenmeister lists synagogues at 185 sites plus an additional 37 Samaritan sites; Hüttenmeister and Reeg, 1977, xxi.

44 As mainly Israeli scholars presented their views, a somewhat skewed picture of scholarship on ancient synagogues is evident; Levine, 1981b.

45 Chiat, 1982b, 2.

By the end of the 1980's and into the 1990's, the largest amount of archaeological fieldwork had been undertaken by two groups. First, the continuing work of Meyers under the auspices of Duke University has seen the full publication of the excavation of the synagogues at Horvat Shem'a, Meiron, and Gush Halav.

Ilan's *Ancient Synagogues in Israel* was published in 1991 by the Israel Ministry of Defense as a guide and catalogue of every building considered a synagogue. This opus contains 180 sites with various evidence for one or more phases of synagogue construction.⁴⁶ In this work, there is a plan, photograph, directions on how to locate each site, some inscriptions, and text referring to the excavation and particular aspects of the building. The bibliographic references almost exclusively refer to Hebrew literature. Fifty-four additional possible sites are listed at the end of the book. However, the criteria for identifying remains as an ancient synagogue are not overly strict. In fact, one building at Khirbet Yattir has turned out to be not a synagogue but rather a Mamluke mosque.⁴⁷

In sum, research on ancient synagogues has followed a twisting path. Now that modern archaeological methods are being employed in the excavation of ancient synagogues, a critical mass of data is being assembled, ready for reconsideration. Already from the work of the Franciscans in the 1970's at Capernaum, the second-third century dating of the 'Galilean' synagogues has been seriously called into question. For as excavations reveal more synagogues built in the late fourth century or later, a reassessment can start of the impact of Byzantine art on ancient synagogues.

46 This book also emphasises a need for an institution to take responsibility for the excavation, identification, and preservation of synagogues in Israel: Ilan, 1991, 19.

⁴⁷ Eshel, Magness, and Shenhav, 1999, 413.

Chapter Two

Excavated synagogues dating to the Byzantine period

Introduction: Evidence for identification and dating of ancient synagogues

Archaeological evidence for ancient synagogues dating after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem has been found at sixty-three sites in Palaestina Prima, Secunda and Tertia. At numerous sites, more than one phase of a building has been found, which we distinguish as a separate building. In the attached catalogue of finds (Volume III), 102 buildings are presented in alphabetical order. Of these, few have been published to an extent sufficient to warrant both a secure identification as a synagogue as well as providing a solid basis for dating, that is, by numismatic and ceramic evidence found in sealed contexts.

Following the categorisation set out by Chiat, the buildings are divided into four groups.¹ These four groups are *Attested*, *Attributed*, *Disputed*, and *unknown*. *Attested* buildings have a published plan, plus inscriptions or sufficient iconographic evidence indicating a Jewish identification. *Attributed* synagogues may have an unclear plan, but Jewish motifs, loose inscriptions, or other features indicative of a synagogue have been found nearby. *Disputed* buildings do not have sufficient

archaeological evidence to be considered solidly-identified synagogues, either owing to the lack of a coherent plan, or lack of Jewish motif found in its excavation. Other sites fall under the *unknown* category, as no evidence for the building exists, but evidence of a Jewish presence is known, for example, a chancel screen from an unknown site near Ashdod bears a carved menorah.²

In this chapter we present archaeological evidence for the identification and dating of 23 of those *attested* synagogue buildings dating from the fourth to seventh centuries. These are subdivided into two groups. The first group contains unequivocal cases selected on the basis of published evidence from the excavation, which is of particular importance for this study. The second group features an equivocal category, either because the archaeological evidence for their dating is less firm, or because there is less material evidence that the building was used as a synagogue.

2.1. Archaeological evidence for unequivocal synagogues by century

2.1.1. Dated to the Fourth Century

Two synagogues can be solidly dated to the fourth century. These are located in Galilee at Horvat 'Ammudim and Horvat Shema'. Horvat 'Ammudim is dated by coins found underneath the mosaic floor. The dating of Horvat Shema' has recently aroused scholarly debate. Owing to a coin of Gratian (367 - 383 CE) found in the fill, the construction date of this synagogue belongs in the late fourth century to early fifth century, rather than the third century, as the excavators proposed (see below).

1. Horvat Ammudim, "Synagogue" – Upper Galilee, Palaestina Secunda

The first plan of the building was made in the second week of May 1905, along with drawings of a number of architectural members by the Deutsche Orient-

1 Chiat, 1982b, 2.

Gesellschaft.³ Seventy-four years later, in 1979, Levine and Netzer carried out a small excavation consisting of five main trenches.⁴ The basilical structure measures internally 72 x 45 Byzantine *podes* (22.55 x 14.06 m.).⁵ Three main doorways in the south led to the nave and aisles. This building had two rows of seven columns in addition to a transverse row of two columns in the north. The two corner columns have a heart-shaped section. All columns rest on pedestals, which are set on a stylobate.⁶ The first plan drawn by Kohl and Watzinger in 1905 shows three doorways in the southern wall, and one in the eastern wall. However, the recent excavations revealed only a mortar bedding in the central part of the eastern wall. No other sounding was carried out in the southern part of this wall to see if an entrance did exist there. Three entrances in the southern wall have not been verified. According to Levine:⁷

The southern ends of the stylobate were robbed, as was all of the southern façade, with the exception of the foundation course.

Traces of a mosaic floor were found preserved in only two soundings in the western half of the synagogue, areas D and E.⁸ In area E, much of the western aisle was covered by a mosaic depicting a series of geometric designs in several colours and a fragmentary Aramaic inscription. A rectangular frame enclosed a circular medallion pattern with stylised floral shapes. Within the medallion, remains of four lines have

2 Avi-Yonah, 1960a, 69; Avi-Yonah, 1960b, 61.

3 Kohl and Watzinger, 1916, 71-79.

4 A total of seven trenches were dug, two of which yielded insignificant results; Levine, 1982, 2.

5 In 1978, Chen calculated the dimensions as 72 *podes* by 44 *podes*, Chen, 1978, 201; After Levine's excavation, Chen adjusted the calculated inner width to 45 *podes*; Chen, 1986a, 135.

6 The 0.75 m. wide stone stylobate was built upon a foundation course 1.5 m. wide; Levine, 1982, 3.

7 Three stones of the façade wall are drawn on the published plan, see Catalogue; Levine, 1982, 5.

been reconstructed as mentioning a certain son of Tanhum who made the mosaic pavement and the roof.⁹ Repairs in the patterns were made with plain white tesserae.

Finds in the fill below the third bedding layer for the mosaic provide a *terminus post quem* for the floor. In locus 20 four coins were found, which date from 268 CE to 293 CE. All four are bronze and minted in Antioch.¹⁰ One small fragment of a lamp shoulder was found in the make-up of the bedding for the mosaic. Other sherds from this important locus include 'Galilean' bowls of different forms; a sherd of a plain deep bowl dating from the first-fourth centuries; a fragment of a krater of second-fifth century date; and cooking pots, lids, storage jars, and other miscellaneous vessel fragments. This pottery includes local types which cannot be dated specifically.

Finds from above the floor level include pottery, roof tiles, fresco fragments, and tesserae probably belonging to the floor mosaic. The pottery repertoire was similar to that found below the floor, including 'Galilean' and miscellaneous bowls, cooking pots, and storage jars. Fresco fragments were found in both the two eastern soundings (A and B) and in the larger, western sounding (E). The report mentions that the fresco fragments were composed of paneled designs in red, pink, yellow, green, beige and mustard.¹¹ Finds from unstratified deposits included nearly 300 fragments

8 Traces of mosaic floor in the north-west corner of the nave can be seen in the photo taken in 1905, see: Kohl and Watzinger, 1916, 76, Abb. 147.

9 Of the name "son of Tanhum", only the letters *nun* and *het* have been preserved. The inscription reads:

[דכיר / - - - - בר[ת]נח[ום]]

[דעבד[ה]דה טבלה / [דפסיפ]סה ואגרה /

[תהי לה ב[ר]נתה / [אמן סלה]

[May he be remembered - - - - son of Ta]nh[um]

[who made this mo]saic pavement and the roof.

[May he be b]lessed. [Amen Selah.]

Levine, 1982, 8.

10 Levine, 1982, 6-7.

11 Levine, 1982, 3.

of roof tiles. Two types of tegulae were discovered, as well as a number of imbrex fragments. The original size was approximately 23 x 10 x 2 cm. for the tegulae, and 10 x 9 x 2 cm. for the imbrex. Difference in number of fragments based on the type shows that most roof tiles have a rectangular flange, while only five fragments have a rounded flange, were less-well fired, and have a lighter brown shade, even yellow when compared to the majority of fragments. According to the excavator, these two types of tile suggest that the second group is not from the original order for the synagogue, but from another factory, perhaps for a repair.¹²

The excavator concludes from this evidence that the founding date of the synagogue should be '± 300'.¹³ In the report of the ceramic repertoire found at Horvat 'Ammudim, Adan-Bayewitz wrote that the pottery assemblage from below the floor level indicates a construction date at the end of the third century or soon thereafter.¹⁴ However, in a footnote, Levine mentions Orton's calculations regarding deposition dates of coins. According to this theory, several coins found in a sealed locus should be regarded with scrutiny, such that 40 years should be added to the minting date of the last coin for the 'expected' date of deposition, while many coins should be treated with a 'median' date of an additional 28 years from the minting of the latest coin.¹⁵ Taking account of Orton's theory, the construction date of this synagogue would rather be some time in the first decades of the fourth century, rather than at the turn of the century, as Levine claims.

12 Adan-Bayewitz, 1982, 25-27.

13 Levine, 1982, 12. For what exactly is meant by ±300, and the implications presented by design factors, see: Chen, 1986a, 137.

14 Adan-Bayewitz, 1982, 29.

2. Horvat Shema', "Synagogue I and II" – Upper Galilee, Palaestina Secunda

Meyers' excavation of the site at Horvat Shema' occurred over three seasons, from 1970 to 1972.¹⁶ According to the excavator, two stages of a basilical structure were uncovered. Both stages follow a similar ground plan, yet minor changes were made to the interior, giving rise to the later structure Horvat Shema' II (see plan, volume III). The interior has a raised gallery in the west measuring ca. 9.30 m. x 2.5 m. wide. A stairway of 8 steps leads down from the gallery to a large hall. This hall measures 31¹/₂ x 21 Roman *cubiti* (13.9 x 9.30 m.).¹⁷ The main entrance was in the long, northern wall, set slightly west of centre. A secondary entrance, set in the west wall, provided access to the hall from the raised gallery. Another entrance in the western corner of the northern wall appears on the plan. However, there is no evidence to confirm this, as no single stone or indication of a doorway on the cleared bedrock surface survives.¹⁸ Both jambs of the main entrance and western entrance were cut from a single block of limestone. The outer faces of these monoliths are decorated with finely cut engaged pilasters whose base mouldings including *scotia* and *torus*. On the interior walls traces of two layers of painted plaster were found.

In the hall, two rows of four columns were placed on pedestals. All but the easternmost two pedestals were set on bedrock. Owing to the slope of the site, only one stylobate exists for the two eastern pedestals. This so-called 'stylobate wall'

15 Orton, 1980, 103. Orton's theory relies on data from sites in England, not from Palaestina where deposition and use may not necessarily be equivalent.

¹⁶ Meyers, Kraabel and Strange, 1976, xxiv-xxv.

¹⁷ One cubit equals one and half feet, Milson, 1991, 451.

extends the width of the hall, parallel to the outer eastern wall, at an average depth of 0.75 m.¹⁹ In examining that wall, we found that there is no bond between it and the northern wall (Fig. 2:1). That fact indicates that the stylobate wall was set into the finished construction of the outer walls of the building, and was therefore part of the original structure.

No positively identified plaster floor could be attributed to Synagogue I. However, many pieces of plaster, as well as tesserae, were found east of the 'stylobate wall' in the fill below the floor level (see below). In the same fill, small architectural fragments were uncovered. Additional re-used architectural fragments were found built into the north wall. A section of small column with the same diameter as a column base (diameter 26 cm; height 19.7 cm.) was incorporated within the upper course of the 'stylobate wall' (Fig. 2:2).

In the northwest corner of the synagogue, below the raised western section of the hall is a declivity in the bedrock. It contained a fill over a meter deep. Although mentioned in the text but not described in detail, the ceramic material from this declivity dates from the Middle-Late Roman periods (second to third centuries CE). However, a coin of Gratian (367 – 383 CE) points to a late fourth-century or early fifth-century *terminus post quem* for the synagogue. Magness attributes this fill to the

18 Meyers, et al., 1976, 58. The excavators postulate an entrance here on account of the religious necessity for a separate entrance exclusively for women. However, the idea that women must have used a separate entrance in the early Byzantine period has not been confirmed. Since the separation between men and women probably did not begin to occur until the late-sixth or seventh centuries, very few galleries found in early synagogues dating to the fourth or even fifth centuries do not necessarily imply their function as 'women's gallery'. Moreover, there is no strong archaeological evidence for a women's section or gallery in any Diaspora synagogue. For an overview see: Brooten, 1982, 103-138; Safrai, 1989, 78.

19 Meyers, et al., 1976, 64.

original construction of the synagogue, whereas the excavators believe that the fill represents a later rebuilding.²⁰

Fragments of carved stone acanthus leaves belonging to a small capital were found under the stone benches attached to the northern wall (Fig. 2:3). The excavators assume that the small base in the stylobate wall, as well as small column and capital fragments belong to 'an aedicula abutting the southern wall in the earlier synagogue.'²¹ However, this assumption rests more on speculation than on evidence for an earlier phase of the building. Based on the position of the later platform attached to the southern wall, an earlier *aedicula* might have been located here, but no evidence exists to verify this. Furthermore, as only one floor was found, it is difficult to ascribe several re-used building fragments to an earlier synagogue.²²

The destruction date of Horvat Shema' I is based on pottery sealed underneath the partial remains of a plaster floor in the south east corner. Considering the pottery from this important locus, five sherds typical of the third- to fourth-centuries are mentioned in the excavation report.²³ Adjacent to this locus, although not covered by plaster, Meyers found four coins which he identifies as two Hasmonean issues of Alexander Yannai, one of Nero, and one of Trajan.²⁴ However, a comparison of registration numbers in the text with the registration numbers in the coin index shows that only the Nero coin's locus in the index corresponds to the attributions presented

20 The excavator's claim that the coin was deposited in a later remodelling, rather than as the original phase of construction, is difficult to justify owing to the depth of its findspot and its location in the declivity; see: Magness, 1997, 215; and Magness, 2001b, 86.

21 Meyers, et al., 1976; Meyers, 1981c, 72.

22 Netzer reiterates and expands on arguments published in 1981 by Loffreda that there could be only one phase with minor changes in the interior. Fragments could easily be related to some other building, not necessarily the synagogue; see: Loffreda, 1981a, 76-78; Netzer, 1996, 453.

23 Locus 26020 is sealed; Meyers, et al., 1976, 36.

in text. Therefore, relying on the published coin list, only the Nero coin can be ascribed safely to the fill located to the east of the 'stylobate wall.'

In light of the broken architectural fragments found in the fill, coins thought to be from the first century BC to the second century CE along with sherds typical of late third to fourth centuries, Meyers concludes that:²⁵

...A precise date for this event [the first destruction] is provided by the fact that the only 'strong' earthquake known for the 3rd or 4th century is in the winter of 306 C.E., a date well in line with the pottery and coin evidence from the site.

However, a cardinal difficulty in the excavation report lies in the reconstruction of two synagogues (Synagogue I and Synagogue II). On the one hand, the excavators contend that the plan did not change between these two phases, although the building was shaken by at least one serious earthquake. Supposedly, Synagogue II stood unchanged from 306 CE until 419 CE. Not a trace of evidence is mentioned for the earthquake of May 363 CE which devastated cities and towns, including Nabratein and possibly Meiron.²⁶

On the other hand, two stages of development of the furnishings may be discerned: the large southern platform was built over an earlier bench. Broken acanthus fragments found in the fill east of the 'stylobate wall' might be attributed to some other building, not necessarily an early phase in the synagogue.²⁷

24 Meyers, et al., 1976, 37; coin IDs: R2040 Hasmonean (coin does not appear in list); R2051 Hasmonean-Yannai ("locus unlisted"); R2041-Tyre ("locus unlisted"); R2148-Nero ("L26031"); see Appendix B. Index of Coin Finds by Hansor, pg. 285-6. Russell was one of the first to take Meyers's text at face value, without examining the coin lists: Russell, 1980, 58.

25 Meyers, et al., 1976, 38.

26 Magness contends that no evidence exists for the destruction of this phase by the earthquake of 306 CE; Magness, *op cit*, 215.

27 In an obscure passage referring to Synagogue I, Meyers contends: "...that the floor beneath and the wall behind the benches were found to be plastered. The craftsmen of Shema' commonly finished off a room with floor and wall covering before they laid in the benches, which were then plastered as well. The plaster behind the benches, therefore, does not come from an earlier, non-bench phase of Synagogue 1."

When the interior furnishings were changed, a platform was built over the southern benches. Two coins were found in the fill of this platform, one Hasmonean and the other of Constantius II (337-341 CE).²⁸ Contrary to the excavator's report, this coin is not the best datable evidence for the whole structure. The date of the original structure ought to coincide with the late fourth century, on account of the coin of Gratian found in the declivity. That is to say, there was only one building, which incorporated several changes to its furnishings. The main refurbishment was a platform that covers the southern bench.

2.1.2 Dated to the Fifth Century

For fifth-century synagogues we discuss the synagogues at Gush Halav and Capernaum (phase III). Late fourth-century coins and fifth-century pottery found below the floor in the synagogue at Gush Halav indicate that this synagogue was not built earlier than the second half of the fifth century. The construction date of the synagogue at Capernaum has continually aroused interest since the nineteenth century. Whereas Kohl and Watzinger suggested a second-third century date, the Franciscan excavators suggested that construction lasted from the second half of the fourth century to the third quarter of the fifth century.²⁹ Relying on published numismatic and ceramic evidence underneath the floor, Magness has

This statement is unsound. Perhaps the plaster covered by the benches does signify an earlier phase of the structure. An early stage in the development of the building may have existed without benches attached to the southern wall. No explanation is given why the builders found it necessary to use the extra building plaster, wait for it to dry, subsequently build benches on top of this plaster, and plaster these benches as well. Unless, of course, we follow Meyers' own guidance in considering that the craftsmen completed the plastering before they laid in the benches, then used the synagogue '*for an unspecified period of time,*' and later installed benches. This reconstruction might be seen as a building phase (not necessarily a synagogue) unrecognised as such by the excavators. Meyers, et al., 1976, 55.

²⁸ Meyers, et al., 1976, 34.

²⁹ Kohl and Watzinger, 1916, 4-40; Loffreda, 1981; Loffreda, 1997, Arslan, 1997, and below.

recently suggested that the construction date should be raised to the first half of the sixth century.³⁰

1. Gush Halav, “Synagogue Period I” and “Period II to Period IV” – Upper Galilee, Palaestina Secunda

This synagogue was first visited by E Renan in 1860, and later seen by Wilson, Guerin, and Conder in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Kohl and Watzinger made several soundings and traced a plan of the synagogue in 1905.³¹ More recently, the site was excavated for two seasons in 1977 and 1978 under the direction of Meyers, Meyers and Strange as part of the Meiron Excavation Project. The synagogue has a square plan, the interior dimensions being 60 Roman *pedes* on a side (17.50 m.).³² The main entrance is from the south, through a single door in a finely-faced ashlar wall. A second entrance exists in the northern wall, which enters into the western aisle. The interior has two rows of four columns each on a stylobate, forming a nave flanked by aisles. Benches were set along the northern wall, in the nave, and along the western wall.

In the final publication of the finds from the site, the excavators define these four periods to which the synagogue belongs:

Period I: 250-306 CE

Period II: 306-363 CE

Period III: 363-461 CE

Period IV: 461-551 CE

For each of these precise dates, Meyers explains which archaeological evidence was used to determine a beginning and end date. For example, in Period I, 13 coins were found which date to the mid-third century. Some, but not all of these coins were

³⁰ Magness, 2001, esp. 18-26

found in stratified loci. The coins, in addition to the devastation at nearby Nabratein caused by the earthquake of 306 CE, further reinforce the dating of this phase. Period II is dated from 306 CE to 363 CE. In May of 363 CE, another earthquake struck the region. Period III follows the earthquake of 363 CE and lasts for slightly less than one hundred years, before Period IV begins and lasts until the next major earthquake in 551 CE.

The main difficulty in these dates for the four phases of the synagogue is that four different building phases to the synagogue are not clearly attested. That is, four different construction phases to the synagogue have not been identified by a series of floors, or by clearly separate architectural phases. Rather, only one identified plaster floor (with some later repairs) related to walls was found within the prayer hall.³³ The plan was only slightly changed when the outer northern and eastern walls were built. Furthermore, as pointed out above, the evidence for the earthquake of 306 CE is not secure. The inherent danger in using earthquakes as *termini* for dating is that we cannot be sure that any particular earthquake affected every site.

Coins and pottery were found within the prayer hall in only two trenches, one in the north, and one in the east. Of the four coins found in the prayer hall itself, one is unidentifiable, but might be a city coin. One in the plaster bedding dates from the first century BC to the first century CE, and the last two, found in the fill below the

31 Kohl and Watzinger, 1916, 107-111.

32 Chen, 1988, 251.

33 Rather than using the archaeological evidence to determine the architectural phases, it seems that Meyers first set out a chronological scheme and fit the evidence into that construct. Netzer first refuted Meyers's claim that there is more than one phase to the synagogue, see: Netzer, 1996, 450-451. Magness too disagrees on the architectural history of the site, as well as the excavators' dating; Magness, 2001, 3-18 and Magness, 2001, 80-85.

bedding for the floor, date from 133-132 BC and from 100 CE.³⁴ These coins do not aid in precisely dating the hall.

Examining the section drawings pertaining to the prayer hall, it is evident that only two plaster layers existed within the hall. In fact, the second layer seems to be a repair of the first, since it is a rather thin covering without a bedding layer. In Meyers's north-south section A-A, the two plaster levels are shown (Fig. 2:4). The upper level in the centre of the nave is here called L3022, while L3022.1 is approximately 10 cm below it, and very little archaeological material exists between them. This floor is at 704.5 m. above sea level. Further to the north but still in the nave are two plaster layers are called L2001 above and L2003 below, both at approximately 704.5 m. above sea level. To the east of the eastern stylobate, at the same height, plaster layers also were found. Here, several centimeters below topsoil are the remains of a single plaster layer also called L2003. No other floor remains in the nave were reported.

The excavators assume that the floor's rather meagre survival (it was rough and broken) was due to³⁵

... weathering that occurred when the paving stones it most likely bore were removed after the final abandonment of the building.

Below this plaster level, fourth-century pottery was discovered. According to the excavators:³⁶

34 The coin registration numbers are: R771036 (Locus 3030); R78067 (Locus 2037); R78068 (Locus 2003); R78073 (Locus 2043), Meyers, Meyers and Strange, 1990, 270-272.

Locus 2003 was excavated to a depth of about 16 centimeters when the excavators encountered L2009, a rather compact layer containing gravel-to cobble-sized stones. ... Since L2009 contained materials of the 4th century CE, one would conclude that L2009 and L2003 are part of the later history of the building.

This statement is unclear. For as only two plaster layers were found within the hall, the Late Roman pottery from below them (L2009) provides a *terminus post quem* for the floor, and should be understood as part of the bedding for the two layers of plaster floor. The excavators illustrate one bowl, a cooking pot, a juglet, a jar, and a storage jar.³⁷ The finds from this bedding must date to the period before the floor was set down. Therefore, the *terminus post quem* for the original phase of this synagogue is the latter part of the fourth century CE, and not, as the excavators claim, the second half of the third century.

A different picture emerges in the northern corridor, bounded by the later northern wall and north-eastern wall. The excavators found the northern corridor strewn with architectural fragments such as capitals and column sections, as the rest of the synagogue was strewn with columns and pedestals. On account of several heart-shaped column sections, this area was once thought to be a raised gallery. Throughout the hall, but particularly near the walls, nineteen meters of a carved *cyma recta* moulding were recovered, thought to be equal to over one-third of the interior perimeter of the hall (Fig. 2:5). Interestingly, of these numerous architectural elements found below topsoil, only those pieces of architectural elements found in the

35 Although some paving stones were found in the southern section of the hall, near the entrance, it does not necessarily follow that the whole interior was similarly paved, especially since no other paving stones were found. Those stones are *in situ*, in fact, and were not set on a thin bed of plaster. Furthermore, if we take as an example the well-preserved paving stones and their mortar setting bed at the synagogue at Capernaum, the excavators found that the setting bed there was over 30 centimeters thick, with well-preserved impressions of removed stones still in the mortar. From the plan, the total thickness of the plaster floor at Gush Halav was less than 10 cm. deep, see: Corbo, 1975, 158; Loffreda, 1981b, 54; Meyers, et al., 1990, 42.

northern corridor are thought by the excavator to have been 'discarded,' i.e. placed there on purpose at some time after the final destruction of the synagogue.³⁸ If we assume instead that these architectural fragments in the northern corridor have remained where they fell as the other fragments within the synagogue, then they were not moved after the final destruction of the synagogue.

The fill on which these architectural fragments lay is particularly important for several reasons. First, it represents the actual state of the northern corridor at the time of the destruction of the synagogue. As this fill is over one and half meters deep, much datable material might be found within it. Second, as no clearly identified plaster layer or floor level underneath this fill was found in the corridor, one might reasonably assume that no floor existed. As there does not seem to be access to these corridors through a doorway from the prayer hall, these new walls were not used as extra rooms in the synagogue but were intended to strengthen the outer walls.

If this thick fill relates to the construction of the northern room, the pottery and coins within it are of the greatest significance for dating the prayer hall. However, only two buckets of pottery were found in this fill, dating to the middle and Late Roman periods (250-363 CE).³⁹ Of particular importance are five coins. Four coins are dated, while one is identified as Late Roman. The latest is identified as a coin of Theodosius I, dating from 383 to 395 CE.⁴⁰ This coin indicates that the northern corridor was not constructed before.

³⁶ Meyers, et al., 1990, 42.

³⁷ Meyers, et. al., 1990, 198, figs 4-8.

³⁸ The photograph caption of these architectural fragments is incorrect. The photograph was taken from the east, looking west, not vice-versa. The *cyma recta* moulding is located in the nave and not outside the N. wall. See: Meyers, et al., 1990, 30.

³⁹ The bucket numbers were 160 and 167. This pottery is not illustrated; Meyers, et al., 1990, 267. In the short preliminary report from 1981, the excavator noted that: 'The fill beneath the gallery was completely sterile.' Meyers, 1981b, 77.

⁴⁰ These coins are from locus L1086: R78061: 353-61 CE; R78063: 218-222 CE; R78065: Late Roman; R78064: 351-354 CE, and R78066: 383-395 CE; see: Meyers, et al., 1990, 267.

Evidence found in the western corridor however, again beneath the architectural fragments from the apparent final destruction of the synagogue provides an approximate date for the final use of the synagogue. A hoard of 1,953 coins was found in a cooking pot in the northern corner of this corridor. Coins in the hoard are of a low value, and date from the mid-fourth to the mid-sixth centuries.⁴¹ In addition, numerous fragments of oil lamps (as well as one intact), iron nails, bronze chandelier fragments and roof tiles were found here. Magness notes that several lamp forms from this area date as late as the eighth century.⁴²

The evidence found within the synagogue would therefore suggest that the prayer hall had one main phase in its building history. The construction date of the prayer hall was probably in the mid-fifth century. The period of use of this synagogue extended into the late seventh or early eighth century.

2. Capernaum, “Synagogue III” – Galilee, Palaestina Secunda

The synagogue at Capernaum is particularly well-known, not only for its large size, beauty of ashlar construction, and great repertoire of carved relief decoration, but also on account of the site as an often-mentioned town in the NT (for example, Matt. 4:18; Matt. 8:5; Luke 7:5).⁴³ Located on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee, the town was important for its role along a trade route stretching into the Golan and from there to Syria.

The basilical hall measures 72 x 54 *podes* (23.00 x 17.28 m.). The outer walls are made of large ashlar stones set without mortar. The interior has two rows of seven

⁴¹ Some of the coins originally dated to the fifth century could belong to the sixth century; Bijovsky, 1998, 81-83.

⁴² Magness, 2001, 15-18.

⁴³ This synagogue might be built over the building erected by the centurion mentioned in the NT, since a tradition of erecting new buildings over old ones is well-attested in Galilee. See Strange, 1977, 69-71, for a discussion of the early Franciscan publications on the synagogue.

columns set on stylobates with a transverse row in the north. The two northern corner columns have a heart-shaped section. Three main entrances are in the south, which are reached by a narrow porch. To the east is a trapezoidal courtyard with a portico on three sides.

Three layers underneath the limestone paving slabs of the prayer hall were designated by Corbo and Loffreda, who have been conducting excavations since 1968, as A, B, and C.⁴⁴ From the highest layer, level C refers to the mortar setting-bed for the paving stones (ca. 0.30 m. thick). The negative impressions left by the paving slabs show that the mortar was wet when the slabs were laid. Directly beneath the mortar setting bed of Level C is a thin layer of white chipped limestone, probably from the building process. Level B refers to the artificial fill for the synagogue, made of basalt stones that level the natural southern slope of the site. In the southern section of the synagogue, this fill is three metres deep. Level A refers to the structures below the artificial fill, which were destroyed or re-used for the construction of the new structure.

The date for the synagogue rests on the combined evidence of coins and pottery found in these three levels. In the mortar setting-bed (Level C) there were 3,127 coins found within the synagogue, and 20,334 coins found in the courtyard (see Table 2:1).⁴⁵

Table 2:1 Coins found within the Capernaum synagogue and courtyard

<u>Trench</u>	<u>location</u>	<u>stratum c</u>	<u>stratum b</u>	<u>stratum a</u>	<u>totals</u>
1	central nave	4	1	6	11
22	central nave		1		1
24	central nave			3	3
25	central nave	71	3		74
21	W aisle	43	2		45

⁴⁴ Loffreda, 1997, 223.

⁴⁵ The total number of coins found within the prayer hall is 3,385, while nearly 21,000 coins were found within the courtyard; Loffreda, 1997, 230.

14	W aisle	2,922	236		3,158
17	E aisle	1	1	3	5
2	NE corner	86		2	88
4	SE courtyard	11	3		14
11	NW courtyard		2		2
12	NE courtyard	20,323			20,323
23	N courtyard		9		9
18	Balcony		570	6	576
	totals	23,461	828	20	24,309

Although the full report of these coins is pending publication, the excavators

felt confident to write:⁴⁶

...it seems that the initial date of the entire synagogue building (prayer room, eastern courtyard and balcony) was not before the beginning of the 5th century, while the final date of the project is still kept at the last quarter of the 5th century. It is a fact that the coins of Leo and Marcianus now are known to be present not only in Trench 12 of the eastern courtyard, but also in the mortar of the side benches and of the stone pavement of the prayer room, as well as in the fill of Trench 14 (western aisle) and Trench 18 (balcony). Also leading us to this conclusion is a coin of Honorius (395-401 AD) from level A in Trench 18.

With so much numismatic evidence to substantiate the building of the synagogue at the end of the fifth century, it seems reasonable to dismiss claims that the synagogue could be dated earlier.⁴⁷ Rather, owing to the coins of Leo and Marcian, the construction of the synagogue occurred in the late fifth or early sixth century.⁴⁸

2.1.3. Dated to the Sixth Century

The three synagogues from the sixth century are each dated with the help of inscriptions. At Gaza and at Nabratein, the inscriptions reveal the exact date of the construction, 509 CE for the former and 564 CE for the latter. At Nabratein, coins and indicative pottery aid in supporting a sixth-century date, which have so far appeared in a preliminary report. At Beth Alpha, the inscription mentions a certain King Justinus, which might refer to either Justin I (518-527 CE) or Justin II (565-578 CE).

46 Loffreda, 1997, 233, Arslan, 1997.

47 Avi-Yonah was first to question the late dating, instead trying to return to a second-third century date, followed by Tsafir and Foerster; see: Avi-Yonah, 1961, Avi-Yonah, 1973b, Foerster, 1971, Tsafir, 1995b.

1. Gaza, “Synagogue” – Southern Coastal Plain, Palaestina Tertia

Leclant reported this building with its mosaic depicting a saint with a lyre with the Greek and Hebrew inscriptions in 1966, as a fifth-century church.⁴⁹ On deciphering the inscriptions, Avi-Yonah recognized that the building was in fact a synagogue.⁵⁰ Excavations at the site in 1967 revealed the partial remains of a mosaic pavement, but little of exterior walls. A reconstruction of the remains proves shows that the building was a large basilical hall (c. 26 x 30 m.), with a nave flanked by double aisles, the largest synagogue in Palestine. The axis of the building was south-east-north-west, with the main doors on the north-west side of the hall.

The mosaic in the nave depicts King David as Orpheus, playing a lyre, with his name in Hebrew above. To his left are animals including a lion, giraffe and snake. In the southern aisle a vine scroll motif preserves more animal depictions, such as a zebra, a lioness with a sucking cub, a tiger and another giraffe. Owing to the likeness of these depictions to floor mosaics in the nearby churches of Shellal (561/2 CE) and Hazor (in Judaea, 512 CE), as well as the similarities to the synagogue pavement at

⁴⁸ Magness suggests the date should lie in the early sixth century; Magness, 2001, 22-26. For the coins found in the make-up of the benches, see: Loffreda, 1997, 233.

⁴⁹ Leclant, 1966, 135.

⁵⁰ The inscription reads:

Μανάα – μος και Ἰσουος υἱοὶ τοῦ μακαρ (ιωτάτου)

Ἰσσητος ξυλέμποροι

εὐχαριστοῦντες

[τ] ᾧ ἄγιωτ(άτω) τόπω και

[τ] ἦν ψήφωσιν ταύτην

προσενήγκαμεν

μηνὶ Λῶω τοῦ

ΘΞΦ

“Menachem and Yeshua the sons of the late Isses (Jesse), wood merchants, as a sign of respect for a most holy place, have donated this mosaic in the month of Loos, 569” (508/9 CE); Avi-Yonah, 1966, 222; Ovadiah, 1969, 195; Ovadiah, 1981, 130; Lifschitz, 1967, 58.

Ma'on (Nirim, c. mid sixth century), Ovadiah suggested that these mosaics belong to the same workshop, probably from Gaza.⁵¹

In the south-eastern section of the hall, hundreds of marble fragments belonging to four chancel screens were found. These were carved in the drilled technique and included motifs such as grapes, pomegranates, as well as animals. Incised on one of these, near a top border, is a small *menorah*, flanked by *shofar* and *lulav*. This evidence suggested to the excavator that an apse existed at the southern end of the nave.

Although pottery and coins from undisturbed loci below the mosaic pavement have not been published, the date of the mosaic gives the best evidence that it was laid in the first decade of the sixth century CE. We cannot be certain that no earlier building lies on the same spot. The name David, in Hebrew, as well as the menorah incised on the chancel screen are sufficient evidence to identify this building as one of the most magnificent sixth-century synagogues discovered so far.

2. Nabratein, "Synagogue 3" – Upper Galilee, Palaestina Secunda

The identity of the first European explorer to have seen the site is disputed. Both the Englishman Wilson and the Frenchman Renan claim pride of place. However, it was Renan who first published a squeeze of the inscription in 1864, whereas Wilson 'discovered the site' in 1866. The first accurate survey, as well as drawings of a number of architectural elements, was made by the German team of Kohl and Watzinger.

A basilica, with interior dimensions of 48 x 32 *podes* (15.4 x 10.3 m.), has a main entrance in the southern wall.⁵² A second entrance in the northern wall is drawn

51 Ovadiah, 1975, reprinted in English as: Ovadiah, 1995.

52 Chen, 1987, 44.

on the plan made by Kohl, as well as the plan by Meyers, yet there is no physical evidence that this entrance existed.⁵³ The hall is divided by two rows of four columns into a nave and flanking aisles. Pedestals are square, 0.75 x 0.75 m., and have circular plinths (0.59 m. diameter) for the base of the columns. A pavement of limestone slabs covered mortar set on top of a cobblestone fill (L2006). Stone fill foundations of a tier of benches found on the eastern wall indicate that these benches lining the east, and possibly the west walls, had both a lower tier and an upper tier.

The carved lintel inscription flanking a seven-branched menorah circled by a wreath was first seen and published by Renan in 1864, but without a translation (Fig. 2:6).⁵⁴ Nearly one hundred years passed until Avigad was able to decipher the inscription, which states that the synagogue was built in 564 CE.⁵⁵

The excavators conclude this about the chronology of the synagogue:⁵⁶

53 No evidence exists to verify a door here. Compare the early plan with a western door but without a northern door in: Meyers, et al., 1981b, 7, and the later plan with a door in the northern wall but not the west wall in: Meyers, 1982, 43.

54 Renan, 1864, pl. 70.

55 The inscription reads:

למספר ארבע מאות ותישעים וארבע שנה לחרבן הבית
נבנה בשרר חנינא בן לזר ולוליאנא בר יודן

“(According) to the number four hundred and ninety four years after the destruction (of the Temple), the house was built during the office of Hanina son of Lezer and Luliana son of Yudan.” (564 CE); Avigad, 1960, 52.

However, Avigad did not accept this date as an original building phase on account of the theory which included this synagogue in the “early” category. His disquiet is evident in the following passage: “Our moulded lintel with its close parallels at Kefar Bar’am, Gush Halav, and elsewhere, can hardly be of a sixth century date, unless our whole conception of contemporary architecture and the dating of ancient synagogues is erroneous.” Avigad, 1960b, 52 and 55.

56 Meyers, 1982, 36. This statement is inaccurate, since glazed wares do not appear in Palestine until the 9th century CE. Magness gives examples from Jerusalem from the area of Herod's gate, Damascus gate, and the Armenian garden; Magness, 1993, 33, 43, 87. For the dating of early Islamic glazed wares, see: Avissar, 1996, 66-74.

...we found that all the coins and material corroborated a dating for the last use of the building sometime after the Arab conquest of CE 643 and probably towards CE 700. The founding of the building corresponds to the date of the Hebrew inscription on the lintel, in the reign of Justin I, CE 564, or Byzantine 2. The ceramic picture is clearly late Byzantine, overlapping with what is traditionally called early Arabic or Arab 1. The absence of brown-glazed wares and monochrome green glazes certainly supports a *terminus ad quem* in the late 7th century.

We must wait for the publication of the final excavation report to assess when this phase of the synagogue at Nabratein went out of use.

3. Beth Alpha, “Synagogue” – Beth She’an Valley, Palaestina Secunda

Sukenik excavated the synagogue of Beth Alpha in 1929.⁵⁷ This synagogue is basilical in form, with a prayer hall 12.30 x 10.35 m. and an apse in the southern wall. A narthex and atrium precede the synagogue to the north. A mosaic pavement in the nave is divided into three panels (Fig. 2:7). The panel nearest the apse depicts a Torah Shrine below a pediment and conch shell, flanked by lions and two *menorot*. The central panel depicts a zodiac with the central figure of Helios in a chariot drawn by four horses and circumscribed by the twelve seasons with their names in Hebrew and Aramaic. The lower panel depicts Abraham and Isaac. An Aramaic inscription states that the mosaic was laid in the reign of Justin, and one in Greek that the mosaic was made by a certain Marianus and his son Hanina.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Sukenik, 1932, 5.

⁵⁸ Sukenik, 1932, 44 and 47. The Aramaic inscription reads:

סה אתקבע בשתה
 לכותה דיוסטינוס מלכה
 חטייה מאת
 אתנדבון כל בני
 ק[...]
 רבי
 א[...]
 טב כל
 ב[...]

The Greek inscription reads:

Μνισθοῦσιν ὁ τε-

χνίτε ὁ κάμνον-

As the coins and pottery found beneath the mosaic floor have not been published, the dating of the synagogue rests on the setting date of the inscription preserved in mosaic. Concerning the interpretation of the inscription mentioning Justin, Sukenik wrote:⁵⁹

...We know that from the time of Justinian there began a time of persecution aimed not only at the economic and social welfare of the Jews but also at the very observance of Judaism. The Jews were, indeed, in better plight than the Samaritans; but it is difficult to imagine that at this time it was possible for a small Jewish community to pave its synagogue with such a rich mosaic which certainly involved them in considerable expense. But the reign of Justin II can also be considered since, after all, in his days the condition of the Jews was no worse than in the days of Justinian's rule.

The “time of persecution” was certainly not as severe as Sukenik thought. In 1962, a number of partial soundings discovered other buildings nearby. Since there is no numismatic or ceramic evidence for the date of this building, the date must be placed during the reign of either Justin I (518-527 CE) or Justin II (565-578 CE).

This group of buildings we have examined here provide the strongest evidence to date for the identification and dating of ancient synagogues in ancient Palestine. The synagogues at Horvat ‘Ammudim and Capernaum, now dated by archaeologists to the fourth and fifth centuries CE confirm that the “Galilean type” does not belong to the second-third centuries CE as previously thought.

2.2. Archaeological evidence for undated synagogues or those having equivocal building chronologies

These buildings do not have as solid a chronological base, but the evidence for their use as synagogues is sufficient to warrant their identification as a synagogue.

τες τῶ ἔργον τοῦ-
τω Μαρριανὸς καὶ
Ἄνινος υἱός

May the craftsmen who carried out this work, Marianos and his son Hanina, be held in remembrance!

The variety of styles as well as interior layouts is a further attestation to the diversity of Jewish communities in Palestine.

2.2.1 'En Gedi – Southern Hebron Hills, Palaestina Prima

Two seasons of excavations were carried out at the oasis of 'En Gedi in 1970 and 1971. Three phases of an irregular oblong hall were uncovered. Owing to the dry climate, several carbonized remains of texts were preserved at the site from its last phase. Two inscriptions in Hebrew and three in Aramaic were found on the mosaic pavement of the narthex and the prayer hall (see catalogue).

The first phase hall measured 12 x 8.5 m., and had two entrances in its short, eastern wall. This phase had a white mosaic floor. In the later phase II, the two northern entrances were blocked. The hall was enlarged to the west, and new entrances were constructed in this new wall. In the final phase III, a narthex in the west was added before the three doors. In the southwestern corner of the narthex a washing-basin was found.

The interior of the phase III building has a 2 x 4 m. platform set in front of the blocked doorway in the north wall (see catalogue). At the four corners of this platform sockets were found, perhaps for wooden chancel posts. Abutting this platform to the north, the excavators found a solid semi-circular construction, c. 0.50 m. in height, built of rough-cut stones and mortar. In the excavation report, this construction is called a "semi-circular niche". Although its purpose is unclear, the excavators suggested that it served as part of the Torah Shrine.⁶⁰

Nearly touching the north east corner of this platform are two plastered steps, which lead to the flat, northern wall. These steps are considered to have been used as

⁵⁹ Sukenik, 1932, 58.

⁶⁰ Barag, 1981, 117.

a seat, which they identify as the "Seat of Moses".⁶¹ West of these steps, in the niche formed by the blocked doorway, a cast bronze menorah was found (22 cm. wide), a bronze goblet, a hoard of bronze coins, as well as charred traces of scrolls and a codex were found.

Five inscriptions were preserved in the mosaic pavement of the western aisle. Two Hebrew inscriptions list the ancestors of man, one of the longest inscriptions yet discovered in an ancient synagogue (I Chron. I:1-4), and the signs of the zodiac, the months of the year, and the names of the Patriarchs. Three inscriptions are in Aramaic. These mention donors, and preserve a curse against anyone revealing the secret of the town.⁶²

Since the finds from beneath the floors of the building have not been published, the date of this building cannot be certain. A hoard of coins found in a nearby room contained coins which date to the first half of the sixth century. Owing to the burnt layer covering both the synagogue and the houses nearby, the excavators concluded that 'En Gedi was destroyed, along with the synagogue, around 530 CE.⁶³

2.2.2 Horvat Susiya – Southern Hebron Hills, Palaestina Prima

Excavation at this site were carried out over a three-year period from 1969 until 1972. A building composed of a large square court, a narthex, and a hall on its western side was uncovered. The form of the synagogue is a broad hall, with three entrances on the short, eastern wall. Three tiers of plastered benches line the southern, western and half of the northern walls.

Two platforms were found abutting the northern wall, a larger one slightly west of centre, and a small, shorter square platform to the east. In their reconstruction,

⁶¹ Barag, 1981.

⁶² Barag, 1981, 118; Levine, 1981.

the excavators suggested that three built niches existed in front of the larger platform. Five steps in the centre of this platform lead to the central niche. The smaller platform was probably used for reading, while the larger one merely as access to where the scrolls were kept. In a recent conference, Yeivin discussed the development of the large platform.⁶⁴ The platform underwent at least three re-building stages, from a small raised area above the northern benches, to a rectangular area surrounded by chancel screens, and finally by a larger platform, with a new set of chancel screens and rounded, decorative benches along its perimeter. Yeivin discerned that the latest platform was decorated with ten chancel posts (five on each side of the central steps, see Fig. 2:8).⁶⁵ On each side, four chancel screens were placed between the posts. Access to the niches in the north wall was therefore possible through the central steps, and also through the steps located at the perimeter of the platform.

Three layers of mosaic paving were discovered. The first layer is composed of simple white tesserae, while the second and third are polychrome. Partial remains of depictions of Daniel in the lion's den and a zodiac covered the second floor; the third, the last on the site, had geometric designs. In front of the small, eastern platform is a depiction of a Torah Shrine, flanked by menorot, beneath a gable. This mosaic must have been in use over a long period, since there are numerous, poor repairs, of white tesserae. Several of these repairs are indicative of iconoclastic damage, such as the repair of the depiction of a ram, near the small platform.

Three Aramaic inscriptions and one in Hebrew were preserved in the mosaic floors of the hall, narthex, and courtyard. The fully-preserved Hebrew inscription,

⁶³ Barag, 119.

⁶⁴ Yeivin, 2001, 28.

⁶⁵ Yeivin, 1989, 94.

from the southern portico of the courtyard, mentions Isai the priest, who made the mosaic and plastered the walls with lime.⁶⁶

Dating of the synagogue seems to be based on a coin of Honorius (393-423 CE) found under the first mosaic pavement of the narthex. This coin gives a *terminus post quem* for the laying of the narthex floor. Beneath the southern benches inside the prayer hall, however, a coin of Justinian was found. Since the excavation report does not specify whether the benches were an original feature of the prayer hall, we cautiously modify the dating proposed by the excavators from the end of the fourth century for the synagogue, to the fifth century for the narthex, and mid- to late-sixth century for the benches in the prayer hall.⁶⁷

2.2.3. Beth She'arim, "Synagogue I and II" – Lower Galilee, Palaestina Secunda

The large basilical hall measures 27.35 x 13.60 m. in the interior. The walls are made of large ashlar blocks. A central nave, 7.70 m. wide, is flanked by aisles, separated by two rows of eight square pedestals (0.85 m. x 0.85 m.). There is a narthex in the front, and a short façade wall to the south-east. The façade, of which only the lowest courses were extant, abuts a small street running north-east south-

⁶⁶ The inscription appears inside a *tabula ansata* Gutman, 1981, 128.

זכור לטובה קדושת מרי רבי
איסי הכהן המכובד בירבי שעשה
הפסיפוס הזה וסח את כותליו
בסיד מה שמתנדב במשתה
רבי יוחנן הכהן הסופר בירבי
בנו שלום על ישראל אמן

Remembered be for good the sanctity of my master and rabbi Isai the preist, the honorable, the "venerable," who made this mosaic and plastered its walls with lime, which he donated at a feast Rabbi Yohanan the priest, the venerable scribe, his son. Peace on Israel! Amen!

⁶⁷ Gutman, 1981, 128, "The synagogue...seems to have been founded toward the end of the fourth century or in the fifth century CE, and to have flourished at least until the eighth or ninth century CE."

west. Three doorways connected a narthex to the hall. A raised platform was built against the short, north-west wall.

Dating of the structure by the excavator to the “first half of the third century to the beginning of the fourth century C.E.” rests on architectural style and decoration, plaster found on the walls, Greek and Hebrew inscriptions on marble slabs, oil lamps and pottery sherds, and coins from the third century. In a room adjoining the synagogue several marble slabs with Greek inscriptions commemorating *archisynagogoi* (leaders of the synagogue) were found, including a certain Iakos from Caesarea.⁶⁸ Hebrew inscriptions were also found within the synagogue, with the words ‘Amen’ and ‘Selah.’ An inscription found in the synagogue mentions a Palmyrene family whose name appears in catacomb 4.⁶⁹

During this phase, the synagogue was renovated. The ashlar stones used in the reconstruction are smaller and the execution is poor, compared with the earlier phase. The central door on the south-east wall was walled up, creating a niche. A massive destruction caused the end of this phase. In a thick burnt layer in the basement of a building attached to the synagogue, which was also destroyed by fire, a hoard of over 1,200 copper coins was found. The latest coins in the as yet unpublished hoard date to Constantius II. The destruction of the city is attributed by Mazar to the suppression of a rebellion by Gallus in 352 CE.

⁶⁸ Ιακὼς Καισαρεὺς | ἀρχισυνάγωγος Πανφυλίας
Yakos the Caesarean *archisynagogos* from Pamphylia,
Schwabe, 1974, 90; Roth-Gerson, 1987, 137.

⁶⁹ A summary report of the excavations of the synagogue at Beth She’arim has been published without full details of pottery, coins, and loci. Mazar, 1973, 18. The inscription from the catacomb reads (Schwabe, 1974, 72):

Λεοντίου Πολμυρηνοῦ

τραπεζέτου

ἡμεῖς

We (are the sons) of Leontios from Palmyra, the banker.

However, the rebellion and its suppression may not have been so great as some have previously thought. Mazar does not mention devastation caused by the earthquake of 363 CE. Whether the synagogue was destroyed by human hands or by natural causes has not yet been verified. Furthermore, this synagogue at Beth She'arim cannot be considered as solidly dated. Sealed loci have not been published, nor has the full repertoire of finds. The cache of coins found in the attached building dated up to 361 CE provide some evidence of the collapse of the structure, possibly caused by the earthquake of 363 CE. The character of the building, and the inscriptions attest to its use as a synagogue. Moreover, recent excavations have shown that the city was not completely destroyed, but existed well into the Byzantine period.⁷⁰

2.2.4. Sepphoris, "Synagogue" – Lower Galilee, Palaestina Secunda

The synagogue at Sepphoris is a long hall, with its short walls in the southwest and north-east.⁷¹ The outer walls, although almost completely robbed to the level of the foundations, were made of well-cut stone blocks, 2 *podes* wide (0.64 m.). A single entrance in the southern part of the south-west wall leads through a small narthex to the oblong hall. This hall measures 50 x 20 *podes* (16.0 x 6.4 m.). A single row of five columns set parallel to the long, north-eastern wall divides the prayer hall into a nave and narrow (1.80 m.) eastern aisle. At the north-east end of the hall, a raised platform stood (5.0 x 2.4 m.). The entire floor was paved in polychrome mosaic.

⁷⁰ Although no ceramic or numismatic evidence indicating a conclusive date from below the floors were found (although much sixth to seventh century pottery was discovered above the floors), the mosaics were dated on account of similarities of design typical of the late fifth to sixth centuries; Vitto, 1996, 126-136.

⁷¹ In the excavation report, the panels are numbered in reverse order, from the platform to the entrances. This format does not take into consideration the chronological implications of the Biblical narrative; Weiss and Netzer, 1996b, 12.

The floor mosaic is divided into seven registers. Some of these are subdivided into two or three panels. As one enters the hall, the first two registers depict biblical scenes of the binding of Isaac, and the Angel's visit to Abraham and Sarah. Above this panel is a Greek inscription mentioning Boethus, son of Aimilios, who made this panel (tabula).⁷² Both these registers are more than 50% destroyed. Remains of the aisle mosaic have been reconstructed as a series of geometric circles and squares containing Aramaic inscriptions. One dedicatory inscription has been translated as: 'May he be remembered for good, Yudan son of Isaac the Kohen and Paregri his daughter, Amen, Amen.'⁷³

The third register, which is the largest, is set in the middle of the floor. The twelve signs of the zodiac surround a chariot carrying the Helios, depicted as the sun with ten rays, pulled by a *quadriga*. A fragmented dedicatory inscription surrounds the central circle. Four personified seasons are depicted as women in the corners of the panel. An inscription in Hebrew and in Greek names the season. Similar panels have been found in four synagogue floors dating from roughly the fourth to fifth centuries CE.

The fourth register is one large panel, much destroyed, which shows the daily offering and the service of the Tabernacle. A stylised horned altar is depicted flanked by one bull and one lamb are depicted on the left, and water basin supported by an ionic columns on the right. The missing central portion probably showed a figure of

⁷² The inscription reads:
 ΜΝΗΣΘΗ ΕΙΣ ΑΓΘΟΝ ΒΟΗΘΟΣ ΑΙΜΙΛΙ
 ΟΥ ΜΕΤΑ ΤΕΚΝΩΝ ΕΠΟΙΗΑΕΣΕΝ ΤΗΝ Τ
 ΑΒΛΑΝ ΕΥΛΟΓΙΑ ΑΥΤΟΙΣ
 ידא

Let there be remembered for good Boethos son of Aimilios with (his) children. He made the mosaic [tab(u)la]. Blessing on them. Amen.

⁷³ The inscription reads:

Aaron, but only his name in Hebrew and portions of a tunic are visible. The fourth register continues the subject of the latter, with three panels. The left most panel has four objects, a lamb, trumpets, a square container with the Hebrew caption 'flour' (*solet*), and an amphora with the title 'oil' (*shemen*). The central panel has a round shrewbread table with three legs. Two censers are depicted above the table to the left and right. The right panel has a wicker basket with the first fruits, those brought to the Temple. The fruits depicted have been identified as grapes, pomegranate, and two cymbals attached by a chain are below the basket.

The sixth register consists of three panels. The central panel depicts a gabled pediment supported by two sets of three columns. In the centre is an ornamented double door. Below is an incense shovel. This panel is flanked by panels depicting seven-branched menorot, a rams' horn (*shofar*), tongs, and the Four Species: a palm branch (*lulav*), myrtle (*hadas*), willow (*arava*), bound and set in a type of stylised amphora. A citron (*etrog*) floats between the *menorah* and Four Species. An attempt to repair the mosaic is apparent in the left amphora, where a number of ceramic sherds were inserted into a damaged mosaic panel. Poorly executed gray plaster was then used to smooth the spaces between the original mosaic and later sherds.

The top register, at the northeast end of the hall, depicts a wreath encircling the remains of a Greek inscription: '...may he be blessed...'. The top section has been destroyed, 'probably as a result of stone robbing from the *bema*.'⁷⁴ Examining the published photograph one may see that the plan for setting out the mosaic took no account whatsoever of the position of the later platform. This implies that the

דכיר לטב יודן בר יצחק הכהן ופריגרי בריתה אמנ אמנ

Weiss and Netzer, 1996b, 41.

⁷⁴ Weiss and Netzer, 1996b, 16.

platform was added on top of the existing mosaic, removing the top half of the inscription.

This synagogue mosaic ranks as one of the most important discoveries in the study of Jewish art in decades. Not only does it provide further evidence of a tradition of depicting the zodiac, a Temple façade, and the sacrifice of Isaac as at Beth Alpha, but the other panels show a rich and developed iconographic repertoire. Interpretation of these themes has rekindled ideas first proposed after the discovery of the synagogue at Dura Europos, as well as sparked new ones. Whether they indicate a messianic interpretation, as the excavators suggest,⁷⁵ or that the synagogue is a replacement for the Temple,⁷⁶ or that one should view them in a multi-layered approach,⁷⁷ will certainly occupy scholars for the foreseeable future.⁷⁸

Whereas identification of this structure as a synagogue rests on solid evidence of inscriptions and the typical iconographic repertoire of the images depicted in the mosaic floor, chronological anchorage to the early fifth century is less firm. No numismatic or ceramic evidence has yet been published from sealed loci underneath the bedding of the mosaic giving a *terminus post quem* for the floor. Dating of the apparent repairs to the mosaic, such as the ceramic sheafs inserted into the stylised amphora in the second register, or the repaired inscription in the fourth register, has not been dealt with adequately in preliminary excavation reports. For a more solid chronological base, we will have to wait for the full excavation report.

⁷⁵ Weiss and Netzer, 1996b, 38; and Kühnel, 2000, 43.

⁷⁶ Fine, 1999, 229.

⁷⁷ Talgam, 2000, 105.

⁷⁸ See: Levine, 2000.

2.2.5. Ma'oz Hayyim, "Building A" – Beth She'an Valley, Palaestina Secunda

The earliest structure at the site of Ma'oz Hayyim is a rectangular building with interior dimensions measuring 40 x 36 Roman *pedes* (11.87 m. x 10.70 m.).⁷⁹ The location of the entrance to this phase is unknown but has been reconstructed in the published plans in the eastern wall, since the later entrances are in this wall. Little remains of the northern wall, as it was taken down to make the building longer in the second phase. The entrance could possibly have been in this wall. The interior is divided into a nave and aisles by two rows of four rectangular pillars, each 1.00 x 0.60 m. The floor of this phase is paved with flagstones, preserved in the nave and western aisle, but not in the eastern aisle. Attached to the middle of the south wall is a rectangular platform, c. 2.5 m. x 2.00 m. that protrudes into the nave. This platform is made of small field stones, and may have had a wooden or stone superstructure for the Ark. In comparison, a similar yet slightly larger platform attached to the south wall was found in the synagogue at Rehov, located about 3 km. to the south-east.

The identification of this structure as a synagogue rests neither on epigraphic, nor on iconographic evidence, but rather on the fact that Building B, built directly above this structure, is certainly a synagogue. Thus by inference, Building A served as a synagogue as well. In addition, presence of a platform attached to the south wall, as found in other synagogues, and the size of the hall attest to its public function and probable use as a synagogue.

Chronological anchorage for the founding date of Building A to the end of the third or beginning of the fourth centuries, based on epigraphic, numismatic, or ceramic evidence does not exist since, as the excavator wrote:⁸⁰

79 Chen, 1988.

80 Tzaferis, 1982, 228.

...The fills beneath the floors were sterile. It was necessary to rely mainly on the evidence of the finds from outside the synagogue, especially from the courtyard on the east and the building adjoining the synagogue to the southwest. There, three occupational levels were unearthed, probably contemporary with the three floors of the synagogue itself.

We must rely on the pottery and coins from the next phase to help date the earlier structure.

2.2.6. Ma'oz Hayyim, "Building B" – Beth She'an Valley, Palaestina Secunda

The second structure erected on the site used the remains of the eastern and western walls, while the southern wall was pierced by an attached apse. The northern wall was removed and rebuilt 4.00 m. further to the north. The interior dimensions of the new structure are 50 x 40 Roman *pedes* (14.8 x 11.87 m.). Two entrances were found in the eastern wall, each 1.3 m. wide. These entrances lead from a stone-paved courtyard in the north, yet its northern extent is unknown.

The interior of Building B is divided into a nave and two aisles by two rows of 5 columns each. Width of the nave is identical to the previous phase, that is 6.0 m. Few column drums were found, but a simple ionic capital was found in secondary use as a base for a column in the latest stage, Building C. As in Building A, the walls are constructed of fieldstone and mortar. Traces of plaster remain on the walls indicating that the whole interior was plastered. Mosaic tesserae were also found. In front of the apse, the mosaic ends in a straight line which shows that there is no room for a platform protruding from the apse. Pieces of broken marble chancel screen found in the platform of Building C may indicate that a chancel screen enclosed the apse.

Identification of this building as a synagogue seems to be relatively secure. The mosaics of this phase, which rest directly over the flagstone floor of Building A

survive mainly in the southern section of the hall.⁸¹ Still, a number of observations can be made. The remains of one mosaic panel in the nave, in front of the apse, is particularly important. This panel was preserved because it was covered by the later platform of Building C, set on top of it. This panel depicts a *menorah* and *shofar*. As stated above, pieces of marble chancel screen found in the fill of the *bema* of Building C may belong to the earlier phase B. One of these has Hebrew or Aramaic letters from an inscription. Another fragment has a carved section of a branch of a *menorah*, similar to that depicted on a chancel screen from the synagogue at Rehov.

Concerning the construction date of Building B, the excavator states that material found within the fill of the mosaic floor can be ascribed to the end of the fourth - beginning of the fifth centuries. Looking at the pottery that came from this fill, the excavator writes that:⁸²

...A plaster floor, most likely a repair of the early mosaic floor, is beneath the upper mosaic floor in the northern end of the western aisle

However, since all this material comes from a possible repair of the first mosaic floor, and not from directly beneath the original mosaic, dating the construction of Synagogue B would be unsound, rather than its period of use.

Examining this material, we note that of nine sherds, two bowls are Late Roman C ware Form 3, dated by Hayes from the first half of the fifth to the first half of the sixth century.⁸³ One sherd of a bowl is imported Cypriot Red Slip ware Form 1, dated by Hayes from the late fourth to the third quarter of the fifth century.⁸⁴ Two partial vessels, a jar rim, and a cooking pot lid are similar to other finds from nearby

81 In the east aisle there is a foundation of broken roof-tiles alone. The flagstones from this aisle may have been those used to pave the courtyard; Tzaferis, 1982.

82 Tzaferis, 1982, 235.

83 Tzaferis, 1982, Figs. 9-2 and 9-4; Hayes, 1972, 329.

Capernaum, but are merely dated to the Byzantine period or possibly early Arab - seventh century CE.⁸⁵ These finds provide a mid-fifth to mid- sixth century date/terminus post quem for the repair and a terminus ante quem for the laying of the original mosaic floor.

The mosaic of Building B with the depiction of the menorah clearly indicates that this structure was a synagogue. By inference, then, the lower and upper phases, Buildings A and C, too can be considered synagogues since rebuilding of synagogues is an often - occurring pattern in the area. Chronological anchorage for these three phases is another matter. From the published report, it is not clear that a single sealed locus with datable numismatic or ceramic finds from any phase exists inside the building. Ceramic evidence found underneath the pavement of the three levels of the courtyard should not be seen as furnishing solid criteria for dating the synagogue proper.

2.2.7. Ma'oz Hayyim, "Building C" – Beth She'an Valley, Palaestina Secunda

The latest phase of this structure at Ma'oz Hayyim, Building C, witnessed no changes to its exterior dimensions, but major changes occurred inside, some time during the first half of the sixth century. A new mosaic floor was laid over the previous floor c. 0.30 m. higher. Remains of this mosaic survive in the north and east. This mosaic does not extend to the walls however, which may indicate that benches existed along the walls similar to the synagogue at Beth Alpha. In front of the entrances mosaic panels reach the thresholds. Column bases changed too; those of this phase were found made of small stones and not monolithic limestone blocks. The

⁸⁴ Tzaferis, 1982, 372, figs. 9-17.

⁸⁵ Tzaferis, 1982, 233.

excavator states that this may indicate that the columns of this phase were made of wood.

In front of the apse a platform was built which protrudes into the nave. This platform measures 2.0 x 6.0 m. and rests directly on the mosaic of Building B. The corners of the *bema* reach the first two columns of the nave. In the apse no pavement was found, but in the rear, built against the apse wall is an installation cut into the floor, made of stones and plaster with a tile floor. It is approximately 1.5 x 0.50 x 0.50 m. deep. This building was destroyed by fire some time in the early seventh century.⁸⁶

2.2.8. Rehob, "Phase 3" – Beth She'an Valley, Palaestina Secunda

This structure was uncovered in 1973 after a number of architectural members and gold coins were found in a ploughed field.⁸⁷ The basilical hall measures 58 x 52 Roman *pedes* (18.50 x 17.30 m.), with walls built of an outer facing fieldstone with an inner core of rubble $2\frac{1}{2}$ *pedes* (0.80 m.) thick.⁸⁸ Three entrances from the short wall in the north led from an attached narthex to the hall. One additional threshold was found in the southern part of the eastern wall. Two rows of square pillars made of stone blocks covered with plaster divided the central hall into a nave and aisles. The interior had white plastered walls, with geometric and floral patterns painted in red, yellow, black and green. A large platform was set against the southern wall.

The exact plan of the first phase is unclear, but the floor probably had a simple white mosaic. Based on unspecified factors, this phase is dated to the fourth century. The second phase, with its finely executed polychrome mosaic, plaster wall decoration, and Aramaic inscriptions on the pillars, is dated by stylistic analysis to the

86 For an early report see: Tzaferis, 1974b.

87 Vitto, 1975, Vitto, 1981.

end of the fourth or fifth centuries. The latest phase of the synagogue, which probably can be understood as a repair of the second mosaic, less skillful than the original, had benches along the east and west walls. One of the most important changes to the phase III building was that steps on either side of the phase II platform were moved to the northern face of the platform. Remains of a low wall in front of the *bema*, thought to be for the marble chancel screen, were found in front of the *bema*. The narthex, with the longest inscription in an ancient synagogue found to date, belongs to this phase.⁸⁹ Dated to 'some time in the sixth-seventh centuries C.E.', this synagogue

88 Chen, 1990b, 528.

89 Vitto, 1981, 93. The inscription reads:

1. שלום הפירות הללו אסורין בבית שאן בשביעית ובשאר שבוע מתאסרין דמי הקישואין
2. והאבטיחין והמלפפומת והאסטפליני והמינתח הנאגדת בפני עצמה ופול המצרי הנאגד
3. בשיפה והקפלוטות מן העצרת עד החנוכה והזירעונין והקצע והשמשמין והחרדל והאורז והכמן והתרמסין
4. היבישין והאפונין הגמלונין הנימכרין במידה והשום ובצלין בני מדינה הנימכרין במידה והבולבסין
5. והתמרין אפסיות והיין והשמן בשביעית שביעית שני שבוע דמי והפת חלה לעולם אילו המקורות
6. המותרין סביבות בית שאן מן הדרום שהיא פילי דקמפון עד חקלה חירותה מן המערב
7. שהיא פילי דזיירה עד סוף הרצפה מן הצפון שהיא פילי דסכותה עד כפר קרנוס וכפר קרנוס
8. כבית שאן ומן המזרח שהיא פילי דזבלייה עד נפשה דפנקטייה ופילי דכפר זמרין ופילי דאגמה
9. לפנים מן השער מותר ולחוץ אסור העיירות האסורות ביתחום סוסיתה עינוש ועינחרה ודמבר
10. עיון ויערוט וכפר יחריב ומב וחספיה וכפר צמח ורבי היתיר כפר צמח העיירות שהן ספיק בתחום נווה
11. ציר וצייר וגשמי וזיזון ורנב וחרבתה ואיגרי חוטם וכרכה דבר הרג העיירות אסורות בתחום צור שצת
12. ובצת ופי מצובה וחנותה עלייתה וחנותה ארעייתה וביברה וראש מיה ואמון ומזה היא קסטלה וכל מה שקנו ישראל
13. נאסר תחומי ארץ ישראל מקום שה[חזיקון] עולי בבל פורשת אשקלון וחומת מיגדל שרושן דור וחומת עכו
14. וראש מי גיאתו וגיאתו עצמה וכבר[נתה] ובית זביתה וקסטרה דגלילה וקובעייה דאייתה וממצייה דירכתה
15. ומלתה דכוריים וסחרתה דיתיר ונהל[ה] דבצאל ובית עיט וברשתה ואולי רבצה וניקבתה
16. דעיון ומסב ספנחה וכרכה דב[ר] ס[נ]גורה ותרנגולה עלייה דקיסרין ובית סבל וקנת
17. ורקם טרכון זימרה דמתחם לבוצרה יבקה וחשבון ומחלה דזרד איגר סהדותה נימרין
18. ומלח רזיזה רקם דגיהא וגנייה דאשקלון ודרך הגדולה ההולכת למידבר הפירות
19. הללו אסורין הפנים בשביעית ובשאר שני שבוע הן מתעסרין דמיי משלם
20. האורז והאגוזין והשמשמין ופול המצרי יש אומרין אוף אחוניות הבכיות
21. הרי אלו בשביעית שביעית ובשאר שני שבוע הן מתעסרין ודיי ואפילו
22. מן תרנגולה עלייה ולחוץ הפיות הללו מתעסרין דמיי בקסרין החיטין והפת
23. חלה לעולם והיין והשמן והתמרין והאורז והכמן הרי אלו מותרין בשביעית בקסרין
24. ובשאר שני שבוע הן מתקנין דמיי ויש אומרין בולבסין הלבנין הבאין
25. מהר המלך ועד איכן סביב לקיסרין עד צורנה ופנדקה דטביתה ועמודה
26. ודור וכפר סבה ואם יש מקום שקנו אותו ישראל חוששין לו רבותינו שלום העיירות
27. המותרות בתחום סבסטי איקבין וכפך כסדיה וציר ואזילין ושפירין ועננין ובלעם עלייתה ומזחרו
28. ודוּתן וכפר מיה ושילתה ופנטאקומוותה לבייה ופרדיסלייה ויצת וארבנורין וכפר
29. יהודית ומונרית ופלגה דשלאף

1. Shalom! These fruits are forbidden at Beth-Shean in the Seventh Year, and in the other sabbatical cycle years they are tithed (as) *demai*: the marrows,

(phase III) cannot be more precisely set chronologically until the numismatic and

2. and the melons, and the cucumbers, and the parsnips, and the mint which is bound by itself, and Egyptian beans which are bound
3. in shavings, and leeks from the holiday (of Succot) until Hanukkah, and seeds, and dried figs, and sesame, and mustard, and rice, and cummin, and dry lupine,
4. and large peas which are sold by measure, and garlic, and vilage onions sold by measure, and onions,
5. and pressed dates, and wine, and oil; in the Seventh Year (they are considered) Seventh Year (produce), the other years of the sabbatical cycle (they are thithed as) *demai*, and the bread for *hallah* (dough-offering) is eternally (due). These are the places
6. which are permitted around Beth-Shean: on the south which is the "campus" gate till the "white field"; on the west
7. which is the gate of the (oil-) press till the end of the pavement (?); on the north which is the gate of the watchtower (or "of Sekuta") till Kefar Qarnos, and Kefar Qarnos
8. is as Beth-Shean; and on the east which is the "dung" gate till the tomb of *pnwtyyh*, and the gate of Kefar Zimrin and the gate of the uncleared field (or " *gmh*").
9. Before the gate it is allowed and beyond it is forbidden. The forbidden towns in the territory of Sussita: *Ayyanosh*, and *'ynhrh*, and *dnbr*,
10. *Iyyon*, and *Yaarut*, and *Kefar Yahrib*, and *Nob*, and *Hasfiya* (= Caspein), and *Kefar Zemah*, and Rabbi permitted *Kefar Zemah*. The towns which are doubtful within the territory of *Naveh*:
11. *Sir*, and *Sayyer*, and *Gasimea*, and *Zeizun*, and *Raneb*, and *Harbata*, and *'ygr hwtm*, and *Charax of bar hrg*. The forbidben towns in the territory of Tyre: *shst*,
12. *Bezeth*, and *Pi Masoba*, and *Upper Hanotha* and *Lower Hanotha*, and *bybrh*, and *r'sh myyh*, and *'mwn*, and *mzh*, which is *Castella*, and all (the lands) which Jews have purchased,
13. is forbidden. The territory of *Eretz-Israel*: the place which they that returned from *Babylon* [held], the *Ascalon junction*, and the wall of *Strato's Tower*, *Dor*, and the wall of *Acco*,
14. and the head of the waters of *Gaaton*, and *Gaaton proper*, and *Kabr[atha]*, and *B]eth-Zenitha*, and the *castrum* of *Galilia*, and *qwb'yyh* ("peaks"?) of *Aita*, and *mmsyyh* of *Jorcatha*,
15. and the fort of *Kuryaim*, and the neighborhood (or "enclosure") of *Jatti[r and the brook]* of *bs'l*, and *Beth-Aita*, and *Barshata*, and *greater Houle*, and the channel (?)
16. of *Iyyon*, and *msb spnhh*, and *Karka of Bar Sangora*, and *Upper Tarnegola of Caesarea (Paneas)*, and *Beth-Sabal*, and *Canatha*,
17. and *Rekem* (of) *Trachonitis*, *Zimra* of the limits of *Bostra*, *Jabbok*, and *Heshbon*, and the brook *Zered*, *Igar Sahaduta*, *Nimrin*,
18. the fort of *Raziza*, *Rekem of Gaia*, and the garden of *Ascalon*, and the great road leading to the desert. These fruits
19. are forbidden in *Paneas* in the Seventh Year and in the other years of the sabbatical cycle they are tithed as full (?) *demai*:
20. the rice, and the nuts, and the sesame, and Egyptian beans. Some say even choice plums,
21. for these in the Seventh Year are (considered) Seventh Year (produce) and in the other years of the sabbatical cycle they are tithed as *demai*, and even
22. from *Upper Tarnegola* and beyond. These fruits are tithed (as) *demai* at *Caesarea (Maritima)*: the wheat and the bread
23. for *hallah* (which is) eternally (due), and the wine, and the oil, and the dates, and the rice, and the cummin, for these are permitted in the Seventh Year at *Caesarea*
24. and in the other years of the sabbatical cycle they are due (as) *demai* and there are some who forbid white onions from
25. the *King's Mountain*. And until where is the region of *Caesarea*? Till *Soran*, and the inn of *Tibetah*, and the column,
26. and *Dor*, and *Kefar Saba*, and if there is a place which was purchased by the Jews our rabbis are suspicious of it. Shalom! The towns
27. permitted within the territory of *Sebaste*: *'yqbyn*, and *Kefar Kasdayah* and *Sir*, and *'zylyn*, and *Safirin*, and *'nnyn*, and *Upper Jibleam*, and *Mezharu*,
28. and *Dothan*, and *Kefar myyh*, and *Silta*, and *Pentakomias Livias* and *Pardisalya*, and *Yazit*, and *'rbnwryn* and *Kefar*
29. *Yehudit*, and *mwnryt*, and half of *Shalaf*.

ceramic evidence for its construction are published. Indications that the end of this phase, as well as the simultaneous abandonment of the site occurred from a strong earthquake, include the fallen pillars and walls lying parallel to each other. The latest finds at the site are from the late seventh and early eighth centuries.

2.2.9. Hammat Tiberias, "Synagogue IIA Severus" – Eastern Lower Galilee, Palaestina Secunda

Hammat Tiberias was a small village located to the south of Tiberias, until the two towns grew large enough to be a single large town. In the third century CE, Tiberias became a spiritual centre of the Jews in Palestine, and later became the seat of the Patriarchate.

A public building with a central hall and rooms to the south and to the north was built some time in the first half of the third century CE.⁹⁰ The excavator believed that the southern room was the entrance hall, leading to the main doorway to the prayer hall in the southern wall. The hall had a central nave, flanked by a single aisle in the west, and two aisles in the east, similar in some respects to the plan of the synagogue at Ein Gedi (phase III). At some stage, the large hall at Hammat Tiberias was renovated by closing the southern room. New entrances were then built in the north wall, and the hall was covered by a polychrome mosaic. Dothan suggested that this change could have occurred after a major earthquake, perhaps the one which shook Tiberias in 306 CE.⁹¹

In the nave, this polychrome mosaic features three panels, depicting a zodiac in the centre, a façade motif flanked by menorahs to the south (nearest the now-sealed southern room), and a Greek inscription to the north, nearest the main entrance. The

⁹⁰ This tentative dating is based on few finds, sherds and coins from the whole stratum and not stratified loci; Dothan, 1983, 26.

zodiac, similar but not identical to the one at Sepphoris, has Helios riding his chariot in the centre ring, surrounded by the 12 signs running counter-clockwise. The names of each are written in Hebrew. Interestingly, the figure of Libra is not circumscribed, nor is the Hebrew word *deli* (Aquarius) written correctly, it is written in reverse. At the corners of the square in which the zodiac lies are the four seasons as female figures. The Greek inscription in the northern panel is flanked by lions. The inscription mentions a certain Severus, a pupil of the patriarchs who completed the construction of the synagogue.⁹²

The dating of this building rests on Dothan's claim that the earlier, IIB synagogue was destroyed by an earthquake, probably the one in 306 CE. However, no numismatic or ceramic evidence is published from sealed stratigraphic contexts to support that claim.⁹³

2.2.10. Hammat Tiberias, "Synagogue IB" – Eastern Lower Galilee, Palaestina Secunda

The late synagogue at Hammat Tiberias was built above the smaller, earlier one, located directly below. The phase III synagogue, as published by the excavator, has a narthex in the north that leads to the prayer hall. This later building is basilical, with two rows of columns dividing the prayer hall into a nave and two aisles. A third row of columns forms a transverse row on the north, similar to the lay-out of other synagogues in Galilee, such as those at Chorazin and Capernaum. Three doorways

⁹¹ Dothan, 1983, 27.

⁹² The inscription reads:
 Σευῆρος θρεπτὸς τῶν λαμπρο-
 τάτων πατριαρχῶν ἐτελίωσεν
 εὐλογία αὐτῷ καὶ Ἰούλλῳ τῷ προνοητ[ῆ]
 Severos, disciple of the most illustrious Patriarchs completed (it).
 Blessings on him and on Iouillos the supervisor.
 Dothan, 1983, 60.

from the western aisle lead to a paved courtyard. The interior measures 60 x 52 *podes* (18.45 x 16.00 m.). An apse was built in the southern end of the hall with a raised *bema* in front of it reached by three steps. This synagogue, called 1B, was partly destroyed in the first half of the seventh century CE, but was re-built soon afterwards (1A). The mosaic floor was paved mainly with geometric patterns, and pottery found in the room flanking the apse was typical of the seventh - eighth centuries CE. The building was apparently destroyed in the mid-eighth century CE.⁹⁴

This is an interesting synagogue, especially since what has been published so far does not exactly correspond to what one sees at the site. A bench, 0.60 m. wide (c. 55m. average height) abutting the apse is neither shown on the plan nor mentioned in the report. Remains of a marble chancel screen and posts are not mentioned either. The apse does not seem to be an integral part of the building, but rather was added to an already-standing building. There are also probable traces of a wall in direct alignment with the southern wall (Fig. 2:9). This southern wall seems to have been dismantled when the apse was later added on. In the south-eastern corner of the western aisle is a small raised platform, facing the door which leads into a room attached to the apse (Fig. 2:10). Neither of these features appear in the published plan, nor are they mentioned in the published report.

93 For better chronological accuracy in dating this structure, we must wait for further excavation at the site; Dothan, 1983, 67.

94 Evidence for this earthquake is meagre, see above, and Dothan, 1981, 69. The final publication of the late phase appeared posthumously: Dothan, 2000.

One possible explanation for the wall and the small platform is that these are actually traces of an earlier phase of the synagogue.⁹⁵ Before the apse was built, the southern wall probably had three entrances and clearly one *bema* next to the western door—as at Nabratein. The chancel screens and posts could easily belong to the stage with the apse, as noted at Ma'oz Hayyim, for example. This would be the first instance of a bench in the apse of a synagogue in Palestine, similar to a *synthronon* in churches.

In addition, this synagogue surprisingly resembles a number of churches found in Apamea. Foerster tried to get around this problem by suggesting that in addition to the Ark in the apse, the bench served as a *synthronon*:⁹⁶

...in those synagogues which had a large apse also served as the seat of the elders of the congregation, like the presbyterium in churches, although we have no proof that it was in fact used as such.

The Ark stood in the apse, facing Jerusalem, as in those other synagogues with an apse. However it is highly unlikely that the elders of the congregation sat hidden behind the Ark.⁹⁷

2.2.11. Arbel, “Synagogue I and II” – Eastern Lower Galilee, Palaestina Secunda

The synagogue at Arbel is a basilical hall, 59 x 54 *podes* (20.35 x 18.5 m.).⁹⁸

The walls are made of limestone blocks, rather than the local basalt. The prayer hall is divided into a nave and aisles by two rows of five columns. In the north, a transverse

95 Reconstructing a phase of the synagogue without the added apse would justify the small square structure, partially hidden beneath the western steps. This could easily be identified as the foundation course to a platform, attached to the southern wall. Unanswered questions such as whether doors existed on the southern wall before the construction of the apse; what is the absolute dating for the addition of the apse what was the lay-out of the structure before the apse can only be answered by renewed excavation at the site (see chapter 5.3.1).

96 Foerster, 1986, 177; republished in English as: Foerster, 1995, 91.

97 Milson, 1987b, 310.

row of two columns exists in front of a possible entrance. The jambs, lintel, and threshold of the main entrance in the east is made of a single piece of stone. The corner columns have a heart-shaped section. Remains of benches were found attached to the east and west walls. A 1.4 m. wide platform was built to accommodate four tiers of benches, two above and another two below. There are two tiers on the northern wall. Traces of mosaic floor exist above a stone paving.

The building had at least two phases, and possibly three, although the plan did not change.⁹⁹ Evidence for more than one phase includes the above-mentioned mosaic floor over an earlier paving, a stone paving over this mosaic, and re-used cut capitals and bases in the make-up of the walls. A large number of architectural members were re-used in building the southern wall, including bases, columns sections, and fragments of a capital. The latest southern wall has a niche, 1.53 m. deep. In front of this is a platform, 5.5 x 2.7 m. Small architectural fragments found include a smooth colonnette, carved spiral columns, fragments of a chancel screen and chancel posts.

Dating the latest phase seems to be according to an unpublished Ummayyad coin found on the stone pavement, which dates to 724-743 CE, possibly indicating that the synagogue was destroyed by the earthquake of 749 CE. This phase might have been built at the earliest in the mid-fifth century or later since the latest coins possibly found underneath the floor date to Theodosius II.¹⁰⁰ The first phase has been dated to the fourth century based on coins found in unstratified deposits somewhere within the synagogue, and by Fischer who dated the synagogue on the basis of its architectural details.¹⁰¹

98 Chen, 1986b, and Chen, 1989a, 205.

⁹⁹ Ilan and Izdarechet, 1989, 56.

100 Ilan and Izdarechet, 1989, 56.. It is unclear from the published reports the precise loci from which the coins were found.

101 Ilan and Izdarechet, 1989.

2.2.12. Beth Yerach, "Synagogue" – Eastern Lower Galilee, Palaestina Secunda

The building is surrounded by a walled enclosure c. 60 m. square, with corner towers and a single entrance in the middle of the southern wall, flanked by two towers similar to those at the corners, each c. 5.0 m. square. This enclosure is a wall, c. 1.5 m. thick, is made of large smoothly dressed stones on both faces with a rubble fill. This is a large apsed building, with the apse facing south. Three rooms are attached to the western wall, each is approximately 10 m. square. The interior is a basilica, with a nave flanked by aisles and a transverse aisle in the north, as other synagogues in Galilee. The nave is 100 Roman *pedes* long (29.75 m.), and the clear chord of the apse at its foundations is 30 *pedes*, the largest in Palestine (8.90 m.).¹⁰² The inner width of the nave, measured at the foundations is 70 *pedes* wide (20.70 m.). Two rooms approximately 5.0 m. square flank the apse. Sparse remains of mosaics found in the central part of the nave depict possible plants, birds, and lion motifs, with a bordering single guilloche pattern. Attached to the southern wall are five rooms of differing widths, each approximately 5.0 m. long. On the eastern and northern sides of the building a stylobate was found, probably for a peristyle. To the north, west and south a system of water pipes was uncovered, probably for supplying water to the complex, and for sewage.

Identification of the structure as a synagogue by the excavators seems to rest on the fact that the apse faces south towards Jerusalem, on the remains of a roughly inscribed menorah found in secondary use on a pilaster in front of the southern entrance to the building, and on a few fragmentary mosaics. This identification was challenged by Reich, on the following grounds: the apse does not face *directly*

¹⁰² Milson, 1991, 449-451.

towards Jerusalem, but is oriented more towards true south; the stone bearing the inscribed menorah is in secondary use and cannot be used to identify the building as a synagogue; the great size of the building precludes its identification as a synagogue; and the fact that a church was found merely 50 meters away makes it unlikely that the two buildings were contemporaneous.¹⁰³ However, if this building was not a synagogue but a church, it seems inconceivable that it would be the only originally-designed church in the Byzantine empire with an apse pointing south.

Concerning the date of the building and the enclosure, the excavators discerned two phases, one Late Roman, one Byzantine, that is fourth-fifth centuries. The difference is that the earlier phase had columns in the inner colonnades, and the second phase had built pilasters instead. However, no ceramic, numismatic, or epigraphic evidence has yet been published to substantiate those chronological claims. The relative chronology of the central building and the enclosure walls is unclear too.

2.2.13. Hammat Gader, "Synagogue" – Golan, Palaestina Secunda

The plan of the synagogue is a basilical hall about 13 meters square (it is slightly trapezoidal).¹⁰⁴ In front of the apse was found a platform, and on the north side of it, grooves were found for a chancel screen flanked by posts. Sukenik found a mosaic in the nave, consisting of three panels: the top panel with a roundel and inscription, an inscription in a tabula ansata, above a geometric pattern, and the lowest panel with a geometric pattern and two inscriptions. All these inscriptions are in Aramaic, and mention donors but no dates.

¹⁰³ Reich, 1993, 144. One should not be misled in reading the table of metric dimensions of apses of synagogues in Galilee published on page 143, since the late synagogue at Hammat Tiberias (not cited) also has an apse slightly less wide than that at Beth Yerah (Philoteria). Furthermore, on the opposite shore of the Sea of Galilee, at Capernaum, a church and a synagogue are even closer.

This synagogue was destroyed by fire, as evidence of burning was found on the mosaic. In addition, Sukenik believed that the broken marble chancel screen bears witness to destruction by a Christian mob. Two finds in the synagogue show that this was intentional: a ring with an inscription Χε (Χριστὲ) Βοήθ(ε)ι Ἄνδρεα and an oil lamp with the sign of a cross.¹⁰⁵

Sukenik dated the synagogue to the first half of the fifth century, because the title *Comes* appears in an inscription in the mosaic floor and the types of coins represented. Sukenik believed that the title *Comes*, could not be held by Jews after 438.¹⁰⁶ In contrast, Avi-Yonah wrote that:¹⁰⁷

The transverse row of columns and the square hall are characteristic of early synagogues. The apse and mosaic pavement are typical of the later types. Because of the absence of human images and the paucity of faunal and floral representations, this synagogue should be assigned either to the earliest period of the laying of mosaic pavements in synagogues or to the time when resistance to images and figures was beginning and interest in geometric patterns was again on the increase (after mid-sixth century). In comparison with the mosaics in the synagogue in Hammat Tiberias, a later date should perhaps be assigned.

Neither of these opinions refers to the stratigraphic, numismatic, or ceramic evidence underneath the floor of the synagogue.

In 1982, when Foerster carried out restoration work on the mosaics, two more phases of the synagogue were discovered, which were unnoticed by Sukenik.¹⁰⁸ Foerster found the second phase 20 cm. below the latest one. His excavations also revealed that the apse is actually a later addition, built some time in the sixth century.

The first phase of the building was found only in a few areas; it had a simple white mosaic with some remains of a black and red frame. The walls of this phase

104 Sukenik, 1935.

105 Sukenik, 1935, 160-161.

106 Sukenik, 1935, 82.

107 Avi-Yonah, 1993, 568.

108 Foerster, 1986, published in English as: Foerster, 1995.

were not completely discerned, but Foerster mentions that the outer outlines resemble but are not identical to the later phases. In outline, the second phase is identical to the last phase, except for the addition of the apse. In this phase, the floor was laid with square and triangular tiles in *opus sectile*. The raised *bema* was erected in this phase, and many finds were discovered near it. These finds included fragments of pottery and oil lamps from the late third or early fourth century. The latest coins are Constantius II. However, the exact position of these finds whether on the floor, in the bedding of the floor, in the *bema*, or next to it is not recorded. Nor are these finds themselves published by Foerster, which would allow critical examination of his chronology. Thus, dating of this phase must be used with caution.

2.2.14. Nabratein, "Synagogue 2a and 2b" – Upper Galilee, Palaestina Secunda

Directly above the earlier Synagogue 1, another public building was built, enlarging the previous one. This structure incorporated the southern, eastern and western walls of the earlier building with a new northern wall, enlarging the structure by 4.5 meters. This basilical hall measures 41 x 34 Roman *pedes* (12.1 x 10.1 m.) in the interior.¹⁰⁹ Two rows of three columns were set on stylobates. Concerning the supports for the roof, the excavator mentions:¹¹⁰

The pedestals are simple 0.75 x 0.75 m., as are the surrounding columns, which average ca. 50 x 50 cm. in diameter [*sic*].

Stone benches like those built against the eastern and western walls of the previous stage were constructed along the eastern and western walls of the newer construction. The new northern wall, however, did not have an attached bench. Two stone platforms flanking the main southern entrance were enlarged. In addition to the main

¹⁰⁹ Chen, 1987, 46.

¹¹⁰ Meyers, et al., 1981b, 41.

southern entrance, a smaller doorway was set in approximately in the centre of the eastern wall. To the south, in front of the main doorway, a portico was added, consisting of four columns supporting an architrave.

The excavator states that two stages of this building were evident from two plaster floors within the same plan. Built directly above Synagogue 1, the first floor of Synagogue 2a sealed datable material including pottery sherds and third-century coins. The platforms from Synagogue 1 were re-plastered. The second plaster floor (Synagogue 2b) covered roof tiles and other ceramic fragments. In addition, the platforms from Synagogue 2a were also rebuilt and enlarged. Within the western platform, a fragmentary stone pediment was found which depicts a conch beneath a pediment flanked by lions (Fig. 2:11). Meyers uses this stone to reconstruct an *aedicula*, which stood on the west platform. A small hole at the apex of the pediment may have held a chain for a lamp. Identified as part of a stone Torah Shrine belonging to Synagogue 2a, this stone pediment is contemporary with that of the synagogue at Dura-Europos.

The excavators believe that the pediment sealed in the new Synagogue 2b platform was damaged during the earthquake of 306 CE. Roof tiles belonging to Synagogue 2a covered by the floor of Synagogue 2b are further evidence of the damage caused by the earthquake. Evidence of this earthquake and its destruction was found in the nearby sites of Gush Halav and Horvat Shema' too. However, the

evidence constituting proof of the earthquake of 306 CE and its intensity are still debated.¹¹¹

Domestic Area

Outside the synagogue to the north-east, bones, glass, and lamps were uncovered above a well-preserved plaster floor. According to the excavator, these finds indicate a domestic use. The excavators concluded that this area was made into a domestic space attached to the eastern wall of the synagogue at a stage well after Synagogue 2b was built. Beneath this 'domestic' floor, a mass of roof tiles was found covered by a burnt layer of soil. This destruction layer is 'probably from the burning or decay of roof beams' also thought to belong to Synagogue 2a. Several coins dated by Meyers to Constantius II (AD 340) were found beneath this floor.¹¹² Since the coins could not have been deposited there after the floor was laid, they give a *terminus post quem* of 340 CE for the floor of the domestic space.

However, if these roof-tiles from to the roof of Synagogue 2a are similar to those found underneath the floor of Synagogue 2b, as Meyers' explains, it is unclear why the roof-tiles found outside of the synagogue are anchored by numismatic evidence to 340 CE at the earliest, while those inside the synagogue were shaken from the roof by the earthquake of 306 CE. Meyers' suggestion seems dubious that

¹¹¹ Russell argues for the 306 CE earthquake affecting the coast of Lebanon alone. The basis for this rests on literary evidence in the Chronicon of Eusebius (preserved by Jerome) that this earthquake occurred at Tyre and Sidon. No other sites are mentioned as being damaged. Further archaeological evidence for this particular earthquake is ambiguous. As a result, Russell contends that the destruction date at Horvat Shema' 2a should be advanced to 363 CE (Russell, 1980, 57). However, after a personal communication with Meyers, Russell later retracted his argument (Russell, 1985). In contrast, Groh accepts Meyers' dubious evidence for the 306 CE earthquake at Horvat Shema' without question; (Groh, 1995, 66). In Amiran's most recent (1996) list of sites in Israel damaged by earthquakes, both Horvat Shema' and Nabratein have been removed from a list of sites destroyed by the 306 CE earthquake. Moreover, convinced by Russell, Amiran inserted Horvat Shema' into the 363 CE earthquake site list in a Corrigendum published in 1995. See: Amiran, Arie and Turcotte, 1994, 265; Amiran, 1995, 201; and later: Amiran, 1996, and Magness, 1997, 216.

¹¹² The full publication of these finds is pending, see catalogue; Meyers, et al., 1981b, 43.

these roof tiles and burnt roof-beams were lying adjacent to the eastern exterior wall of the synagogue for at least thirty years until a plaster floor of the 'domestic space' covered them.¹¹³ Moreover, Meyers' assumption that the deposition date of these Constantius II coins was soon after their minting date can not be proven. Thus, we cannot fully depend on the meager published material for accepting unequivocally the chronological distinction proposed by the excavators for synagogues 2a and 2b, nor for physical proof that the earthquake of 306 CE caused damage to Synagogue 2a. Rather, if the coins and roof tiles from both inside and outside the synagogue are contemporary, then the damage attributed to the 306 CE earthquake in fact belongs to the earthquake of 363 CE.

The total break in coin finds between 350 and 500 CE, together with the small amount of pottery dating to the late fourth and fifth centuries, are difficult to interpret. Meyers believes these few finds are indicative of the site being abandoned for nearly one hundred years, beginning some time in the late fourth century CE, perhaps after the earthquake.¹¹⁴ Meyers states that the village of Nabratein likely went into decline and probably was desolate within a few decades after the earthquake of 19 May 363 CE. This desolation lasted until the mid-sixth century when the later lintel inscription mentions the synagogue being built in 564 CE ('Synagogue 3,' Phase III, see below, and Volume III, Catalogue).¹¹⁵ However, there are other ways to interpret the meagre evidence. One possibility is that the lack of coin finds follows a pattern all over the country, whereby fewer coin finds might merely indicate that less coin was distributed. The problem of the reduced production of copper coin in the fifth century

¹¹³ Meyers, et al., 1981b, 43.

¹¹⁴ See the numismatic report for the first season of excavation by Raynor in Meyers, et al., 1981b, 15-21.

was recognized by Anastasius, and dealt with by his coin reform in 498 CE. Lack of coins, then, neither indicates a decline in population, nor does fewer pottery types dating to the late-fourth to fifth centuries at the site mean that the whole town of Nabratein fell into decline. An alternative interpretation would be that the earthquake of 363 CE destroyed the 2a synagogue, and the new 2b floor was laid down after that. Decline in population must be sought by other means.

2.2.15. Meiron, "Synagogue" – Upper Galilee, Palaestina Secunda

The large public building near the summit of the hill of Meiron was first seen and partly cleared by Wilson in 1868, and later measured by Kohl and Watzinger in 1905.¹¹⁶ Cut from bedrock to establish a flat area, the central basilical hall measures 92 x 46 Roman *pedes* (27.5 x 13.6 m.), with the short walls to the north and south.¹¹⁷ The west wall was hewn out of bedrock, and was once covered with plaster. Traces of this plaster still remain. A deep foundation wall was built to support the eastern wall, but few stones of the synagogue wall still exist above this foundation. Immediately to the east is an attached room, called Annex A. The interior of the structure had two rows of eight columns each, with a transverse row of two columns in the north. These columns stood on pedestals (0.76 x 0.79 m.), two of which can still be seen at the site. The two corner columns in the north have a heart-shaped section, which allows for both longitudinal and transverse beams to be set upon a single base. Traces of the cuttings into the bedrock for the pedestals can be discerned. However, no trace of mosaic, flagstone or plaster floor exists, making it impossible to determine the floor type in the nave.

¹¹⁵ The inscription is in Hebrew: "In the year 494 since the destruction of the Temple, Hanina son of Lizar and Luliana son of Yudan built this." (564 CE); for the translation of this long-undeciphered inscription, see: Avigad, 1960b.

¹¹⁶ The German team worked here from 29 May to 1 June, Kohl and Watzinger, 1916, 2.

¹¹⁷ Chen, 1980, 257.

Three entrances in the southern wall are the only doorways found leading into the synagogue. At the southeastern edge of the east wall, annex A (4.9 x 6.0 m.) was 'bonded to' the eastern foundation wall (Fig. 2:12). No physical evidence exists for a side-entrance into the southeastern annex, shown on the published plan, since the eastern wall only exists in courses below the level of the floor. Instead, this entrance was assumed to be the only access to Annex A, owing to the topography of the site. The southern entrances are preceded by a 6-columned portico, ca. 3.0 m. wide. Four steps cut into bedrock lead up to the portico.

Fortunately, the western section of the ashlar southern façade has been preserved. Here, the lintel and the jambs on the exterior of the central and western doorways are decorated with a simple continuous moulding, similar to those doorways of the synagogues at Horvat Shema', Gush Halav, and Bar'am. A small window was originally set between the main and western entrances (0.30 x 0.40 m.).

No sealed archaeological evidence whatsoever was found within the synagogue, since the floor is cut from bedrock. Dating of the synagogue by Meyers after three seasons of excavations rests on soundings outside of the synagogue. The first sounding in Annex A produced two worn coins found in a locus (L1008) sealed by a stone layer (L1007). One coin dates from the time of Aurelian (270-275 CE); the second is of Probus (276-282 CE). Pottery from this sounding cannot be more accurately dated than the third-fourth century.¹¹⁸

The second sounding in the middle section of the eastern wall is reproduced in Fig. 2:13. A north-south wall set on bedrock separates two areas. The area closer to the building is called MIII.8. In area MIII.8, a total of eight coins were found in two

118 The Probus coin has registration number R75375; that of Aurelian is R75376 Meyers, et al., 1981b, 269; for the pottery see: plate 8.19:12-16, and plate 8.20:1-8.

loci near the surface. The top layer (L8002) produced two coins of Constantius II, three unattributable Islamic coins; and one coin probably belonging to between the 6-13th centuries CE. In the lower locus (L8003) two probably fourth-century coins were found.¹¹⁹ Adjacent to this, in area MIII.3, 14 coins were found in five loci, 50% of which date to the reign of Constantine II or later. The excavators identified the locus in which most coins were found as:¹²⁰

...between the two rooms just above bedrock ... pottery and objects represent material filled in or dropped after abandonment of the synagogue complex.

However, it seems speculative whether two coins of Theodosius, and two of Constantine were 'dropped' in a fill east of the synagogue building between two annexes after the synagogue was abandoned, or these two rooms were constructed together with the original synagogue. The excavator's statement that:¹²¹

...We encounter Early Byzantine pottery in surprising quantities on bedrock in the soil layer 3034 in MIII.3

might indicate that these two rooms were constructed long after the synagogue. The published pottery however, does not reveal further proof for the construction date of the synagogue, but only casts doubt on the excavators' conclusions regarding the construction date of the structure.¹²²

The third sounding at the northern corner of the eastern wall (MIII.2) uncovered remains of the eastern wall of the synagogue below topsoil. One course of wall that was offset c. 0.13 m. from the foundation remains. Stones were placed upon

119 In Appendix A, L8003 is considered to be "identical to L8002", Meyers, et al., 1981b, 241.

120 This locus is L3034; Meyers, et al., 1981b, 16.

121 Meyers, et al., 1981b, 18.

122 Meyers, et al., 1981b, plate 8.20:9-20.

'a finely fashioned face' of a wall.¹²³ Of this wall, four courses c. 0.8 m. high are drawn on the published section. However, bedrock and courses of stone are not differentiated in the published section, making interpretation difficult. No photo has been published of this wall either. Since this foundation wall is not only finely fashioned, but is also set on bedrock, the excavators assumed that it belonged to the original eastern wall of the synagogue, and was never reconstructed.¹²⁴ This finely-fashioned wall would indicate that the entire eastern wall continued the same construction technique of the façade, and that the attached annexes are of a later date than the original building.

Three coins found in this area include two unattributable Islamic issues probably from the 13th century, and one worn coin, perhaps from the first or second centuries CE. Of the seven published loci from this sounding, a mixture of pottery was found including Early Roman, Terra Sigillata, Late Roman, Byzantine, and Arab pottery.¹²⁵ The excavator dated a plaster floor here to Period VIIa (11th-13th centuries). However, this material does not help in dating either the synagogue, or the foundation wall.

Concerning the foundation date of the synagogue, datable evidence for the structure rests on the two coins found over four meters away from its outer eastern wall, in Annex A. This structure is made of rough stones bonded to the southern part of the eastern foundation wall. Arguing that the synagogue could have been built earlier than an annex whose purpose was to support its weakest eastern wall (since its foundations had to be much deeper than any other wall) seems forced.

123 Meyers, et al., 1981b, 18.

124 In Appendix A, L8004 is defined as: "North-south wall, east foundation wall of synagogue," Meyers, et al., 1981b, 241.

125 These sherds were mainly found in locus L2008, which is at the same level as locus L5011, Meyers, et al., 1981b, 241.

However, the evidence of ashlar masonry similar to the façade wall in the north eastern corner of the eastern foundation wall indicates that a similar style was likely used in the first phase over the whole extent of the eastern wall. The style and construction of the Annex walls do not match the well-made construction found in the south foundation stones, nor the well-made southern façade. Thus, we cannot rely fully on the excavation report for the claim that the construction of this synagogue must be dated to the end of the third century on the basis of coins from Annex A. Excavation of the fill belonging to the podium attached to the southern façade of the synagogue may lead to more clues for the dating of this building.

2.2.16. Bar'am, "Synagogue" – Upper Galilee, Palaestina Secunda

The synagogue at Bar'am retains one of the few standing, preserved facades in Galilee. This site was seen as early as the thirteenth century by Rabbi Samuel bar-Shimon, who described its remains.¹²⁶ The building is a basilical structure 20.0 x 15.2 m., with walls made of finely-cut ashlar blocks. Three entrances lead from an eight-columned portico to the prayer hall, which measures 56 x 42 *podes* (18.1 x 13.35 m.).¹²⁷ Two rows of six columns each set on a stylobate separate the 6.2 m. wide nave from the flanking aisles. A transverse aisle exists in the north. The corner columns have heart-shaped sections, allowing both longitudinal and transverse beams to be placed on a single base. Similarly shaped columns exist in the corners of the portico. Two tiers of benches line the east and west walls. The floor is paved with flagstones.

The architectural fragments *in situ* at Bar'am make this site one of the richest synagogues, in addition to Chorazin and to Capernaum. The central jambs and lintel

¹²⁶ "...and from there we went to Kefar Bar'am and we found at the entrance to the town the tomb of Rabbi Pinchas son of Ya'ir, ...and built above this is a very nice synagogue" Eisenstein, 1969, 64.

¹²⁷ Chen, 1995.

are carved of limestone, with winged victories bearing wreaths. Above the lintel is a carved frieze, with a vine motif, and above this is a cornice that supports an arched window, also cut in relief. Flanking the lintel are double-spiral consoles (Fig. 2:14). The two side entrances have decorated jambs and lintels. In addition, above the lintel is a convex frieze and cornice. The western frieze is decorated in a rope pattern while the eastern frieze has a leaf motif. Above these two doorways are windows with decorated pediment for an upper course. On the sill of east window is an Aramaic inscription mentioning Eleazar son of Yudan who built the synagogue.¹²⁸

In 1998, Aviam carried out a limited excavation in three trenches within the prayer hall, and two trenches to the south and east. In the sounding at the southeastern corner of the hall (Area A), three walls were found underneath the stone floor. These walls, he suggests, could be from an earlier synagogue below the present one.¹²⁹ Furthermore, an additional stylobate was uncovered between the southernmost pedestals. This feature indicates that this synagogue had four rows of columns in the prayer hall.¹³⁰

Archaeological evidence for dating this synagogue rests on the pottery finds and numismatic evidence. Twenty knob-handles from Byzantine oil lamps were found, as well as numerous fragments. This group of lamps dates from the end of the third to the early seventh century CE. The numismatic evidence aids considerably in refining the chronological framework for the construction of the building. A total of 69 Byzantine coins were found below the paving stones. A coin of Theodosius II

¹²⁸ The inscription reads (Hüttenmeister, 1977, 33):

בנ[ה]ו אלעזר בר יודן

¹²⁹ Aviam, 2001, 159.

¹³⁰ Aviam, 2001, 159-160.

(408-450 CE) found under the floor provides a *terminus ante quem* for the construction of the synagogue.¹³¹

2.2.17. Meroth, "Stages A and B" – Upper Galilee, Phoenicia

This synagogue, located seven kilometres east of Gush Halav, was uncovered in four seasons of excavations between 1983-1989.¹³² Excavations revealed a basilical hall with a wide nave and two rows of six columns (phases I and II). Three doors are located in the southern wall, preceded by a forecourt and portico. Two tiers of benches lined the walls. The inner dimensions of the hall measure 75¹/₂ x 37¹/₂ *podes* (17.78 x 11.66 m.).¹³³ A small room, reached from the western aisle is thought to be the store-room of the synagogue. In the interior, flanking the entrance are two platforms, the eastern slightly smaller than the western platform. Near the western platform fragments of two small columns were found, one of which had an engraved menorah-stem.¹³⁴

Three phases of the early structure are evident from three superimposed floors. The first floor was simple plaster ('phase IA' or later called 'stage A.1'). The second was a polychrome mosaic dated to 'the second third of the fifth century' on the basis of two coins found underneath the mosaic.¹³⁵ One of these coins has been identified as of Valentinianus III (425-455 CE, otherwise unpublished). A Hebrew

¹³¹ In light of the Theodosius coin, the construction date of the structure must be in the fifth century, and not, as Aviam suggested, "at the very end of the fourth or beginning of the fifth century C.E." Aviam, 2001, 165.

¹³² The site is located underneath an abandoned Arab village called Kfar Marous; Ilan and Damati, 1984; Ilan and Damati, 1987; Ilan and Damati, 1989; Ilan, 1989b; Ilan, 1991; Ilan, 1995.

¹³³ Chen, 1990a, 352.

¹³⁴ Ilan surmises that the western platform was the location of the Torah Shrine, while the eastern platform was used as a pulpit for the reader or perhaps as a *cathedra*; Ilan and Damati, 1989, 31.

¹³⁵ Ilan calls the synagogue with the mosaic "phase IB" in early publications, but then called "stage A.2" in 1995. Ilan, 1995.

inscription with the words “Yodan bar Shimeon Mani” is in the mosaic.¹³⁶ A flagstone floor was laid above this (phase II). The flagstone floor is dated by ‘hundreds of coins we found underneath and between the flagstones’. The latest of these coins is dated to c. 475 CE. From this evidence, it is clear that the flagstone floor must have been laid after 475 CE, that is, at the end of the fifth or early in the sixth century.

2.2.18. Meroth, “Stage C” – Upper Galilee, Phoenicia

A major renovation to the synagogue took place in the early seventh century (phase III). The southern entrances were blocked off, and the northern wall with three new entrances was re-built more than a meter to the south, reducing the length of the hall. Now there were five columns in the hall, rather than six on each stylobate. The platforms on the southern wall of the synagogue were renovated and built slightly larger. In the rebuilt store-room, underneath the floor a hoard of 485 coins were found, more than half of gold. The latest coin is from 1193 CE. The courtyard and portico were then turned into large rooms, thought to be a study-hall and children’s schoolroom respectively. The entrance to the study hall had a large lintel with the Hebrew inscription “Blessed shall you be in going in and blessed shall you be in going out” (Deut. 28:6).¹³⁷

2.3. Metrological evidence corroborates material evidence for Byzantine dating

Over one hundred years ago, Petrie was one of the first to apply the technique of metrological research to his study of 40 rock-cut tombs in Jerusalem. In comparing the plans of these tombs, with only a measuring tape and paper for tools, Petrie

¹³⁶ Ilan and Damati, 1989, 31-33. The inscription reads:
'יודן בר שמעון מני'

¹³⁷ Ilan and Damati, 1989, 31-33. The inscription reads:

noticed that particular dimensions recur in their lengths and widths. He was looking for the lengths of the Tomb Cutters' cubits used in Jerusalem. Petrie wrote:

...Firstly, we should begin without any preconceived theories, or any attempt to find certain known cubits in these dimensions, as there is enough material here for us to deal with it quite impartially by induction

Petrie describes how it is simple to divide a long length by whole numbers until one gets to the original unit used in its design. By doing this, Petrie was able to identify those tombs cut by the Egyptian cubit, and those which cut by the Roman *pes*.

Fortunately, in the early 1920's Abel found a fourth- or fifth-century CE Greek inscription near Bethlehem belonging to the aqueduct that served Jerusalem. On it, the inscription reveals that no one is to tend the soil 15 feet from either side of this aqueduct, with a scale on the bottom.¹³⁸ The measured length of the foot is 0.3089 m. or nearly 31 cm. For metrological studies, this discovery is a boon since it can be assumed that any building using this Byzantine foot, in contrast to the Roman foot of 0.2957 m., should date to the Byzantine period. The Roman foot could have been used continually, but the introduction of a new standard in the country ought to be considered a valid chronological criterion for dating. Research in Illyricum established two additional Byzantine feet, those of 31.5 and 32 cm. Metrological research in Palestine has shown that the Byzantine foot superseded the Roman foot from the early fourth century on.

As mentioned above, ceramic evidence underneath the floor of the synagogue at Capernaum dates to the early fifth century. One hoard of 2,900 coins found at the southern entrance dates from the early to mid-fifth century. Another hoard of 6,000

ברוך אתה בבואך וברוך אתה בצאתך

138 Abel, 1926.

coins below the pavement of the courtyard also dates to the mid-fifth century. Furthermore, 6 of 67 bronze coins found in the foundations of the side-benches in the hall were embedded in the mortar, and date from Constantine in the early fourth century to Honorius and Arcadius in the early fifth.¹³⁹ Material evidence for the date of the synagogue thus derives from numismatic finds and pottery from a stratigraphic excavation.

Whereas the material evidence from excavation at Capernaum provides one source for dating the structure, metrological analysis of a building's dimensions offers further support for a Byzantine date. Considering the dimensions of the synagogue at Capernaum, research has shown that this synagogue was designed by the Byzantine foot. The measured width of the walls is 64 cm., which is equal to 2 Byzantine feet of 0.32 m. The inner contour of the synagogue, 23.00 m. x 17.28 m. defines the sides of the Pythagorean triangle, such that the length is 72 feet, and the width is 54 feet—the same as 3 x 18 and 4 x 18. The distance between the centers of the columns in the colonnades is 2.89 m. which is identical to 9 feet.

In 1978, Chen analyzed the dimensions of the Capernaum and Nabratein synagogues, among others.¹⁴⁰ The interior dimensions of the synagogue at Nabratein (15.40 x 10.24 m.) are equal to 48 x 32 Byzantine feet. The aisles are 8 feet wide, and the central nave, double this, 16 feet. Meyers's excavations recovered numismatic and ceramic material below the latest flagstone floor that gives a date in the 7th century. Excavated coins and pottery fully support the Byzantine date of the lintel as well as confirm the results of the metrological analysis.

¹³⁹ Loffreda, 1997, 230.

¹⁴⁰ Chen, 1978.

The synagogue at Horvat 'Ammudim provides a further example of the ease of using measurements for helping to date ancient synagogues. Before excavations of the site in 1979, analysis of the standing remains showed that this synagogue too was designed by the Byzantine foot. The inner dimensions represented in ancient feet are 72 *podes* by 45 *podes*. In the excavation report, published three years after the metrological analysis, 4 bronze coins were found in the fill underneath remains of a mosaic floor. The latest coin dates to 293 CE. Pottery below the floor dates to the end of the third to early fourth century.

To conclude, merely seven buildings can be securely identified as ancient synagogues dating from the fourth to sixth centuries CE. Three of these previously were believed to date from the second century owing to the similarities in their form and architectural details, (Horvat 'Ammudim, Capernaum, and Nabratein III). Now they are firmly dated to the fourth, late fifth, and sixth centuries, respectively. Evidence unearthed from excavations for dating and metrological analysis based on physical dimensions is complementary.

Chapter Three

On the 'orientation' of ancient synagogues and churches

3.1 Introduction: where was the Divine Presence?

This chapter is divided in two sections. In the first section, the theological implications for having a direction of prayer are examined in light of the Jewish sources. This evidence is contrasted with what is known about direction of prayer from the Christian sources. Apparently Jewish writers were not overly concerned with this issue. Moreover, no single authoritative view is expressed, which might be a result of the form of the Jewish sources themselves. This situation stands in marked contrast to the Christian view from as early as the second century CE, in which the East is understood as the 'correct' direction to offer prayer.

In the second section of this chapter, the archaeological evidence is presented for prayer in the Jewish and Christian realms. First, the criteria used by archaeologists to define the functional aspects of rectangular synagogue halls used by Jews are examined. Second, evidence found by archaeological excavation is reassessed to determine to the validity of modern assumptions regarding direction of prayer. Apses and niches in synagogues are the best evidence for direction of prayer in synagogues, as in Christian practice. Finally, the archaeological

evidence from Palestine and Syria is presented to show that apses and the raised *bema* preceding the apse were features of even the earliest churches.

3.1 Introduction: Where was the Divine Presence?

In 70 CE, after a three-year siege, the Legio X Fretensis had not only destroyed Jerusalem, but had also obliterated the Temple, the unique house of Yahweh, where the Shekinah or “Divine Presence” supposedly dwelt. In the words of Landsberger: “To many this signified that Jerusalem had been forsaken by the Divine.”¹ One of the most disturbing questions that Jews might have asked themselves was, “Where is the Divine Presence after the destruction of His Temple?” Though this issue did not seem to be a topic of major importance to the rabbis who wrote the Mishnah and Talmuds, some discussion of the location of the Shekinah is found in the rabbinic sources, as is the direction to which prayers are to be offered. The *Tannaim* and the *Amoraim* of Palestine and Babylonia present inconsistent opinions.² Some thought that the Shekinah is everywhere, while others believed that the Shekinah is in the west. We shall contrast the architecture of prayer halls and their layouts in light of these opinions. Moreover, since archaeologists have often utilized written rabbinic material to explain material finds, the evidence on which some of their theories have been based needs to be re-assessed. However, we should bear in mind that some of the questions that we shall pose have no certain answers.

¹ Landsberger, 1957, 182.

² For a convenient collection of the rabbinic sources on the mobility of the Shekinah, suggesting a possible attachment of the Divine Presence to synagogues after the destruction of the temple. See: Schreckenburg and Schubert, 1992, 161-3.

3.1.1 Jewish influence on Christian practice

In this chapter I will attempt to examine a number of aspects relating to the directions of influence between Jews and Christians in the first few centuries of the Common Era. One component concerns the impact of Jewish tradition on early Christian practice. In 1901, Strzygowski proposed that synagogue art must have been transmitted to the Church.³ He based his theory on frescoes in early Christian catacombs in Rome that had Old Testament themes, whereas New Testament themes appear in later catacombs. He surmised that not only did Christian art develop from art of the synagogue, but that Christian liturgy did so as well. This turn-of-the-century methodology which based wide-ranging conclusions on meagre evidence is also common in studies dealing with the synagogue.⁴

3.1.2 Christian influence on Jewish practice

In 1935, Watzinger clearly pointed out that the reverse was in fact the case—namely, that the development of the synagogue was influenced by Christian practice.⁵ Typically, synagogues from the second-third century were similar to the Galilean synagogue at Capernaum, while sixth-century synagogues had a church-like layout. This state of knowledge would seem to indicate that second-century synagogues follow Roman architectural styles, but by the sixth century, synagogue layouts follow similar patterns to fifth- and sixth-century church

³ Strzygowski, 1901, 37-39. Modern research has leaned less toward a linear evolution from one to another, and more towards a cross-fertilization over centuries, see: Kühnel, 2000, 65.

⁴ Sukenik was first to deal with the difficulties involved with this methodology, cf. Sukenik, 1934, 67.

⁵ "Die neue Typus kann nicht unbeeinflusst von der seit Konstantin in Palästina verbreiteten Bauform der christlichen Basilika erstandein sein. Die Südseite nach Jerusalem zu ist, soweit erhalten, durch eine Apsis erweitert, die als Platz des Toraschranks dient." Watzinger, 1935, 114-115.

architecture, with an apse, raised *bema* enclosed by a marble chancel, and mosaic floor.⁶

3.2. "Orientation" of synagogues

After 1935, several scholars returned to Strzygowski's suggestion that the early synagogue exerted a strong influence on the development of the church. Direction of prayer proved to be an outstanding issue. According to Sukenik, since the sixth-century synagogues at Beth Alpha and Hammat Gader had apses facing Jerusalem, thus directing prayer in that direction, all synagogues must have been "oriented" toward Jerusalem, regardless of whether an apse existed or not. This practice of praying towards Jerusalem has often been called "orientation" or "sacred direction."⁷ Furthermore, since the dating for "Galilean" synagogues, like the one at Capernaum was left unquestioned, scholars further assumed that Jews prayed toward the destroyed Temple in Jerusalem already from the second-century CE.⁸

3.2.1 Jewish prayer toward Jerusalem?

In support of this idea directing prayer toward Jerusalem, Kraeling introduced complementary evidence from the synagogue excavations at Dura-Europos.⁹ Here a niche existed in the western wall of the synagogue (Fig. 3:1). If the congregation faced this niche while praying, reasoned Kraeling, then already by the mid-third century Jews at this border-town on the Euphrates must have prayed toward Jerusalem. Since the destruction of this synagogue can be securely

⁶ Sukenik excavated the synagogue at Beth Alpha in 1929 and Hammat Gader in 1934; Sukenik, 1932; Sukenik, 1935.

⁷ Some modern scholars use the term "sacred wall," while one scholar uses the expression "wall of orientation," following Sukenik, see: Meyers and Strange, 1981, 143f; Kraeling, 1956, 24.

⁸ The earliest is Krauss, 1922, 317-334.

dated to before the Sassanian conquest in 256 CE, the position of the niche would suggest that here Jews prayed toward Jerusalem.¹⁰ If this was the practice at a large caravan town in the desert, then perhaps it was normative on a much wider scale.

3.3. Christian prayer toward East

In contrast to an uncertainty about Jewish practice, Christian prayer towards the east is clearly attested in the Levant before the fifth century in written sources, inasmuch as the early church fathers discuss the East as the direction of prayer.

3.3.1 Written sources for prayer toward the East

In Tertullian's *Ad Nationes*, written at the turn of the second century in Carthage, good and light come from the east. Tertullian also writes that Christians were thought of as sun-worshippers, since they were known to turn to the east in prayer.¹¹ Origen, after his move to Caesarea in Palestine, wrote in his *Homilies* that redemption comes from the east, and evil from the west.¹² Written doctrine can be found in the *Apostolic Constitutions*, probably composed in Syria some time in the 380's CE, which give clear instructions that the apse of a church, and therefore prayer, should be in the east.¹³ From a letter of Paulinus, bishop of Nola (east of Naples) from 409 CE, we know that the church there had its apse to the

⁹ See Kraeling, 1956, 24-25; and also Landsberger, 1957, 181.

¹⁰ For issues involved in dating the end of Dura: Millar, 1993, 162.

¹¹ Denique inde suspicio quod innotuerit nos ad orientis regionem precari. *Apol. xvi.* Tertullian, 1931. For dating of this text see: Barnes, 1985, 33-34.

¹² Origen, *Hom. in Lev. IX:10; 2.*

¹³ *Ap. Const. II:57;3:*

Καὶ πρῶτον μὲν ὁ οἶκος ἔστω ἐπιμήκης, κατὰ ἀνατολὰς τετραγώνος, ἐξ ἑκατέρων τῶν μερῶν ἔχων τὰ παστοφόρια πρὸς ἀνατολήν, ὅστις ἔοικεν νήσω
Metzger, 1985-1987; Davies, 1952, 82.

north, and “does not face east in the ordinary way.”¹⁴ Socrates, writing the continuation of Eusebius’ *History of the Church* in fifth-century Constantinople, complained that the western apse of the Constantinian church in Antioch was reversed.¹⁵

The canonical layout is as follows: a church ought to have a long hall, divided into a nave and flanking aisles by two rows of columns. The length should be twice the width (see Appendix A). The axis of the hall should be east-west. Windows set in the wall above the arches should allow light into the nave. The aisles should have sloping roofs, lower than the central nave. An apse should be in the east. On the left, flanking the apse, should be the diaconicon (or sacristy) for the sacred vessels, and on the right the prothesis (or martyrs chapel) for preparation of the service. Even though textual sources do not prove that the canon was actually imposed, it is clear from archaeological evidence that by the fifth-century nearly all churches in the territory of Palestine and Syria followed this pattern.¹⁶ In the fourth century, however, we still lack the evidence to show how widespread this canonical layout was in this area.

3.4. Archaeological evidence for Christian direction of prayer

Examining several dated churches in this area to compare how the written instructions in the *Apostolic Constitutions* were followed may prove fruitful. It is not my intention here to follow the development of the basilica over the empire,

¹⁴ Letter 32, 13:

Prospectus basilicae non, ut usitatio mos est, Orientem spectat, sed ad domini mei beati Felicis basilicam pertinet memoriam eius adspiciens.

See Wilkinson, 1984.

¹⁵ Socrates, *Hist Ecc* I;V;22:

Inverus est ecclesiae situs, neque enim altare ad solis ortum spectat, sed ad occasum.

See: Landsberger, 1957, 201.

¹⁶ Peña, 1997, 65, Ovadiah, 1970, 185-218.

but rather to point to several examples of typical Christian architecture that allow comparisons to contemporaneous synagogues.

A number of churches built in the Holy Land served to commemorate some event on the same spot mentioned in the holy texts. Directing the worshipper's gaze to that location was one of the cardinal functions of a building such as the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.¹⁷ For standing archaeological remains, Syria is especially rewarding for research, since many of the once vibrant sites lay empty for hundreds of years and hence preserved their original features with few modifications.

3.4.1 Churches in Palestine

In the pre-Constantinian development of the Church, small communities gathered in private homes, city centres and other locales. By 200 CE, a liturgy developed with particular requirements: a place to celebrate the Eucharist and to hear the word of God. The *domus ecclesiae* fulfilled that need.¹⁸ These were renovated houses used as places of worship. The first part of the service (Mass of the Catechumens) consisted of readings, a sermon, and prayer attended by both the faithful and the catechumens (converts who were not yet baptised). Catechumens were not allowed to attend the second part of the service (Liturgy of the Faithful), when the offerings were brought to the sanctuary, where the Eucharist and communion took place. The House of Peter at Capernaum is one example of a *domus ecclesiae*.¹⁹ In the first century, this simple house consisted of a courtyard surrounded by several rooms. In the mid-first century, the largest

¹⁷ Mango, 1972, 3.

¹⁸ White, 1990, 111-123.

room of the house was enlarged to the east, and a roof was now supported by a barrel vault, increasing the height of the hall. The walls and floors were then plastered.

Christianity was granted official standing by Constantine from 313 CE by the Edict of Milan, and from then on the Church became the dominant religious power. Constantine's mother Helena, a devout Christian herself, paid homage to the Holy Land by her pilgrimage in 326/7 CE. Once there, she oversaw the building of churches at several of the most holy Christian sites: the Holy Sepulchre Martyrium Golgotha (begun in 325, consecrated in 336 CE); the Nativity church in Bethlehem; and the Eleona church on the Mount of Olives (Fig. 3:2). In the early phases of the development of church architecture, namely, in the fourth century, there was no standard church "type". At the church of the Nativity, for example, the octagonal martyrium marking the rock over the grotto, by tradition the birth-place of Christ attached to the basilica, takes the place of an apse. Variety is the best way to describe building during Constantine's reign.²⁰

The basilica was a type of building recognized throughout the first and second centuries of the Roman empire and used for many functions, but typically as a large meeting hall. The forum basilica was a part of the market in any Roman city, but was covered by a roof. Some cities had several basilicae, each for a specific function, for money exchanges, for clothing, or for law courts. As a court, the tribune would sit on a raised dais with the statue of the emperor in a nearby shrine. For without the shrine and the icon of the emperor, business could not be bindingly conducted. In Rome, Constantine completed the huge basilica begun by

¹⁹ For the excavation report: Corbo, 1975, 75-106. For questions regarding the construction date: Taylor, 1993, 273-284.

Maxentius, and added an apse to the north and an entrance at the south, facing the forum. In the eastern end, Constantine placed his colossal statue.²¹ This is the first instance of a secular basilica being converted into a church. According to Krautheimer, the three essential characteristics that categorise the basilica are its oblong plan and longitudinal axis; the timber roof; and the terminating tribunal, often in the form of a semicircular apse.²²

Eusebius reports that beginning in the last quarter of the third century, churches were built throughout the Holy Land.²³ In his travels in the Holy Land, the Bordeaux Pilgrim in 333 CE saw the Nativity church among others.²⁴ Floor mosaics exposed in the 1930's of the Constantinian edifice revealed plant, animal and geometric motifs.²⁵ Similarly, in the cathedral at Tyre, Eusebius mentions a direct line of sight leading from the atrium to the nave, and from there to the sanctuary, enclosed by the chancel screen (consecrated in 316/7 CE). There the bishop and clergy were enthroned.

This kind of building fulfilled the need for church processions, for communion, and for separating the catechumens from the Eucharistic service. The interiors of churches were lavish, with gold and silver furnishings, marble columns, and mosaic decoration. In contrast, the exteriors of churches were plain.

²⁰ Krautheimer, 1986, 66-67.

²¹ Krautheimer, 1980, 28.

²² Krautheimer, 1986, 42-43.

²³ HE, X:iii:1:

Ἐπὶ δὴ τούτοις τὸ πᾶσιν εὐκταῖον ἡμῖν καὶ ποθούμενον συνεκροτεῖτο θέαμα, ἐγκαινίων ἑορταὶ κατὰ πόλεις καὶ τῶν ἄρτι νεοπαγῶν προσευκτηρίων ἀφιερώσεις, ἐπισκόπων ἐπὶ ταῦτόν συνηλύσεις

After this there was brought about that spectacle for which we all prayed and longed: festivals of dedication in the cities and consecrations of the newly-built houses of prayer, assemblages of bishops, comings together of those from far off foreign lands...

²⁴ Itinerarium Burdigalense, 598; 6:

duo a parte sinistra est Bethleem, ubi natus est Dominus Iesus Christus; ibi basilica facta est iussu Constantini.

Itineraria et alia geographica, 1965.

3.4.2 Several Churches founded by Constantine have apses in the West
Several Constantinian foundations such as St. Peter's, St. Paul's, and San Lorenzo in Rome, the cathedral at Tyre, or the Constantinian church at Antioch, and the Holy Sepulchre Martyrium in Jerusalem have apses to the west, and their entrances in the east.²⁶ For the Holy Sepulchre, topography and location of the tomb may have been a decisive factor in their orientation (Fig. 3:3). This layout allows easy entry to the Martyrium from the Cardo, but difficult access to the Triportico and Golgotha next to the sacred Tomb.

Nevertheless, other churches, such as the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem,²⁷ Church at Emmaus,²⁸ and the Church at Eleona²⁹ are oriented toward the East. The written sources suggest that the canon set out by the *Apostolic Constitutions* directing apses and prayer to be in the east reflects a practice at least 200 years old, dating from the time of Clement of Alexandria.

In the fourth century, the early church did not yet possess monumental architecture. Constantine certainly was looking for a building style that would suit the needs of Christianity throughout the empire. The basilical hall was the common feature of most of Constantine's later foundations.³⁰

By the fifth century, the Church in the east was torn by acrid christological controversies. As a result of this internal strife, the liturgies of Antioch and Alexandria parted. It was at this time that standard types of churches evolved for services, for the cult of the martyrs, for private needs, and for large public

²⁵ Harvey, 1935; Richmond, 1936; Richmond, 1936.

²⁶ For a list of churches see: Vogel, 1964, 14.

²⁷ Hamilton, 1947.

²⁸ Vincent and Abel, 1932. The construction date of this building is not certain, see: Bagatti, 1984, 161.

²⁹ Vincent and Abel, 1920, 339.

³⁰ Ward-Perkins, 1954, reprinted in: Ward-Perkins, 1994, 463.

gatherings.³¹ Parish churches, composed of nave, apse, and flanking aisles served the people in villages. The prothesis, a square room to the north of the apse, was typically used as a place for preparation of the elements before being brought to the altar. The diaconicon, to the south, was a place for the deacons to receive the offerings of the people, and a place for the vestments and church treasure. However, the functions of these rooms (*pastophoria*) were not the same in every community. Local custom, as well as amount of funds available determined whether the ceiling was coffered or left as timber.

In the fifth century and early sixth centuries, the emperors erected fewer new structures in Palestine than in the fourth century. At Gaza, a cruciform church was built by the empress Eudokia according to a plan sent from Constantinople (401 CE), which is described by Mark the Deacon in his *Life of Porphyry*.³² In 484 CE the emperor Zeno erected an octagonal church at Mt. Gerizim, called the Church of the Theotokos.³³ Other changes in form are apparent in the mid-fifth century at Ramat Rachel, near Jerusalem, a village church has a polygonal external apse.³⁴ The Church of the Multiplication of the Loaves and Fishes at Tabgha, on the northern shore of the sea of Galilee (ca. 500 CE), has a rectangular transept (Fig. 3:4),³⁵ while the Justinianic reconstruction of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem has an apsidal transept.³⁶

In Palestine, the number of churches built in the fifth century was exceeded by the number of those built in the sixth century. In Galilee and along the coast, it seems that

³¹ Krautheimer, 1986, 98

³² See Mango, 1972, 30-32 for a translation of chapter 75.

³³ The church was excavated by Magen; Magen, 1990.

³⁴ Testini, 1962, esp. 89; Testini, 1964.

³⁵ Schneider, 1937; Ovadiah, 1970, 56.

³⁶ Hamilton, 1947; Krautheimer, 279.

churches were first constructed near large cities such as Scythopolis and Acco.³⁷ During the reign of Justinian, ecclesiastical buildings developed along similar lines as before, but some new features were introduced.³⁸ Churches in the Negev, such as those at Mamphis, Ovdad and Shivta exchanged square *pastophoria* for apses, while at other sites, such as at Philoteria (Beth Yerah) on the southern shore of the sea of Galilee, subsidiary apses were added to the north and south aisles, where there had been a flat wall before.³⁹

3.4.3 Syrian churches

For standing archaeological remains, Syria is especially rewarding for research, since many of the once vibrant sites lay empty for hundreds of years and hence preserved their original features with few modifications. Turning to Butler's corpus of churches, the earliest church dated by inscription is at Fafirtin in Northern Syria, not far from Qalat Sim'an (Fig. 3:5). The north side of the church was cut from bedrock, while of the walls, only the apse has been preserved standing to its original height. The church is plain, with very little decoration. A single door from the west led to a spacious nave, over 23 metres in length. Six columns with simple Doric- or Tuscan-style capitals separate the nave from the flanking aisles. Two square rooms flank the central decorated apse. On the lintel above one of two doors in the south wall is an inscription which gives the date, 372 CE. Above the clerestory, Butler noted rectangular windows that were devoid of any ornament.⁴⁰ A better-preserved example at Harab Sems is dated to the mid-fourth-century (Fig. 3:6). Here, the side walls, originally built of clay and fieldstones, have fallen. This church still has its northern entrances preserved. Three entrances lead to a nave of 5 bays. Windows over the main doorway and

³⁷ Aviam, 1999, 286.

³⁸ Ovadiah calls this period "the climax of church building in the Holy Land", 1970, 188.

³⁹ Delougaz, 1960.

⁴⁰ Butler, 1969, 33.

windows preserved above the arches of the arcades, allow light to filter into the nave. The apse is set off from the nave by a raised *bema*, enclosed by a chancel, which projects into the first bay of the nave.⁴¹

From Butler's work, a number of common features can be discerned for churches of Syria dating from the fourth to sixth centuries. The churches in Northern Syria are typically basilicae, with two rows of columns separating the nave from the lateral aisles. Double-pitched roofs are common. Almost all these churches are oriented with the apse to the east; most have two rooms, the prothesis and diaconicon, flanking the apse. Some times a semicircular vault covers these rooms, while other examples are simple square rooms with flat roofs. Western doors do not appear in all fourth-century churches, but are standard by the sixth century. Colonnades along the outside of the church are typically along the south or the west walls or some times both. Windows are set in the second-storey walls above the arches of the arcades, with either flat or arched lintels. Often, a window is placed in the apse.

1. Baalbek

At Baalbek, a church built over the remains of a temple to Jupiter was discovered by the German expedition led by Wiegand (Fig. 3:7).⁴² This church is especially interesting since it was probably built in the fourth century with the apse towards the west and main entrance in the east wall. Like other churches in the north, it has a nave separated from flanking aisles by piers, not columns. Three arches supported the clerestory. Nine windows in the clerestory let light into the

⁴¹ Butler, 1969, 31.

⁴² Wiegand, 1923, pp. 130-144.

nave and the roof was double pitched and probably made of wood. However, some time in the sixth century, this church was re-modelled. The eastern doorway was widened, and replaced by an apse. In the west end, a door was cut through the former apse. This major reconstruction indicates that the direction of prayer toward the east must have been the norm by this time.

2. Interaxial distance between roof supports and the axis toward the focal point

An interesting feature of the developing architecture of church layouts is the expanding axial distance between columns. The fourth-century church at Banqusa has an axial intercolumniation (the distance between the centres of two adjacent columns) of about 2 metres. By the second half of the sixth century, thanks to the use of piers instead of columns, the Bizzos church in Ruweiha has an axial intercolumniation of over 8.5 metres. Increasing the size of the bay by the use of fewer piers than columns would produce an overall effect of enlarging the size of the hall. Fewer piers than columns are required to support the roof, thereby enlarging the floor-space of the hall and removing some of the obstruction from the worshippers' view. In all of these churches, regardless of the shape and form of the internal layout, whether columns or larger piers, the main axis of the liturgy of the church is always longitudinal. That is to say, the focal point of the liturgy always occurs at one end of the hall. This focal point is set off from the rest of the nave by a platform reached by one or two steps.

3.5. Direction of influence: Jewish-Christian, Christian-Jewish, or separate

We will attempt to tackle the problem dealing with direction of influence: was the synagogue a model for the church in having a "sacred direction"?

Confusion over the two separate issues of alignment of the main doors and direction of prayer has been the order of the day in studies dealing with ancient synagogues.⁴³ In order to look at some of the issues involved, we must re-examine solidly dated examples of early synagogues, particularly those in Palestine, to see whether as a rule they were aligned so as to direct prayer toward Jerusalem.

3.6. Written sources from the Jewish realm

First, let us contrast some of the Jewish written sources concerning direction of prayer and alignment of synagogues. Relying on written sources after the destruction of the Temple, one finds no authoritative view of where Yahweh is, or in which direction one should pray.

3.6.1 Location of the Divine Presence

While the Temple existed, the prophet Daniel prayed in the direction of Jerusalem (Dan. 6:11). Where was the Lord after His sanctuary was destroyed? In the Midrashim, a difficult-to-date exegetical work perhaps from third-century Palestine, several differing views are expressed.⁴⁴ One view is that when the Temple was destroyed, the “Divine Presence” simply vanished into Heaven.⁴⁵ A second view betrays incredulity that the Temple had been destroyed over 100 years before and no longer existed. Rabbi Eliezer ben Pedat was given leadership

⁴³ Wilkinson clearly distinguishes between direction of prayer and alignment of the main entrances in synagogues, but not between direction of prayer and church type: “there can be equally little doubt that the church type was derived from that of the synagogue...” Wilkinson, 1984, 16 and 29; and direction of prayer, most recently Amit, 1995.

⁴⁴ For a discussion of the date of this work, its structure, and redaction traditions, see: Stemberger, 1991, 108-139.

⁴⁵ M. Psalms 11:3:

בשמים כסאו כל זמן שבית המקדש קיים היתה שכינה שרויה בתוכה וכיון
שגרמו העונות ונחרב בית המקדש סילק שכינתו בשמים

On the interpretation of the Mishnah on Psalms, see: Braude, 1959, esp. 160.

of the school of Tiberias in 279 CE, but died in the same year. This rabbi said: “The Lord does not depart from his place, whether destroyed or not... even though his Throne is in Heaven, the Divine Presence (Shekinah) is in the Temple.”⁴⁶

By the turn of the fourth century, some Babylonian rabbis believed that the location of the Divine Presence shifted from the Temple Mount to particular synagogues, while other rabbis thought that the Shekinah was “everywhere.” Rabbi Abaye (280-339 CE), one of the fourth generation of Amoraim and head of the academy of Pumbeditha, believed that the Shekinah alternated Its presence between the Huzal synagogue and the Shafveyatif synagogue at Nehardea, but was never in both at the same time.⁴⁷ According to the Mekhilta de R. Yishmael, a work which may date as early as the end of the third century, the Shekinah existed “wherever 10 men pray”, perhaps to legitimize the quorum of 10 men needed for communal prayer.⁴⁸ A similar view is expressed by the Babylonian Rabbis Oshaia and Ishmael, who believed that the Divine Presence was everywhere.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ m. Psalms 11:3:

אמר ר' אלעזר בן פדת בין חרב ובין שאינו חרב, השכינה לא זזה ממקומה

On this particular rabbi see: Stemberger, 1991, 89.

⁴⁷ B.Meg. 29a

תניא ריש בן יוחי אומר בוא וראה כמה חביבין ישראל לפני הקבייה שבכל מקום שגלו שכינה עמהן, גלו למצרים שכינה עמהן... גלו לבבל שכינה עמהן... בבבל היכא, אמר אביי בבי כנישתא דהוצל ובי כנישתא דשף ויתיב בנהרדעא, ולא תימא היכא והכא אלא זמנים הכא וזמנים הכא.

It has been taught that Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai said, Come and see how beloved is Israel in the sight of God, in that to every place they were exiled the Divine Presence went with them. they were exiled to Egypt and the Divine Presence was with them... they were exiled to Babylonia and the Divine Presence was with them... Where in Babylonia Abbaye said, in the synagogue of Huzal and in the synagogue of Saf we-Yativ in Nehardea. Do not, however, say that it is [both] here and there, but sometimes here and sometimes there.

About this rabbi: Stemberger, 1991, 95; on the historic traditions associated with these particular synagogues: Oppenheimer, 1987, 278.

⁴⁸ M. de R. Yishmael, Bahodesh 11:45.

All these differing ideas concerning the location of the Divine Presence indicate confusion on this issue. To those who felt that the Presence was everywhere, perhaps it really did not matter at all to which direction one would pray.

3.6.2 Direction of prayer

As there is no unified view of the location of the Divine Presence in either the Palestinian Talmud or the later Babylonian Talmud, it would be peculiar to find a single view on which direction to pray. An often-quoted passage in the Mishnah, in the first Order, "Seeds," the first tractate "Benedictions" contains regulations concerning prayer. In this early tractate, perhaps dating to the 2nd century but problematic in its position in the Order "Seeds," the Holy of Holies of the Temple in Jerusalem is described as the direction to which one should pray.⁵⁰ Again, the fact that the Temple had been destroyed for over a century does not seem to matter. This view is repeated in the later Palestinian Talmud.⁵¹ The third century R. Joshua b. Levi from Lod, and Rabbi Abbahu the head of a school in

מכאן אמרו כל עשרה בני אדם שנכנסין לבית הכנסת
שכינה עמהם שנאמר אלהים נצב בעדת אל

In connection with this passage the sages said: Whenever ten persons assemble in a synagogue the Shekinah is with them, as it is said: "God standeth in the congregation of God".

On this work, see: Lauterbach, 1933.

⁴⁹ B. Bab. Bat. 25a

ורבי אושעיה סבר: שכינה בכל מקום ...
ואף רבי ישמאל סבר: שכינה בכל מקום

⁵⁰ M. Berachot 4:5.

היה רוכב על החמור יורד. אם אינו יכול לירד יחזיר את פניו. ואם אינו

יכול להחזיר את פניו יכולין את לבו כנגד בית קודשי הקדושים

One who is riding on an ass should dismount [to recite the prayer] If he cannot dismount, he should turn [to face toward Jerusalem] and if he cannot turn, he should direct his thoughts to the chamber of the Holy of Holies [in the temple of Jerusalem]

Caesarea, stated that prayer should be toward the west.⁵² Comparison of synagogue entrances to the gates of the the Tent of Meeting (Num 2:2) as well as those of the Temple can be found in the early fourth-century Tosephta. In this work, it is stated that the synagogue doors should open to the east, since that is the direction in which the Tent of Meeting had its gates.⁵³ A certain xenophobia can be discerned through the blind Rabbi Sheshet who in about 300 CE believed that any direction was appropriate except toward the east, because that is how the *Minim* teach, perhaps referring to Christians.⁵⁴

3.7. Archaeological evidence in synagogues for direction of prayer

With this rather jumbled view of where the Divine Presence was, and the resulting absence of an authoritative *dictum* concerning which direction to pray, archaeological remains of synagogues dating from the fourth to sixth centuries might be considered helpful. However, even considering the archaeological reports of over 100 synagogue sites, the problem concerning direction of prayer in

⁵¹ According to one scholar, this tractate proves that prayer toward Jerusalem was turned into law, as derived from biblical practice: Meyers, 1980, 100 and reproduced in Meyers, 1987, 129.

⁵² BT Baba Bathra 25a:

ורבי אבהו אמר: שכינה במערב

On Rabbi Abbahu see: Levine, 1975.

⁵³ Tos. Meg. IV; 22

אין פותחין פתחי בתי כנסת אלא למזרח, שכן מצינו בהיכל שהיה פתוח למזרח.

On the differing views of dating the Tosephta: Goldberg, 1987, 284; Stemberger, 1991, 149; Landsberger, 1957, 192.

⁵⁴ BT Baba Batra 25a

ואף רב ששת סבר: שכינה בכל מקום... לכל רוחתא אוקמן לבר ממזרח

ולאו משום דלית ביה שכינתא אלא משום דמורו בר מיני

R. Sheshet also held that the Shechinah is in all places, because [when desiring to pray] he used to say to his attendant: Set me facing any way except the east. And this was not because the Shechinah is not there, but because the *Minim* prescribe turning to the east.

For whom the "*Minim*" refers to and citations from Justin Martyr, Jerome, and rabbinic sources, see: Alon, 1984, 289.

these buildings is a complicated one. Their plans follow no consistent pattern. Halls identified as synagogues have been found with a multitude of layouts, with main entrances on the east as at Sumaqa, to the west as at ed-Dikke, or to the north as at Qasrin, and more often, in those synagogues north of Jerusalem, in the south walls, as at Capernaum. Horvat Susiya and Eshtemo'a have niches in their northern walls, while Arbel has a niche in the southern wall. All these niches are in the direction of Jerusalem. Synagogues having apses often are usually aligned toward Jerusalem too, such as at Beth Alpha, although an exception is the synagogue at Gaza.

Often no certain means exist to definitely ascribe a direction of prayer to a basilical hall thought to be a synagogue. Furthermore, the Rabbinic sources indicate that the Torah Ark was for a long time movable, being carried into the hall when necessary.⁵⁵ In that case, there may exist no archaeological evidence to indicate the use of a building as a synagogue for prayer, or for direction of prayer.

To assess whether archaeological remains can give clues to the direction of prayer, we will examine the remains of platforms (chapter 5) niches and apses (chapter 6) to ascertain how these remains are indicative of prayer.

3.7.1. Criteria used by archeologists for describing direction of prayer

Four criteria have been used by archaeologists to describe "orientation" as a loosely-defined encompassing term for the direction of prayer. After excavation of public buildings with some Jewish symbols indicative of a synagogue, one or

⁵⁵ Tos. Meg. 4:21b

כיצד היו זקנים יושבין, פניהם כלפי העם ואחריהן כלפי קודש. כשמניחין את
התיבה פניה כלפי העם ואחריה כלפי קודש.

more of these criteria have been considered adequate for defining the direction that the community prayed to. These are:

1. The architectural design of the hall, as indicated by the columns, or position of an apse or niche to indicate the direction of prayer—as at Beth Alpha
 2. Direction of mosaic depictions of Jewish symbols—as at Hammat Tiberias
 3. Furnishings in the hall, such as raised platforms—as at Meroth
 4. External appearance of a building, such as the location of the main doorways—as at Capernaum
1. Problems with these criteria

In some cases, any one of these features may indicate direction of prayer but it is not uniformly so. Each case must be examined in context. A U-shaped stylobate supporting columns, as at Capernaum, may indicate direction of prayer, as the doors are also in the southern wall. At 'En Gedi, the doorways are not.

In some later synagogues, the *bema* is set into an apse such as that at Beth Alpha. It seems that the similarity between church apses and apses or niches in synagogues is the strongest reason so far for assigning prayer towards a particular direction.

3.8. An obstacle: view and access to some platforms interrupted by columns and entrances

In Galilean synagogues having a raised platform against their southern wall, direction of prayer would have been toward the south, that is, toward Jerusalem. The synagogues at Capernaum, Chorazin, and Arbel have a U-shaped layout of the interior columns. Focus of prayer was probably to have been directed

The elders would sit with their faces toward the people and their backs toward the holy (qodesh). When the Ark was set down, it faced the people and its back toward the holy.

toward the flat, southern wall unhindered by columns. Interestingly, similar interior layouts exist in several churches with apses, such as those at El-Bara in Apamea.⁵⁶

Traces of a stone or plastered platform next to the main entrance have been uncovered at the synagogues such as Capernaum, Gush Halav, Nabratein, and Meroth.⁵⁷ At Gush Halav, a platform is partially set in the west aisle. Here, then, the Torah Shrine would have been partially hidden from the worshipper's view by the columnar supports of the roof.⁵⁸

Another, less successful attempt to surmount the architectural problem of the position of the *bema* within a basilical, columned hall is the late fourth-century synagogue on the hill at Khirbet Shema', located opposite the synagogue at Meiron (Fig. 3:8).⁵⁹ Here, the large platform was set abutting the southern wall, which is closest to Jerusalem, and not on the eastern wall, in the wide nave, along the main axis of the building. Thus, access to this platform must have been from between or around the two central columns, whose pedestals nearly touch this platform. While this solution for the location of the platform solved the problem of the platform's location behind the front door, the platform was now set in the southern aisle, and is partially hidden by the columnar supports for the roof.

3.9. An enhanced axis in synagogues

Two contemporaneous architectural changes were made to overcome the awkward placement of the Torah scrolls and improve access to them. The earliest

⁵⁶ Lassus, 1972, 21; and Tchalenko, 1953-58, vol III, pl. XII.

⁵⁷ Meyers, Meyers and Strange, 1990; Meyers, 1982; Ilan, 1995.

⁵⁸ Apologetically explained as "...not an error of judgement but an expression of tenacity to the principles of Roman sacral architecture." Tsafir, 1987, 149.

⁵⁹ Meyers, Kraabel and Strange, 1976. For questions as to the validity of the date see: Loffreda, 1981; Magness, 1997.

ought to be dated to the late fourth century, or even the beginning of the fifth century CE, in the synagogue at 'En Gedi. Here, the main doors of the phase I synagogue were blocked (above Ch. 2.2.1, and Fig. 3:9). The central door formed a kind of niche in phase II, while the main entrance now was set in the west. Another example is the synagogue at Meroth.⁶⁰ In the third phase of construction, the southern entrances were blocked, and new entrances were set in the rebuilt northern wall.⁶¹ Access to the raised platforms was no longer hindered by the doorways. The result of sealing the main southern entrance is essentially a basilical hall with an enhanced axial view of the platforms set next to the stylobates on the flat, blank southern wall presumably for the central point of the liturgy—the Torah Shrine. However, these platforms were not moved to the centre of the southern wall along the axis of the hall, but were still somewhat hidden by the columns supporting the roof set on the stylobate.

3.9.1 Synagogues at Ma'oz Hayyim and at Rehov near Scythopolis

Two earlier examples of a basilical hall with a raised platform against a flat southern wall are the synagogue at Rehov, and the synagogue at Ma'oz Hayyim, both near Scythopolis in the Jordan Valley. The synagogue at Rehov has a rectangular platform set against the southern wall, like the dais in a Roman basilica (Fig. 3:10). A similar platform was found in the phase 1 synagogue at Ma'oz Hayyim (Fig. 3:11).⁶² The synagogue at Ma'oz Hayyim is an especially appropriate example, since an apse was added to the south wall in its second phase. This occurred at some time in the early fifth century, when the earlier

⁶⁰ Ilan, 1995.

⁶¹ The change in layout is dated by the excavators to Stage C, 620-1200 CE; Ilan, 1995, 288.

⁶² Tzaferis, 1974a; Tzaferis, 1974b; Tzaferis, 1981; Tzaferis, 1982.

structure underwent major renovation. After the prayer hall was lengthened by 4 metres to the north, a mosaic was laid in the hall; and the southern wall was pierced to allow a semicircular apse to be built there. This enhanced southern wall would then indicate that the direction of prayer was toward the south, namely, toward Jerusalem. At both these sites, the raised platform in the south, separated from the prayer hall by a chancel screens and posts, creates an internal space similar to the internal layout of a basilical church.

3.10 *Bema* and chancel screens in churches and synagogues

Finally, a word about the *bema* and chancel. The *bema* platform and surrounding chancel existed even in the earliest churches, as noted by Eusebius in the cathedral at Tyre.⁶³ In Duval's study of the development of Christian architecture in Jordan and Palestine, he found that the major change in the *bema* from the fourth to sixth centuries was its enlargement into the nave. Often the *bema* and chancel enclosed the central apse and southern apse, although instances of the chancel enclosing both lateral apses are well attested in Jordan and the Negev.⁶⁴ The chancel, which separates the *bema* from the prayer hall was a well-known architectural feature of the Roman world. On a coin of Antoninus Pius dated to 140 CE is a depiction of a chancel screen before his temple in Rome. Chancel screens were used in the hippodrome in Constantinople to separate the Emperor from the crowds. In tracing the use of chancel screens as markers of

⁶³ Ecc. Hist. IV;iv;44; (Eusebius, 1957).

αὐθις καὶ τάδε, ὡς ἂν εἶη τοῖς πολλοῖς ἄβατα, τοῖς ἀπὸ ξύλου περιέφραττε δικτύοις εἰς ἄκρον ἐντέχνου λεπτουργίας ἐξησκημένοις, ὡς θαυμάσιον τοῖς ὀρώσιν παρέχειν τὴν θέαν.

and again surrounded this part also, that the multitude might not tread thereon, with a fence of wooden lattice-work, delicately wrought with the craftsman's utmost skill, so as to present a marvelous spectacle to those that see it.

⁶⁴ Duval, 1994, 167.

'sacred space' from the Roman period to Byzantine times, Branham points out that the chancel never lost its inherent qualities in demarcating holiness.⁶⁵

In churches, the function of the *bema* and the chancel was to separate the sanctuary and the clergy from the congregation. What was their function in synagogues? Hachlili suggests that the purpose of the chancel in synagogues was to separate the Torah Shrine from the prayer hall, which seems strikingly similar to the purpose of the chancel in the church.⁶⁶ Branham suggests that the chancel was a means by which communities could memorialize the sacredness of the destroyed Temple.⁶⁷ Clearly the purpose of the chancel was to form a limit or boundary, but exactly why such a boundary was present in some synagogues and not in others will be dealt with below in chapter six.

3.11 Conclusion

The archaeological record is a rich source of material for examining the spread of Christian tradition and Jewish practice from the fourth century on. In the study of ancient synagogues, if we were to assume that the presence of a raised platform and mosaics indicate the direction of prayer, then archaeological evidence would show that from the fourth century, Jews in Palestine probably did pray toward Jerusalem. However, in the synagogue at Beth She'arim, there are clear indications that not all communities directed prayer toward Jerusalem. Here the raised *bema* of the synagogue is attached to the north-west wall, instead of the southern wall. Another exception is the synagogue at Gaza where the mosaic of King David playing the lyre, dated to 508/9 CE by its inscription, points in a south eastern direction, instead of north-east. Moreover, there was no single shape or

⁶⁵ Branham, 1992, 375-394.

⁶⁶ Hachlili, 1996, 108.

form of synagogue that was adopted by most communities. By the fifth century though, some Jewish communities located near sizeable Christian or pagan populations, such as Scythopolis or Gaza, had adapted the typical Christian basilica to their own use.

The villages in the Galilee were a different story, inhabited as they were mostly by Jews. Surrounding them were Graeco-Roman towns and cities where only a minority of the population was Jewish.⁶⁸ Jews living in Galilee as well as the rest of Palestine, were probably not especially keen to change their practices. At the same time that the basilica was being adapted for Christian liturgy, it seems that Jews were grappling with their own predicament over the Divine Presence itself. As has been shown, fourth-century synagogues show an eclecticism of form and layout. Watzinger, while incorrectly dating the “Galilean synagogues” two hundred years too early, was nevertheless the first to grasp the clear connection between synagogue and church architecture, that is between a Christian tradition over 100 years old, and evolving Jewish practice.

In those first centuries after the destruction of the Temple, it is highly unlikely that the Jews with their uncertainty as to the very existence, much less the location of the Divine Presence, and the subsequent differences over the “normative” direction of prayer, could have influenced the layout of early churches. Rather, present evidence suggests that the Church first seized upon the model of the standard Roman basilica, and modified it for its own needs. The functional aspect *per se*, that is the axial layout of the basilica, where the worshipper is directed from the entrance to the apse at the far end of the hall, was

⁶⁷ Branham, 1992, 393.

⁶⁸ Goodman, 1983, 41ff.

adapted by both Christians and by Jews. A century after the apsidal basilica with apse had become a Christian tradition, some Jewish communities adopted the apse with its raised and built-up platform on one end, separated from the hall by a chancel screen, for their own worship.

Chapter Four

The 'façade motif' in early Byzantine decoration and as Torah Shrines in ancient synagogues

4.1. Introduction: the Torah Scrolls, the Torah Shrine and the 'façade motif'

The Torah scrolls were unmistakably the most important objects in the synagogue. We know that the scrolls were kept in the Torah Ark. By the Torah Ark we mean some kind of movable cabinet, which may have been permanently kept in the prayer hall, or brought into the hall for the service from a separate room. As their main purpose was to be read during the service, the scrolls could easily have been removed from the synagogue hall when they were not needed. We do not know how many scrolls were kept in an average synagogue, and so far, no scrolls have been found in an excavated Byzantine synagogue.¹ To find out what the Torah Ark might have looked like, we are confined to written accounts and depictions on mosaics, gold glass, and ceramics.

¹ Evidence for scrolls found in a building thought to be a synagogue was found at first-century Masada, where portions of the book of Ezekiel and other texts were discovered buried in two shallow (geniza?) pits, Yadin, 1981, 21. In the excavation of the synagogue at 'En Gedi, burnt remains of a codex were found, along with charred parchment or possibly scrolls, Barag, Porat and Netzer, 1981, 117.

On the fourth-century synagogue pavement at Hammat Tiberias, the fifth-century synagogue mosaic at Sepphoris, and on the sixth-century mosaic of the synagogue at Beth Alpha, the same motif appears in the mosaics in the nave, near the end of the hall (Fig. 4:1).² This motif consists of a façade with a pair of columns supporting a pediment. Between the columns are two doors. In the Jewish realm, this motif appears not only on synagogue pavements, but also on carved stone relief decoration, on frescoes of the third-century synagogue at Dura-Europos, as well as on household objects such as oil lamps and glass plates. Jacobs was the first to identify this motif as the Torah Shrine on gold glass vessels found in the Jewish catacombs in Rome in 1902.³

Two main interpretations have been put forward concerning the meaning of this motif. The first considers the motif as representing the Torah Shrine in the synagogue.⁴ The second interprets this motif in a symbolic manner, as the Ark of the Covenant in the first Temple in Jerusalem, (or the Temple façade) and so as a symbol of God's presence.⁵ The Shrine symbolised the Covenant between the Jews and God, particularly after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, when the Divine Presence was believed to inhabit the Torah Shrine within the synagogue.⁶ These interpretations are not, however, mutually exclusive of each other. The recent discovery of the mosaic at Sepphoris may indicate aspects of both the Torah Shrine in the synagogue, and a desire to increase the sanctity of the synagogue by referring to implements used in the Temple, such as the incense shovel and shewbread table.⁷ Nevertheless, the Torah Shrine became one of the most potent Jewish symbols in the ancient world.

² In addition to the above synagogue mosaic floors, the Torah Shrine motif appears in the fifth century remains at Susiya, Samaritan el-Khirbe and Beth She'an North, and in the sixth-century Jericho and Na'aran pavements.

³ Jacobs, 1902, 737.

⁴ Hachlili, 1988, 278.

⁵ Meyers, 1997, 325; Ovadiah, 1987, 185.

⁶ Revel-Neher, 1986-7, 136-137; Revel-Neher, 1984, 208-213.

⁷ See the recent articles in Levine and Weiss, 2000; and especially: Talgam, 2000, 99-105; and Kühnel, 2000, 31-35.

In this chapter we will follow the first approach, in which this depiction was based upon a physical object within the synagogue, by comparing the iconographic depictions of Torah Shrines with the physical evidence from synagogue remains.

The oldest functioning Shrine was the medieval Torah Shrine which stood in the Altneu synagogue in Prague (Fig. 4:2). This thirteenth-century stone-built Torah Shrine had the same features as those of the façade motif; namely, two columns supporting a high pediment, with two doors. A wooden Torah Shrine in the Ben Ezra synagogue at Fostat, Egypt, is a large cabinet (Fig. 4:3), with the earliest extant doors (Fig. 4:4). These doors bear the inscription: 'Open to me the gates of righteousness. I will go into them, and I will praise the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord, into which the righteous shall enter.' Medieval European curtains for the Torah Shrine have similar inscriptions.⁸ There is medieval evidence that to the Jews, the Shrine represented the heavenly gate.

Although there is some evidence that in the medieval period Torah Shrines were built of stone or wood, in the early Byzantine period the evidence is much less straightforward. Third- to sixth-century inscriptions contain five different terms for the Shrine, while the Talmudic literature adds a sixth. To complicate matters, the Greek term for a small wooden cupboard (*kibotos*) is the same term used in the Septuagint for both Noah's Ark, and the Ark of the Covenant, which was the chest containing the tablets with the Ten Commandments in them and placed inside the Holy of Holies in the First Temple.⁹

Physical evidence for a Torah Shrine from the fourth- to sixth-century synagogues in Palestine is almost non-existent. Several stone niche heads with a

⁸ Yaniv, 1989, 32.

⁹ Kraabel, 1979, 498. A mosaic pavement of a large building at Mopsuestia, Cilicia, has a depiction of a four-footed open chest, surrounded by animals and birds. An inscription on the chest identifies it as Noah's Ark, (κίβωτος νωε ρ...). The excavator ascribed the mosaics to a church from the third quarter of the fourth century. Kitzinger suggests it could be either a synagogue or a church (even though a bronze cross was found on the floor). Avi-Yonah believes this building was a synagogue. See: Budde, 1969, 40-43; Kitzinger, 1973, 136; Avi-Yonah, 1981, 189.

carved pediment and a conch below have been found in excavated synagogues, but not *in situ*. These blocks are thought to be the remains of small stone *aediculae* (see chapter 5.2). Small columns have also been found, although it is difficult to definitely ascribe them to a shrine rather than other features of the building. A single decorated pilaster found in the Chorazin synagogue has been interpreted as supporting one side of the Torah Shrine.¹⁰ Although several wooden cabinets have been found at Herculaneum under the ash produced by the eruption of Mt Vesuvius in 79 CE, no wooden cabinets were found *in situ* in the excavations of an ancient synagogue.

The lack of physical evidence is one of the obstacles to the interpretation of iconography of the Torah Shrine. Equally problematic is the fact that nearly identical depictions of the façade motif are often featured in Christian as well as late Roman pagan surroundings. These have persons, objects or scenes framed by this motif, rather than the doors in the Jewish version. Did the façade motif represent one object for Jews, another for Christians and a third for pagans? By examining the contexts of these motifs, we may be able to discern whether the 'façade motif' represented a single object or several different ones. Conceivably, this motif was so common throughout the Roman world that representations of façades might have been merely part of a common iconographic repertoire used by pagans, Christians, and Jews for their own specific purposes.

4.1.1. A 'generic' motif?

The façade motif in the late Antique world has myriad variations. It appears on frescoes, silver, ivories, ceramics, stone reliefs, glass, mosaics, and illuminated manuscripts. Single columns often appear flanking a central object, although double or triple columns are sometimes portrayed instead. The columns may be surmounted by Ionic or Corinthian capitals, or alternatively, not have capitals at all. The columns some times stand on pedestals or simple plinths. Within the pediment, various decorations are found, sometimes embellished with a conch. The façade motif in all

¹⁰ Turnheim, 1987, and below.

its diverse forms might be termed 'generic,' as it is used commonly as a framing device.

In first-century Pompeii, a Lares shrine with columns and a pediment frames a dancing scene in the House of the Vettii (Fig. 4:5).¹¹ At mid-third-century Seleucia near Antioch, the façade motif on a floor mosaic in the triclinium of the House of the Drinking Contest frames a scene showing the inebriated Dionysus and Heracles (Fig. 4:6).¹² In Byzantine art, the motif frames a cross on silver book covers dating to the fourth and fifth centuries (Fig. 4:7). On other book covers the motif frames an apostle (Fig. 4:8).¹³ On fifth- and sixth-century carved ivory diptychs it is used to enclose individuals who have received special honours, such as in the consular diptychs of Probus (406 CE), Boethius (487 CE), and even the archangel Michael (c. 518 CE) (Fig. 4:9).¹⁴ On the ivory-paneled Chair (cathedra) of Bishop Maximian (546-556 CE), John the Baptist and the four Apostles are framed by this motif (Fig. 4:10).¹⁵ It also appears on caskets for both pagans and Christians, such as a mid-fourth-century silver Muse Casket from Rome, where eight of the nine Muses are framed by arches, and the contemporary Projecta casket from the Esquiline Treasure with framed figures, both now in the British Museum (Fig. 4:11).¹⁶ In the Rabbula Gospels (finished in 586 CE by the scribe Rabbula) a façade motif frames saints who are reading, writing or teaching. In this same manuscript, a stylised version with two doors is used to depict the Tomb of Christ in the Resurrection miniature.¹⁷ In several church pavements, too, the façade motif is used to frame an inscription, building or other object.¹⁸

¹¹ Eschebach, 1978, 45.

¹² Levi, 1947, pl. XXX, and 156-159.

¹³ Frazer, 1992, 72-73.

¹⁴ Volbach, 1976, nos.1; 6; 109.

¹⁵ Volbach, 1976, no. 140; Rodley, 1994, 96.

¹⁶ Weitzmann, 1979, nos. 309, 310, 329-332. Fragments of a wooden casket were found in Egypt showing figures within a façade motif with draped curtains, nos. 311, 333.

¹⁷ Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana cod. Plut. I.56, folio 13r.

¹⁸ For the framed inscription at Mt. Nebo, the Chapel of the Priest John, see: Saller and Bagatti, 1949, 49-50, 172-176; Piccirillo, 1989, 190-192.

In the Jewish realm, similar depictions on second-century coins of the Bar Kochba revolt frame an object, perhaps the Ark of the Covenant or doors. On the wall paintings of the third-century synagogue at Dura-Europos, the façade motif frames the doors of the destroyed Temple in Jerusalem (Fig. 4:12). The motif appears in Jewish funerary contexts in third-century Palestine carved in the soft limestone of the catacombs at Beth She'arim, painted on tombstones, and in relief on lead sarcophagi (Fig. 4:13). In the catacombs in Italy this motif appears on the bases of gold glass vessels, plastered on tomb walls, as well as on frescoes from the catacombs (Fig. 4:14 and 4:15).

4.1.2. The façade motif on synagogue pavements

As mentioned above, particularly from the fourth to the sixth centuries, the façade motif appears in the decoration of synagogues, on mosaic pavements, and in stone reliefs. All three of these hall pavements also bear a zodiac in their centre panel, with Helios the Sun God, in the centre of the wheel.

At Hammat Tiberias, the façade motif appears in the nave, before a small room. In this motif, two Ionic columns support a pediment within which is a conch (Fig. 4:1). Flanking this motif are two large *menorot*, each with its own *mahtah* (incense shovel), *shofar* (ram's horn), *etrog* (citron-fruit), and *lulav* (palm branch). This whole composition is set within a field of small flowers. The aedicule motif, here with doors and curtain, is thought to be one of the most accurate representations of the Torah Shrine, which probably stood in the adjacent small room.¹⁹ Consequently, it is assumed, that *menorot* would have flanked the Torah Shrine in ancient synagogues.

Less than two hundred years later, at Beth Alpha, the façade motif is depicted in an abstract fashion (Fig. 4:16). Here, two doors are indicated by four square panels, each decorated with a central square with a radiating tassel shape at each corner. Two column-like shapes are depicted flanking the doors, but there is a third column in the

¹⁹ Dothan, 1983, 37.

centre. Each of these three columns is set on a rectangular base and surmounted by vase-like shapes. The tall pediment frames a small conch shell set within a semicircular band of black tesserae. Between the conch and the apex of the pediment, a hanging lamp is depicted with a globular body and triangular base. On either side of the pediment are two birds, which stand on horn-like acroteria. From these projections hang pendants on chains. Two *menorot* are depicted flanking the central motif, and set above surrealistic lions with open mouths and thin tongues. Also within the composition are incense shovels, *shofarot*, *etrogim*, *lulavim*, and a bird within a stylised bush, a notable Christian motif. The whole composition is flanked by two white curtains decorated with flowers, with the right curtain touching part of the *menorah*.

In several instances, synagogue mosaic pavements have the façade motif, but with a curtain hanging between double columns and partially concealing the doors behind. This curtain covering the Torah Shrine is known as the *parokhet* (pl. *parokhot*).²⁰ Curtains hung by rings from a bar or suspended from hooks are an obvious sign of privacy and concealment. Curtains were typically made of linen, which can be permeable to light yet act as a screen.²¹ In a Samaritan synagogue at el-Khirbe, located not far from Mount Gerizim, we find a very realistic façade motif with double columns and a curtain tied around the right-hand, outermost column, adding depth to the composition (Fig. 4:17). At nearby Hirbet Samara, another Samaritan synagogue mosaic depicts a similar façade motif with a white curtain tied around the innermost left-hand column (Fig. 4:18). Another example is found at Beth She'an North, where a curtain is shown hanging flat from seven rings suspended from a rod between two columns, as if to conceal some object behind it (Fig. 4:19). This white curtain is decorated with flowers and has a bottom border with hanging tassels.

²⁰ The earliest surviving *parokhot* come from the late 16th century, mainly from Venice. These woven fabrics depict a façade motif. For the development of the façade motif on *parokhot*, see: Yaniv, 1989, 26.

²¹ Maguire, Maguire and Duncan-Flowers, 1989, 45.

As mentioned above, the floor of the fourth-century synagogue of Severus at Hammat Tiberias has a depiction of a plain curtain tied with a knot, hanging from a rod suspended between two columns. In these depictions on synagogue pavements, as is common on early Byzantine mosaics, the curtain is an integral part of the overall composition.²²

4.2. Inscriptions referring to the Torah Shrine

We know of seven inscriptions from antiquity that probably refer to the Shrine. Instead of one specific term, however, six different terms are employed to refer to what is assumed to be the Torah Shrine or Torah Ark. Two Aramaic inscriptions mention an *arona* (*Aron ha-Kodesh* = Holy Ark), while two others refer to a *theka* (θήκη = chest). One Greek inscription found near Gaza commemorates the renovation of a κόγχη, probably a niche or apse.²³ Three Greek inscriptions refer to a *kibotos*, *nomofulakion* and *simma*.²⁴ These three Greek inscriptions are found outside Palestine, whereas the Aramaic terms are from inscriptions found in ancient Palestine and at Dura-Europos.

On the façade of the third-century *aedicula* in the synagogue at Dura-Europos is the Aramaic inscription: 'I [...] made the repository for the Torah Shrine (*beth arona*), Joseph son of Abba made the [...]'.²⁵ If *beth arona* (= house of the Aron)

²² At Beth Alpha, for example, curtains are depicted at the edges of the mosaic panel, by contrast with pavements at Sepphoris, Susiya and Na'aran where depictions of the façade have no curtains. For a discussion of curtains in Early Christian art, see: Maguire, Maguire and Duncan-Flowers, 1989, 45-47.

²³ Sukenik, 1935, 159:
 Ἀναστ]ασιάκω (και) Λάζαρ-
 ος σύμβιο]ς, ἵνα εὐχαριστὸν
] τοῦ ἁγίου τόπου, ἀνενε-
 ῶσαν κτίσμ]α τῆς κόγχης σὺν
 ἀψίδι ἀπὸ] θεμέλι(ων), μ(η)νι Μάρτιου ἰν(δικτιῶνος)

Sukenik's reading: "For the salvation of Jacob the son of Lazarus, X, his son, in gratitude to God has renovated the structure of the apse (κώνχ(η)ς) [sic] of this holy place together with its screen from the ground up in the month of March, indiction...."

²⁴ *kibotos* at Ostia; *nomofulakion* at Sardis, *simma* appears at Side (see below).

²⁵ Kraeling, 1956, 54, 269; Naveh, 1978, Num. 90, 133.

... אַנִּי [.. עבַדַּת בֵּית אַרוֹנָה]יהו[ס]ף ברה דאבא בר ...

refers to the niche on which the inscription was written, then a container for the scrolls would be the ‘aron.’ The same term might have been used in the undated inscription from Nawa in Syria, although the reading of that inscription has been disputed.²⁶

The Greek κειβώτον [sic] was used in the late-third-century dedicatory inscription on a Torah Shrine at Ostia. This inscription on a stone, re-used as a floor tile in the later phase of the synagogue, mentions a certain Mindius Faustus, who constructed the synagogue and dedicated the cupboard for the Sacred Law.²⁷ The inscription found on a broken marble plaque from the monumental synagogue at Sardis mentions a certain Memnonios, who gave a marble veneer for the *nomofulakion*, a place that protects the Law.²⁸ The inscription from Side in Asia Minor mentions one Isaacis who paved the *ambo* with marble up to the *simma*, which is understood to mean the Torah Shrine.²⁹

²⁶ Naveh does not validate the term “aron” in the photo published by Touwri; see: Naveh, 1978, No. 37, 65.

|ב| ר יודן
[..] יה בר איה (ארונה?)

²⁷ The inscription reads:
Pro Salute Aug(usti)
οἰκοδόμησεν κε αἰπό-
ησεν ἐκ τῶν αὐτοῦ δο-
μάτων καὶ Κειβώτον
ἀνέθηκεν νόμῳ ἁγίῳ
Μίδι(ο)ς Φαῦστος ΜΕ

[.....] DIW[...]

“For the well-being of the Emperor. Mindius Faustus [...DIO...] constructed (the synagogue) and made it from his own gifts, and he dedicated (set up) the ‘Ark’ for the sacred law.” For the most recent interpretation of the inscription see: White, 1996, 392-394; and Fine, 1997, 138.

²⁸ The inscription reads:

Κάμὲ τὸ νομοφυλ[ά]κιον ὁ αὐτ[ὸς] Μεμνόσιος
[ὕ]περ υγίας [α]ῦτοῦ ἔσσ[κούτλ]ωσεν

“And the same Memnonios, on account of his good health, gave the marble inlay for me also, the place that protects the Law.” For the inscription see: Kroll, 2001, no. 63, 40.

²⁹ The term could refer instead to an apse, rather than a Torah Shrine; see: Lifschitz, 1967, 37, inscription 36; Goodenough, 1952-1968, II, 82; and Kraabel, 1979, 498 footnote 74.

[Ἰσ]άκις φροντιστῆς ἁγιωτάτ-
[ης] πρώτης συναγωγῆς ἔστην εὐτ-

Unlike the Greek inscriptions from synagogues outside of Palestine, two Aramaic inscriptions from Galilee refer to a *theka*, from the Greek θήκη (=chest). At Dalton in Upper Galilee a marble chancel post with traces of an 18-line inscription was found not *in situ*. This chancel post is ca. 18 cm. square and ca. 1.0 m. in height (Fig. 4:20). The partial inscription on this post is all that remains of a full inscription carved on a now-lost chancel screen.³⁰ Line four contains the words *theka rahmana* (=chest of the merciful), thought to refer to the Torah Ark. The second inscription from Galilee with the word *theka*, also undated, is from Horvat 'Ammudim, where a loose stone was found with a four-line inscription which mentions the brothers Yoezer and Shimon who made the *theka*.³¹ However, neither the chancel post from Dalton nor this inscription from Horvat 'Ammudim sheds any light on the form of the *theka*, but only that this was a term used, at some time probably in the Byzantine period.

In the Jewish sources, two terms appear: *aron* and *teva*. The term *teva* appears in the third-century Mishnah. The *teva* was a movable object which served as a container for the Scrolls. On public feasts, the *teva* was taken out of the synagogue

[ύχω]ς καὶ ἀνεπλήρωσα τὴν μαρμάρωσιν ἀπὸ
 [τοῦ] ἄμβωνος ἕως τοῦ σῖμμα καὶ ἔσμηξα
 [τὰ]ς δύο ἑπταμύξους καὶ τὰ δύο κιονοκέ-
 φαλα. ἰνδ(ικτίονι) ἰέ μν(νὶ) δ'.

³⁰ For a photograph of this inscription see: Naveh, 1978, *insc. num.* 107, 144; and Shinan, 1996, 142, (Catalogue #50). For a description of the unexcavated site, see: Ilan, 1991, 28.

תקה רחמנה

³¹ This inscription was found loose in the synagogue. For various readings: Avigad, 1960, 62-64; Hüttenmeister, 1978, 109; Naveh, 1978, *insc. num.* 20, 40-42; for the excavation report of the synagogue: Levine, 1981, 2.

יעזר חזנה
 ושמעון
 אחוי עבדו
 הדן תקא דמרי
 שומיא

and placed in the town square.³² The term *aron* is later mentioned several times in both the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds. The most explicit reference to is the statement that a certain Rabbi Yona (head of the academy at Tiberias, ca. 350 CE), built an *aron* in the shape of a tower.³³ Levine points out that the use of the later term *aron* carries with it associations of the biblical Ark containing the Ten Commandments, whereas the term *theka* does not.³⁴

The diverse terms in Aramaic and Greek might indicate that more than one type of container was used for the Torah Scrolls. The evidence is difficult to interpret. For example, even though the synagogues at Ostia and Sardis each have a large *aedicula* built facing east as a major feature of the later prayer halls, inscriptions from these sites do not use the same term when referring to the Torah Shrine. At Ostia, since the inscription belongs to the phase before the large stone *aedicula* was built, the *kibotos* in the inscription could refer to an earlier, simple cabinet (see below). In Palestine, neither of the inscriptions that mention the *theka* comes from a stratigraphic excavation; rather, they were found loose near buildings that may have been synagogues. As only the inscription from the synagogue at Dura-Europos comes from a clear archaeological context located on the *aedicula* itself within the prayer hall, it helps most in our understanding of the term *aron* in the third century CE. The exact meaning of the other terms is still unclear.

4.3. Archaeological Evidence for the Torah Shrine

Before we examine the iconographic representations of the Torah Shrine, we must first look at the archaeological evidence from the synagogues at Dura-Europos,

³² M. Ta'anit 2:1:

כיצד מוציאין את תבה לרחובה של עיר ינותנין אפר מקלה על גבי התבה
ובראש הנשיא ובראש אב בית דין וכל אחד ואחד נותן בראשו

Safrai believes that there is no difference between the *teva* and *aron*, Safrai, 1989, 72.

³³ P.T. Megilla 3: 73d

ר' יונה עבד ליה מגד' ואתני עלוי עילייה דספרין ארעייא

³⁴ Levine, 2000, 187, footnote 95.

Ostia, and Sardis, where the *aediculae* are in many ways similar to the motifs preserved on glass and mosaics. On the one hand, these sites provide the best evidence for the physical appearance of Torah Shrines, as each has a Shrine (albeit of differing shape and form) preserved almost in its entirety. On the other hand, comparisons to synagogues in Palestine must be made with caution as to the relative similarities and differences.

As we mentioned above, the Shrine at Dura is a niche flanked by two columns and surmounted by an arch. The columns are painted to look like marble. The niche is 41 cm. deep and twice as wide. Meyers points out that owing to this small size, the niche probably could not have been used for more than several scrolls, and certainly not for storage of all the scrolls used in the year-long synagogue worship.³⁵ Above the niche are depictions of the Temple façade (with two columns) flanking an arched entrance with two doors, a menorah, and a scene showing the binding of Isaac.

In the synagogue at Ostia, in the mid- to late fourth-century CE, renovations were carried out in the hall (Fig. 4:21). A semicircular *aedicula* was built abutting the entrance to the prayer hall facing east, replacing a thin wall. These renovations came after the previous changes to the hall, probably dating to the late third or early fourth centuries, when the second floor was removed in order to place a monumental four-columned propylaeum inside the building, leading to the prayer hall. These changes created a large room with a high ceiling.³⁶ On either side of this propylaeum were thin walls. The propylaeum connected three small rooms of the vestibule to the prayer hall. In this phase, benches lined the north, south, and western walls. The western wall also had a small platform attached to the middle of the bench. This small platform is assumed to be the location where the Torah Ark stood. After the

³⁵ Meyers, 1997, 309.

³⁶ White suggests that the original edifice was a two-storied private house similar to others nearby, and that a staircase existed on the site of the later *aedicula*. Subsequently, the introduction of the columns and the removal of the second floor marked the building's renovation as a synagogue. For an investigation of the archaeological evidence for the synagogue and Shrine, see: White, 1997, 27-38; White, 1996, 379-397; Fine, 1995, 52-55; for the excavation report, Squarciapino, 1962 and Squarciapino, 1963 for an English summary.

propylaeum had been installed, the northern thin wall was removed, and in its place a large free-standing *aedicula* was built, approached by four steps (Fig. 4:22). The shape of the *aedicula* is semicircular, in the form of an internal apse, which is over 3.5 m. wide and flanked by two marble columns with composite capitals. These columns support marble corbels which project from either side of the apse. The undersides of the corbels were decorated with Jewish symbols including the *menorah*, *shofar*, *etrog*, and *lulav*. The cut-out notch in the upper face of the corbels is thought to have supported a pediment, since the notch is directly above the capital which supports the corbel. However, no pediment was found. Within the apse, a low wall, ca. 0.75 m. from the back edge still stands. This wall is thought to have been part of the support for a wooden cupboard for storing the Scrolls. White dates this major renovation of the plan of the synagogue hall to the mid-to-late fourth century.³⁷

The Ostia inscription mentioned above indicates that at an early phase of the synagogue building, in which the Jewish community adopted a typical piece of Roman furniture as the container for its Holy Scrolls.³⁸ Toward the mid-fourth century, after the new *aedicula* was built to house the Scrolls in the eastern end of the hall, the *kibotos* was no longer needed. This shift from the *kibotos* to the *aedicula* had the additional effect of re-organising the hall from one with a single axis from the entrance to *kibotos*, to one where the most holy object within the hall was placed adjacent to the front door.

At approximately the same time during the late third century at Sardis in Asia Minor, the southern side of the gymnasium complex was renovated and became the largest known synagogue hall uncovered from the late Antique period (Fig. 4:23). What brought about this major renovation is still debated, but nevertheless this section of the building, with its nave pillars, mosaic floor, and marble wall revetments

³⁷ White, 1997, 36.

³⁸ The inscription was found re-used as a floor tile in the vestibule of the synagogue. In the later phase of the building the large and imposing Shrine was built facing East, implying a change in practice some time in the fourth century.

shows that the Jewish community spent considerable sums on its decoration and refurbishment.³⁹ In the fourth century, a colonnaded atrium was built at the eastern end of the hall. The wall separating the atrium from the hall, known as the 'shrine cross-wall' had three doors, a central monumental door and two smaller doors flanking it. Two large platforms for *aediculae* were built flanking the main entrance (designated NS and SS, for North Shrine and South Shrine). These are rectangular platforms made of marble and limestone blocks (Fig. 4:24).⁴⁰ According to Seager's reconstruction, set on top of these two platforms were two *aediculae*. In his reconstruction of both *aediculae*, two steps led up to a raised area, where on the southern *aedicula*, Doric columns supported an entablature and pediment. The northern *aedicula* had Corinthian columns. The columns of the south shrine used in the reconstruction are columns found in the excavation. The capitals were reconstructed from fragments, and the pediments from both *aediculae* are also reconstructed from the original pieces.⁴¹ No trace of a wooden cupboard adjacent to the wall has been found, but Kraabel noted that the capitals were notched so that a screen or curtain could be hung between them.⁴²

At Ostia and Sardis, evidence for large, built *aediculae* relates to the later phases of the construction of these synagogues. *Aediculae* at both sites have the same features as the façade motif, namely, columns supporting a pediment. Both have steps leading up to the platform set between the columns. The *aedicula* at Ostia still preserves traces of a short wall which might be part of a kind of shelf or cupboard, a feature missing from the two *aediculae* at Sardis. These shrines show that by the late fourth century at Ostia and Sardis, large permanent installations were built within the prayer halls, probably for the Torah Scrolls. It is still unclear for what the second

³⁹ Bonz demonstrates that the rise in prominence of the Jewish community was not a steady process from Hellenistic and early Roman times, but rather occurred only in the late third century; Bonz, 1990, 356.

⁴⁰ For photos of the *aediculae* during excavation and after their renovation, see: Hanfmann, 1972, figs. 82, 167.

⁴¹ Seager and Kraabel, 1983, 175.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 189.

shrine at Sardis was for, though presumably it contained additional scrolls, or perhaps, as Hanfmann suggested, a *menorah*.⁴³

4.4. Torah Shrine or Torah Ark

Depictions of the Torah Shrine often seem indistinguishable from those of the Torah Ark, a fact which has provoked considerable debate.⁴⁴ Both the Torah Shrine and the Torah Ark had doors, and both may have had a pediment or gable. In this chapter we will differentiate between the two terms, the Torah Ark, and Torah Shrine, which I believe refer to two distinctly different objects. We will designate a movable piece of furniture as the Torah Ark, and a built or non-movable *aedicula* as a Torah Shrine. Both served the same function, namely, as the repository for the Scrolls. The primary difference between them was that the niche or *aedicula* (= Torah Shrine) was built into or adjacent to a wall of the prayer hall, whereas the *kibotos* or *armarium* (=Torah Ark) was a movable piece of furniture which could have been positioned within the prayer hall on a raised platform or, simply on the floor. The second difference was their scale. The wooden Torah Ark might have been able to hold as many scrolls as a niche. A large Shrine probably held even more scrolls. Whereas the Torah Ark and the Torah Shrine might have been built of wood, only the Torah Shrine could have been constructed of stone.

In contrast to the change from Torah Ark to built *aedicula* at Ostia, the evidence from Palestine is more complicated. It is difficult to determine whether a depiction from a mosaic or stone relief is a portable wooden cupboard, or a permanent, built Shrine. Archaeological evidence is of some help. For example, the burnt wood fragments found in the 'En Gedi synagogue near the Dead Sea may well

⁴³ The excavators do not state where in the synagogue the broken portions of the large marble menorah were found, Hanfmann, 1972, 135.

⁴⁴ Hachlili refers to a Torah Ark set inside a Torah Shrine, where she writes "Due to recent synagogue excavations as well as historical research, knowledge and evidence are now much more extensive than before; it seems reasonable to infer, therefore, that an Ark of the Scrolls in the shape of a wooden chest stood inside the architectural structure of the Torah shrine in the synagogue building" in Hachlili, 1988, 275. For other terms referring to the Torah Shrine such as "Ark of the Law" and "Holy Ark" see: Meyers, 1997, 314.

have been part of a Torah Shrine or *kibotos*.⁴⁵ At Beth She'an North, the excavator surmised that the forty-five iron nails found near the apse of the synagogue were used in the construction of a wooden furnishing on account of their small size.⁴⁶ Several stone blocks with a carved pediment and conch were the niche-heads of small *aediculae*, similar in size to the aedicule at Dura-Europos. In the rebuilt platform of the early fourth-century synagogue at Nabratein (Phase II), a stone block, with a carved conch below a pediment and flanking lions in relief above was found. This stone is assumed to be from the Torah Shrine of the synagogue. A hole carved in the top centre of the conch is thought to have been used to suspend a hanging lamp. A similar, but not identical, conch niche-head was found loose in the excavation of the synagogue at Chorazin (Fig. 4:25). These blocks are similar in form to a common feature of Roman architecture, namely, the *aedicula*, which is a stone shrine consisting of two columns supporting an entablature and a pediment in which a statue was placed.⁴⁷

4.5. Scrolls in late antiquity

Papyrus was the most common writing material in the ancient Roman world. Sheets of papyrus were glued together into long rolls. The elder Pliny states that vellum was another material on which texts were written, invented in Pergamum during a dispute between Ptolemy (Epiphanes, 205-182 BCE) and Eumenes (II, 197-159 BCE).⁴⁸ Rolls were stored in various ways: in boxes or buckets, or laid on shelves, or in pigeon-holes. To make reading more convenient, rollers were attached at the ends of texts. These rollers were then ornamented with projecting knobs made of wood, or in some cases ivory or ebony. The rolls may have had a protective

⁴⁵ Barag, Porat and Netzer, 1981, 119.

⁴⁶ Zori, 1967, 164.

⁴⁷ s.v. *aedicula*, in Fleming, Honour and Pevsner, 1981.

⁴⁸ Nat.Hist. xiii, 21; Pliny's statement about its invention is doubtful as vellum documents dating to the first decade of the second century BCE were found at Dura-Europos, so far away from Pergamum that they indicate vellum was used as a writing material before the time of Ptolemy II, Kenyon, 1951, 88-91; Reynolds and Wilson, 1991, 3.

wrapper.⁴⁹ Labels called σίλλυβοι projecting from the roll and contained the title of the work for identification purposes. In Herculaneum, a private library was found which contained the burnt remains of hundreds of rolls along with the wooden bookcases.⁵⁰

It is important to point out that in Jewish synagogues today, the roll form, rather than the codex, for the Pentateuch has been preserved since antiquity. Even in the fourth century, as more texts were written in codex form, the scroll form of the Pentateuch was deeply rooted in tradition, and acted as a potent symbol of the antiquity of the Jewish religion. The ancient Hebrew text was read during the synagogue service before it was read in Greek. The antiquity of the Jews, evident from the Scriptures themselves, helped to increase the 'spiritual potency' of the Jewish religion, in contrast to the relatively new books of the Christians.⁵¹ Christians may not have had the inhibitions Jews had about adopting the codex.

Roberts and Skeat point out several reasons for the growing dominance of the codex over the scroll from the first to the sixth centuries.⁵² It may be an anachronism to assume that the codex is also more convenient than the roll, in that there is no need to re-roll a codex when finished reading the text, as finding a particular passage is easier with a codex. However, no ancient author criticises the roll for its disadvantages. From the evidence of Greek literary and scientific papyri known today from Egypt, the roll accounted for one hundred percent of known manuscripts in the

⁴⁹ Reynolds and Wilson, 1991, 61 on rolls in general: Dilke, 1977, 10-11.

⁵⁰ Reynolds and Wilson, 1991, 83.

⁵¹ Chrysostom, *Adv. Iud.* 1:5;2-3:

Ἐπειδὴ δὲ εἰσὶ τινες οἳ καὶ τὴν συναγωγὴν σεμνὸν εἶναι τόπον νομίζουσι ἀναγκαῖον καὶ πρὸς τούτους ὀλίγα εἰπεῖν. Τίνος γὰρ ἔνεκα τὸν τόπον ἐκεῖνον αἰδεῖσθε, δέον καταφρονεῖν καὶ βδελύττεσθαι καὶ ἀποπηδᾶν: Ὁ νόμος ἀπόκειται. φησὶν, ἐν αὐτῷ, καὶ βιβλία προφητικά.

But afterwards, there are some, the ones who also consider the synagogue to be a holy place, and they say it has more strength towards those others also, in some way. On account of this you revere this place, when it is necessary to condemn and abhor and repulse it: the Law (*nomos*) lies there. They say in it are also the Prophetic books. [trans. DM]

See also: Wilken, 1983, 79.

⁵² Roberts and Skeat, 1983, 25; Reynolds and Wilson, 1991, 34-35.

first century, but by the fifth century, for a mere eleven percent.⁵³ In contradistinction to the Jewish scroll of the Law, for Greek secular or pagan manuscripts, as well as for Christian texts, the codex form became widespread as early as the third century CE. While the percentage of total surviving codices in relation to rolls for the early fourth century CE is equal, the roll form declined considerably after that time. Nevertheless, the use of the roll for the Biblical texts in the Jewish realm has not changed even today.

But how were they stored and transported? Typically, scrolls were stored horizontally on a shelf, or in a bookcase. To transport several scrolls together, a bucket-like object with a cover known as the *capsa* held scrolls in a vertical position. Quite a few depictions of the *capsa* are known. For example, the first-century statue of Sophocles stands next to a *capsa*; the fifth-century Vergil manuscript has one set on the floor, another is depicted on a mosaic pavement from Syria.⁵⁴

Unlike the scrolls that were wrapped simply in a cloth wrapper (*διφθέρα*, *paenula*, Heb:*mitpahat*) and placed horizontally inside a wooden *kibotos*, scrolls placed inside a niche were probably first set inside a container made of metal, leather, or wood (*capsa*, *capsilla*, *scrinium*). A similar container depicting the Ark of the Covenant can be seen in the frescoes at Dura. On the west wall, the Ark appears in three different panels. In the scene of the Battle of Eben Ezer we see a jewelled chest with a round top, mounted on a base and supported by a two long poles carried by four men (Fig. 4:26). Here, the Ark is mounted on the stepped base of a Roman *ferculum* (bier). This scene is from I Samuel chapter 4, where the Ark was carried off by the Philistines after the defeat of King Saul. In two other scenes, the Ark is again depicted as a tall, yellow chest with a round top. Again, the fresco of Ezra reading the Scroll, flanking the niche to the right shows a yellow chest with rounded top covered

⁵³ Reynolds and Wilson, 1991, 37.

⁵⁴ Yaniv, 1997, 21-23. For the pavement see: Donceel-Voute, 1988, 131.

by a red cloth (Fig. 4:27). This object, probably a chest for the Scroll which was being read, barely reaches above Ezra's knees.⁵⁵

If, like Kraeling, we assume that the small, rounded capsula-like object near Ezra's right foot as he reads the scroll is the case for the Scrolls, an object similar to the Roman *capsa*, then a tradition can be discerned whereby the Torah Scrolls were kept in a case that was stored in a niche. Yaniv suggests that this case for the scrolls was the same as the Greek *theka*. The *theka*, then, would be comparable in this instance to the Aramaic *aron*.⁵⁶

The evidence presented so far shows that four or possibly five different types of containers were used for the Torah Scrolls in ancient synagogues. One type, the *aron*, which was kept in the *beth arona* (the niche), is known from the third-century Aramaic inscription at Dura-Europos. The painted panel adjacent to the niche, with the figure of Ezra reading from a scroll and next to him, a small container covered with a red cloth, is the best iconographic evidence for the shape of the *aron*.

The second type of container was the Roman *kibotos*, a tall cupboard with single or double panelled doors, several of which have been found nearly intact at Pompeii and Herculaneum. By the fourth century, the *kibotos* was considered a holy object because it contained the Scrolls. For the same reason, the synagogue itself was a 'holy place.'⁵⁷ According to R. Hachlili, the Torah Ark and its depiction is⁵⁸

...part of the symbolic repertoire of Jewish Art. It was perceived as the focal point of synagogue worship, symbolising the place of Scripture *par excellence*.

Indeed, the Torah Ark depiction symbolised 'the place of the Scripture', which was the Word of God. In it, that is to say within the Torah Ark, was the indwelling Divine Presence (Shekinah) itself. This is suggested by the holiness ascribed to the Torah

⁵⁵ Torah scrolls had two rods, as they were rolled to the centre, unlike other manuscripts which had one rod, Kraeling, 1956, 233-234. See also B.T. Baba Batra 14a.

⁵⁶ The tradition of keeping the Torah scroll within its own case exists today in the Sephardic synagogues; Yaniv, 1997, 24.

⁵⁷ Fine, 1997, 137.

⁵⁸ Hachlili describes four types of arks represented in Jewish contexts, including: 1. those with a gabled top; 2. a round top, 3. a box shape (lacking a gable or conch), and 4. those having a more stylized form, Hachlili, 1996, 118. Revel-Neher identifies five façade types, reflecting five cupboard types, Revel-Neher, 1984, 249-251.

Ark. In the sermons of John Chrysostom in Antioch, John berates the Jews for claiming that the synagogue possesses the same holiness as the Temple in Jerusalem because it contains the *kibotos*, the Torah Ark in which the Scrolls were kept.⁵⁹

We now turn to various depictions of the Torah Ark in chronological order, starting with the second-century Bar-Kochba coins, then to depictions from the catacombs of the necropolis at Beth She'arim. Next we will examine depictions of this motif on mosaics and stone reliefs from ancient synagogues in Palestine and compare them with depictions in nearly contemporaneous funerary contexts from Italy on glass plates and frescoes from fourth-century catacombs in Rome.

4.6. Iconography of the façade motif on coins

Sixty-two years after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, Shim'on ben Kosiba led a revolt against the Roman occupation of Judaea and established a rebel state which survived for over three years (132-135 CE). During that time, he minted coins and expropriated land from the Roman Emperor to lease it to Jews.⁶⁰

On the obverse of all the tetradrachms minted by Shim'on is a four-columned façade with a chest-like object in its centre (Fig. 4:28). The architrave is always represented by at least two horizontal lines. The base of the columns rests on a single

⁵⁹ The Ark of the Covenant, in which the tablets given by God to Moses were kept, was placed in the Holy of Holies of the Temple in Jerusalem. This chest, made of olive wood and covered with gold, was removed some time in the seventh century BC by King Manasseh; Haran, 1959, 31, Haran, 1963, 58.

Chrysostom compares the holiness attached to this chest with the *kibotos* in the synagogue;

Adv. Iud. 6:7:

Ἄλλως δέ, ποία κιβωτὸς νῦν παρὰ Ἰουδαίοις, ὅπου ἱλαστήριον οὐκ ἔστιν, ὅπου οὐ χρισμὸς, οὐ διαθήκης πλάκες, οὐ τὰ ἅγια τῶν ἁγίων, οὐ τὸ καταπέτασμα, οὐκ ἀρχιερεὺς, οὐ θυμίαμα, οὐχ ὀλοκαύτωσις, οὐ θυσία, οὐ τὰ ἄλλα τὰ ποιοῦντα σεμνήν τὴν κιβωτὸν τότε ἐκείνην; Ἐμοὶ τῶν ἐπὶ τῆς ἀγορᾶς πωλουμένων κιβωτίων οὐδὲν ἄμεινον αὕτη ἢ κιβωτὸς διακεῖσθαι δοκεῖ, ἀλλὰ καὶ πολλῶ χειρὸν.

Look at it in another way. What sort of Ark is it that the Jews now have, where we find no propitiatory, no tables of the law, no holy of holies, no veil, no high priest, no incense, no holocaust, no sacrifice, none of the other things that made the Ark of old solemn and august. It seems to me that the Ark the Jews now have is no better off than those toy arks which you can buy in the market place."

trans. Wilken, 1983, 80.

⁶⁰ Mildenberg, 1984, 90-109; Smallwood, 1981, 444.

base line in the coins from year one. From year two, the column base rests on two parallel lines with short vertical lines between them. A chest is depicted by two parallel and vertical lines for the sides and feet, a lower and an upper horizontal line, and a curved semi-circular top. Two dots always appear below the upper horizontal line.

Many interpretations of this depiction have been offered, including: the Temple, the Tabernacle, a gate of the Temple, the Ark within the Holy of Holies of the Temple, a chest representing the Mercy Seat in the Temple, and the Torah Ark of the synagogue.⁶¹ We must keep in mind that the use of coins for propaganda in the ancient world was well known. The object in the middle of the façade could represent either the Ark of the Covenant, which stood in the Temple, or the Torah Ark in the synagogue. However, according to Mildenberg, the most significant object for Jews was the Temple and the Ark of the Covenant, an obvious propaganda tool for Shim'on.⁶² The numismatic evidence, therefore, does not provide proof that the façade motif on these coins represents a Torah Shrine.

4.7. Iconography of the façade motif from funerary contexts

The next surviving depiction of a façade with columns and a pediment is in the necropolis of Beth She'arim. This town, known to Josephus as Βησάρρα, is located near the southern edge of Lower Galilee, approximately six kilometers east of Husfiya, which is part of the district of Sepphoris. Throughout the second and third centuries this town grew to be an important Jewish centre. Here, the seat of the

⁶¹ Meshorer, 1982, 139-140; Muehsam assumed that architectural depictions on coins always represent an existing building. Therefore, he determined that the depiction on these coins represents the Ark of the Covenant within the Temple in Jerusalem and consequently dated these coins to the First Revolt against Rome (67-70 CE), Muehsam, 1966, 7-14. However, a coin overstruck on a Hadrianic issue shows that these issues date from the Second Revolt, from 132 - 135 CE, not the First Revolt. See: Mildenberg, 1984, 82 and plate S.

⁶² Wendel was the first to compare the coins with the depiction on the face of the niche at Dura, and to conclude that the depiction represents Solomon's Temple, Wendel, 1950, 22. Mildenberg compares this second-century depiction to third-century frescoes from Dura-Europos, fourth-century glasses from the Roman catacombs, the late fourth-century relief at Capernaum, and sixth-century mosaic floor at Beth She'an North, Mildenberg, 1984, 33-43. The obvious difficulty with such comparisons is that while similar, all these motifs are from locations far from Judaea, and of much later date than the coins last minted in 135 CE.

Sanhedrin was established after its removal from Shefaram, in the third quarter of the second century CE. Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi, redactor of the Mishnah, was buried here (d. 217 CE).⁶³ Excavations in the 1950s showed that the city prospered until the mid-fourth century, when evidence for a partial destruction was found, but the town was not abandoned until at least the seventh century.⁶⁴

Each catacomb in the necropolis of Beth She'arim consists of a main hall with burial chambers along its sides, and secondary halls. In these chambers two to six burials were carved in the rock as *loculi*, or stone sarcophagi were placed against the chamber walls. Three types of depictions of the façade motif appear in these catacombs: as drawings in red paint on the stone walls, carved in the soft limestone, or as relief decoration on lead sarcophagi.

The depictions in red paint were found on burials α and β in Room I of Hall M in Catacomb I, the largest of the catacombs, with over 300 burials. On the sealing stone for one of the burials there is a depiction in red paint of a façade flanked by *menorot*. The triangular gable on it has stylised acroteria with the geometric decorations of single squares and rhomboids. A circular object is suspended from each side of the gable. This façade frames a two-footed rectangular chest which has two shelves. A painted cylindrical object lies diagonally on the top shelf, and a rectangular object appears on the lower shelf. These two objects are thought to represent Torah Scrolls.

Next to this depiction, on a sealing stone for the adjacent burial to the north of this one, is another painted façade, but without the flanking *menorot*. A similar rectangular chest is divided into triangular sections by horizontal and diagonal lines. To the right of this depiction is a painted Greek inscription: KYPAANNA (Lady Anna). In the debris near this sealing stone a Hebrew inscription was found: *shalom*

⁶³ Mazar, 1973, 4-5. For the possible dates of his death, see: Guttmann, 1954, 256-260.

⁶⁴ Mazar, 1973, 7. For a re-assessment of the archaeological evidence for the end of Beth She'arim, see: Vitto, 1996, 136-141.

l'Yudan (Peace to Yudan).⁶⁵ Mazar assumed that the proximity of these two tombs to the inscriptions as well as the similarity of the depictions of the painted façade, indicate that a certain Yudan (a common Jewish name) was buried in burial β and a woman named Anna was buried in burial α .

Besides painted depictions of the façade motif from the catacombs, carved depictions were also found. In Hall A of Catacomb 4, flanking a carved tomb are two depictions of the motif, each with four columns supporting an architrave and a conch (Fig. 4:29). These two carvings are not identical. The left one has a double door below the conch, whereas the right one has a *menorah* below the conch. Both depictions have lions to the right of the conch. On the left carving the lion stands on a pair of capitals, while on the right carving the lion is on the architrave. Below the left doorway are depicted four small steps. Hachlili uncautiously sees this depiction as proof that synagogues had *aediculae* flanking a central entrance, since this depiction at Beth She'arim clearly represents an actual *aedicula* within a synagogue setting.⁶⁶

Moulded lead sarcophagi, too, have representations of the façade motif. On the hill above the entrance to catacomb 20, five lead sarcophagi were found.⁶⁷ Because these sarcophagi were buried, they survived intact, unlike those of some others inside the catacombs. On the narrow end of lead sarcophagus 1 is a representation of an arch supported by two fluted Corinthian pillars or columns (Fig. 4:30). The arch, decorated with acanthus leaves, frames a depiction of a *menorah* standing on a tripod base. There is a *lulav* to the left, and a *shofar* and incense shovel to the right of the *menorah*. A similar depiction of a colonnade but without the objects flanking the *menorah*, appears on sarcophagus 2, found to the north of sarcophagus 1. A nearly identical arch and columns are depicted on the two other sarcophagi; but, instead of a *menorah*, there is an eight-petalled rosette in the centre of the façade.

⁶⁵ Mazar, 1973, 72:

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⁶⁶ Hachlili, 1988, 175.

⁶⁷ Avigad, 1976, 173-176.

The dating of the lead sarcophagi is problematic. From the archaeological context, the excavators assumed that these lead sarcophagi date from the first half of the fourth century, although no pottery, coins or glass fragments were found nearby as chronological indicators. The excavator explains that their location in the second terrace above the entrance to catacomb 20 dates them to the late third century CE. This date is a *terminus ante quem* for the burial of these sarcophagi because the terrace must have been constructed before the catacomb itself. Some of the other decorations on these sarcophagi are quite similar to third-century depictions appearing on lead coffins from Tyre, Sidon, and Beirut.⁶⁸

These depictions of the façade motif in funerary contexts from the third to early fourth centuries indicate the significance of this motif in the lives of those who were buried there. Hachlili writes that for Jews this symbol represented both spiritual and national aspirations. The Torah Shrine, according to her, is a reminder of the Temple and the most important festival, the Feast of Tabernacles.⁶⁹ While this may be true, Hachlili's attribution to the necropolis depictions of Catacomb 4 as representative of what existed in a synagogue (i.e. a Torah Ark to the left, menorah to the right) remains problematic.

4.8. A closer look at synagogue pavements

In the fourth century, depictions of the façade motif begin to appear on synagogue pavements. There are Roman and Early Byzantine depictions of a chest or *armarium* (cupboard), which we shall compare with the depictions from synagogues. We will try to clarify whether these represent two different objects, namely, the larger Roman *armarium* (= *kibotos*) and the built Torah Shrine, or whether these are in fact the same object. By looking also at the early depictions on frescoes at Pompeii and on stone sarcophagi, we will contrast these images with those from the Jewish contexts.

⁶⁸ More lead sarcophagi from the storerooms of the Department of Antiquities were published by Rahmani, 1987, and two others near Ma'on (Nirim), near Gaza, Rahmani, 1996, 147.

⁶⁹ Hachlili, 1988, 285.

The façade motif representing the Torah Ark appears in nine synagogues, which may be divided into two groups. The first group includes synagogues located near large, non-Jewish populations, including those near Scythopolis, Jerusalem, Diocaesarea (Sepphoris), and Tiberias.⁷⁰ The second group includes several Samaritan synagogues, as is evident from their location near Mt. Gerizim, and other characteristics of them.⁷¹

As mentioned above, the fourth-century synagogue of Severos in Hammat Tiberias is probably the earliest in this group. Set in the centre of its southernmost mosaic panel is a depiction of a pediment with a stylised conch motif, supported by two Ionic columns. The columns have simple bases set on rectangular plinths depicted in perspective. On the pediment, brown dentils are depicted. The dentils on the raking cornices of the pediment correctly face downward, but on the entablature the dentils are depicted up-side-down so that they face upwards. Decorating the angular roof are two pairs of S-shaped scrolls on each side.⁷² Below the architrave a single black line of mosaic tesserae depicts a rod with three rings holding a plain, white, knotted curtain. Partially concealed by a knotted curtain, are two doors with three framed panels: a square panel in the middle, with an elongated panel above and below. Two steps lead up to these doors. Dothan saw this depiction as two objects: the double doors which are part of the cupboard containing the Torah Scrolls, and the steps, columns, and decorated pediment representing the Shrine.

In this synagogue, immediately to the east of the step leading up to the small chamber attached to the southern wall (directly in front of the Torah Ark mosaic) is a small panel depicting a circle inscribed within a square. In the centre of this yellow circle is a small black dot. A second, identical mosaic may have existed on the opposite, western, side of the step leading to the small southern chamber. Dothan

⁷⁰ On the number of synagogues mentioned by the written sources, see, Miller, 1998.

⁷¹ Horvat Samarra, el-Khirbe, and Beth She'an North are included in this group.

⁷² The excavator thought that these S-shaped scrolls are acroteria, Dothan, 1983, 34.

surmised that the circle, dot, and inscribed square marked the location of a pair of columns, or perhaps *menorot*.

In the early fifth-century synagogue at Sepphoris, the second register of the mosaic floor has only partial remains of a façade motif owing to its poor state of preservation (Fig. 4:31). Separated by a guilloche band from the two flanking panels, on this central panel only the upper sections of the façade motif with three Ionic columns to the right of a double door can be discerned. The lower part of the columns on the left and their narrow bases also survive. The two doors between these columns are depicted by three panels each with a central square surrounded by four trapezoidal shapes. Above the door is a conch motif set into a pediment, although very little of the pediment itself is extant. The barely-discernable right-hand corner of the façade indicates an acroterion was depicted here, as on the left. It is interesting to note that the depiction of this façade within the central panel is not centred, but slightly skewed towards the left.

Two or possibly three Samaritan synagogues have a façade motif on their mosaic floors. These are at el-Khirbe and at Khirbet Samara, both to the northwest of Mt. Gerizim, and the possibly Samaritan synagogue at Beth She'an North, outside the northeastern wall of Scythopolis.

On the el-Khirbe synagogue, only the eastern section of the nave mosaic survives.⁷³ Here, three objects are depicted. On the left is a pediment supported by two pairs of columns. In the centre of this panel is a folding table with objects set on it, and to the right is a seven-branched *menorah* flanked by a pair of *shofarot*. The pediment is particularly interesting as it has a conch motif in its centre. The columns supporting the pediment have schematised Ionic capitals. A curtain hung with five rings attached to a horizontal line at the bottom edge of the architrave is wrapped around the outer right-hand column. The curtain is decorated with two roundels. There is only a slight trace of what may be a door frame to the left of this curtain,

⁷³ Magen, 1992, 70.

since below this point, the mosaic has not been preserved. The six Greek inscriptions in the floor mosaic are typical of those dating to the end of the third to the early fourth centuries.⁷⁴

The second Samaritan synagogue, similar in form to the one at el-Khirbe, is located at Khirbet Samara, several kilometres to the north-west of Mt. Gerizim. This synagogue had at least three phases, indicated by three separate floors.⁷⁵ Two tiers of benches lined the southern and northern walls. In the phase II hall, a mosaic floor was laid on a stone pavement, and in phase III another stone floor was laid on top of this mosaic. During the excavation, it became apparent that the phase III benches along the south wall had not been continuous in the previous phase II. This was indicated by a small section of mosaic, ca. 2.00 m. wide, which was not covered by the stone bench, unlike in phase III. The second and third phases are particularly important, since a mosaic panel with the façade motif was revealed under a 2.13 m.-wide section of the southern bench.⁷⁶ In the second phase, this portion of the southern side of the hall is the only part which was not covered by the bench. The panel depicts a pediment with a conch motif in its centre, supported by four columns with Ionic capitals. Two doors are clearly shown with circular door-handles and a lock with rectangular keyhole. A curtain hangs by four rings from a bar suspended from the two innermost Ionic capitals. The curtain wraps around the left column, partially concealing the doors. The bases of the columns and the lowest part of the doors have not been preserved.

This panel in the fourth-century mosaic is important because it is set into a cut-out section of the southern row of benches, and was later covered. On account of the apse in the eastern wall (in the direction of Mt. Gerizim), built in the last phase, the excavator proposed that the Torah Ark once stood on this mosaic panel depiction

⁷⁴ DiSegni, 1993, 233.

⁷⁵ See Catalogue (Volume III) for plans of the separate phases of this synagogue.

⁷⁶ The alcove measures 2.0 x 1.5 m., Magen, 1992, 77.

within the prayer hall. After the apse was built, the Torah Ark was moved into the apse, and this space, now empty, was covered by benches.

Two issues demand our attention. The first is the direction in which the mosaic panel was laid; and the second concerns the location of the Torah Ark on the southern wall of the synagogue. First, since this mosaic panel depicts the base of the façade facing toward the south, and the gable and conch in the north, one who looks at the mosaic from the prayer hall would see the façade motif up-side down. Second, if this mosaic marked the position of a stationary Torah Ark, the mosaic would not have been seen by the congregation, since it would have been covered by the Ark. Possibly the gable, and parts of the conch would have been visible. The high quality of the depiction might suggest that it was not always covered by a Torah Ark, but rather that a wooden cupboard or *kibotos* was brought from another location, set here during the prayer service, and later removed. This last scenario best explains why the community depicted a *kibotos* between benches on the southern wall.

The third synagogue with the façade motif is the mid-fifth-century synagogue at Beth She'an North. In its second phase, this synagogue had a new mosaic floor laid over an earlier one. In the south-west panel closest to the apse, there is a façade motif flanked by *menorot*, two *shofarot*, and two incense shovels. A pediment decorated with diamond shapes has a chain hanging from its apex. A lamp was probably depicted at the end of this chain, but has not been preserved. A simple vine scroll motif is depicted along the architrave, which is supported by two columns with trapezoidal-shaped capitals. Between these columns is a curtain which is parted to reveal two smaller columns supporting an arch. Within this arch is a conch motif, above a horizontal bar. From this bar seven rings hold a curtain, decorated with small rhomboid designs and eight tassels. This is the only known depiction of a curtain hanging between two columns and completely hiding the doors to the shrine behind.

Another depiction of a Torah Shrine was found in the fifth-century synagogue at Susiya, in the Hebron hills. Here, adjacent to the small 'secondary' platform east of the main platform on the north wall, is a damaged depiction of an elongated

entablature with pediment in the centre supported by four columns (Fig. 4:32). The columns are simple, with bases, indicated by a single line of white mosaic, each with a plinth depicted in crude perspective. Under the central pediment with a conch is a rectangular, box-shaped depiction of a cupboard, more than half of which is damaged. This cupboard is divided in half by a vertical spiral design, flanked by doors, of which one panel is visible on the left, and slightly more than one panel on the right.⁷⁷ A single small foot for the Ark can be seen on the bottom right. Flanking this cupboard, underneath the extended entablature are depictions of seven-branched *menorot*. The plain eastern *menorah* consisted of four lines of mosaic. The western *menorah* was made of pomegranate-shaped circles. These depictions, too, are considerably damaged by the later placement of a chancel and chancel posts directly on top of the cupboard and columns. Flanking the whole design are two sheep. The one on the east is damaged, but was repaired in antiquity.⁷⁸ What is interesting about this depiction is that the two doors of the standing cupboard are not affixed in any way to the conch in the pediment. This would seem to indicate two separate features are represented, namely, the (moveable) rectangular chest, and the shrine-like frame provided by the façade motif.

The sixth-century mosaic at the Beth Alpha synagogue was the first to be discovered with a dated inscription. The inscription mentions King Justinus, but whether this refers to Justin I or to Justin II is still disputed. The excavator of the synagogue, and many after him, were inclined to believe that the inscription refers to Justin I. However, the most recent research, which is based on similarities between the iconographic repertoire of this mosaic and other depictions in dated churches in Jordan, indicates that this synagogue was built in the reign of Justin II.⁷⁹ This

⁷⁷ Foerster contends that this depiction is symbolic of the façade of the Temple in Jerusalem, whereas the doors represent the Ark of the Covenant; Foerster, 1989, 546.

⁷⁸ The dating of this mosaic to the fifth century is not secure. Numerous parallels of the depiction of sheep and the pediment motif from dated churches in Jordan might indicate a late sixth- or early seventh-century date instead, see: Gutmann, 1995, 226.

⁷⁹ For Sukenik's misinterpretation of the incense shovel as a lectern, see: Sukenik, 1933, 225, and Narkiss, 1935, 26.

depiction is the most abstract of all.⁸⁰ Above each of these columns is an abstract object which the excavator believed to be a vase (Fig. 4:16). However, we may interpret these as lamps, since they resemble depictions of those on the Missorium of Theodosius and the David plates.⁸¹

In the late sixth-century synagogue at Na'aran near Jericho, remains of a similar motif depicting a Torah Ark, flanked by *menorot* was uncovered in 1921 (Fig. 4:33).⁸² At the southern end of the hall, fragmentary remains of the mosaic depict about half of a standing cupboard with a pediment top. Unlike the depictions at Hammat Tiberias and Susiya, this one has no columns or entablature. Of the pediment, only the left corner and part of the left edge survive. On this pediment are three circles, one at the apex, one on the corner, and one in the middle. Two and one half panels of a door, over half of the original height, are all that survive. Of the cupboard, only the left foot is partially preserved.

The probably eighth-century depiction of a Torah Ark at Jericho is the latest surviving in Palestine. Here, in the centre of the hall is a rectangular panel decorated with squares (Fig. 4:34).⁸³ Eight rows of six equal squares are framed by white tesserae. The inner squares depict various coloured patterns bisected along the diagonal. On its lower edge are four small projecting rectangles, which are thought to be the feet of a cupboard. At the top is a semicircle with five triangular projections, perhaps representing a schematic conch shell. Taken together, these features, including the inner squares which remind one of doors, the feet, and the schematised conch may have depicted a Torah Ark.

⁸⁰ Although over 500 years separate the synagogue at Beth Alpha and the thirteenth-century synagogue at Prague, the Torah Shrine there has some interesting parallels. For one, the built, aedicula-like, structure in Prague consists of a steep pediment, with S-shaped decorations set on two Ionic columns, between which are two bronze doors with handles and latches, see: Yaniv, 1989, 37.

⁸¹ See: Brilliant, 1979, 62-75 and Kessler, 1979, 476-484.

⁸² Benoit and Vincent, 1961, 169.

⁸³ Baramki, 1936, 73.

4.9. Depictions of the Torah Shrine on glass

The depictions of the Ark on Roman gold glass typically display the Shrine, or possibly a Torah Ark. They do not have a curtain, but two open doors revealing spiral designs within a checkerboard pattern (Fig. 4:14), which have been interpreted as scrolls, set on end. The horizontal and vertical lines surrounding these spirals are thought to be shelves or compartments within the Torah Ark. If these depictions represent a piece of movable furniture, then the most similar piece of Roman furniture would be a simple bookcase (= *kibotos* or *armarium*).

Of 450 known pieces of gold glasses, mainly from the early to mid-fourth century, three percent (14 pieces) have been identified as belonging to a Jewish context.⁸⁴ Seven of these have a depiction of an open cupboard with scrolls set on shelves. Two have lions flanking a cupboard containing four and six scrolls respectively. Above both these cupboards are segmented pediments. On the five other glass depictions of the Torah Ark, the pediment is triangular.

4.10. The façade motif in pagan and Christian contexts

Budde collected the known depictions and physical examples of Roman cupboards (*armaria*), a typical piece of Roman furniture by the first century, and noted their similarities. The Roman cupboard was an everyday piece of furniture used, *inter alia*, for holding scrolls and books.⁸⁵ *Armaria* appear on first-century secular frescoes from Pompeii and Herculaneum (Fig. 4:35 and Fig. 4:36). Three Roman *armaria* were found at Pompeii and Herculaneum, both of which were destroyed by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius on 24 August 79 CE (Fig. 4:37).⁸⁶ Depictions of bookcases appear in several Christian contexts as well, such as in

⁸⁴ For the inscriptions from these 14, along with bibliographies of each, see: Noy, 1995, 469-485.

⁸⁵ Budde, 1939, 12-16.

⁸⁶ Budde, 1939, Abb. 3, 5, and 6.

Ravenna in the wall mosaic of the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, the daughter of Theodosius I, dated after 424 CE (Fig. 4:38).

In the Roman period, the cupboard appears in art, on wall-paintings, sculpture, and later glass. Several depictions were found at Boscoreale, Pompeii and Herculaneum. The form of the *armarium* is standard, consisting of a standing rectangular case with four feet. The top is often gabled, sometimes with acroteria at the corners. The front has two doors, often shown open to reveal the contents. Two or more shelves are usually depicted with objects from everyday life, such as jars, flasks, figurines, statues, codices, scrolls, or tools. One of the best-dated examples is in a fresco in the room *q* of the House of the Vettii at Pompeii. This house is painted in the Fourth Style, dated to the 60's CE, and is particularly well-preserved. In this depiction, cupids/putti are performing activities, such as metal-working, chariot-racing, and selling perfume. To the left of two putti stirring a vat of perfume, is another behind a table measuring out the quantities of liquids about to be put into the vat. Behind him is a gabled *armarium*, with acroteria on the top and wide-open doors, revealing three shelves with jars, vessels, and figurines.

Other examples of *armaria* occur on marble reliefs. A stone sarcophagus from Ostia shows a shoemaker sitting on a stool, holding a shoe on in his lap (Fig. 4:39). To his left is a carved depiction of a plain *armarium* with both doors shut. On top of the *armarium* are two pairs of shoes. Another depiction comes from a marble sarcophagus also found at Ostia (Fig. 4:40). A physician sits on a *sella curalis* and reads from a scroll. In front of him is a narrow *armarium* as high as his head. Its two doors are open, revealing two shelves, the upper one containing a stack of seven scrolls, with the *spina* visible. On top of this cupboard is an open box with medical instruments. This sarcophagus can be dated to the late Roman period.

In the fifth century, a well-dated example is the wall mosaic in the Mausoleum of Gallia Placidia in Ravenna. This mausoleum was built adjacent to the narthex of S.

Croce after 424 CE, and dedicated to St. Lawrence, the third century martyr.⁸⁷ On the rear niche is a depiction of St. Lawrence carrying a cross and gospel toward the gridiron above the fire on which he was martyred. Opposite him is an *armarium* with a gabled top with a small *acroterion*. The two doors of the *armarium* are open, revealing two shelves with four codices, two on each shelf. Each codex is labelled with the books of Mark and Luke on the upper shelf, and the gospels of Matthew and John on the shelf below.

A late seventh-century *armarium* is represented on a page in the Amiatinus manuscript, which depicts a scribe writing in a codex in front of a large bookcase (Fig. 4:41), a depiction probably copied from an earlier manuscript.⁸⁸ The pedimented top and its bottom panel were decorated with crosses. The doors have four panels, unlike those on the wall mosaic of the mausoleum of Galla Placidia, which have only two panels. Inside the *armarium* are four shelves, with two codices on each, laid flat. On the space below the lowest shelf is a codex and writing tools.

4.11. From iconography to object: the Torah Shrine

Sloane compared the seventh-century Ashburnham Pentateuch frontispiece to both the third-century *aedicula* in the synagogue at Dura-Europos and the sixth-century nave mosaic at Beth Alpha, to suggest that this manuscript illumination depicted a Torah Shrine.⁸⁹ Sukenik, the excavator of the synagogue at Beth Alpha, interpreted the nave mosaic there in the light of the mosaic at the synagogue of Na'aran near Jericho, frescoes in the catacombs of the villa Torloniana in Rome, gold glass vessels from the catacombs in Rome, and later illuminated manuscripts, in particular the codex Amiatinus. According to Sukenik:⁹⁰

...there is reason to suppose that the craftsmen had before them an actual traditional model of an Ark in which the scrolls of the law were kept in synagogues. The variations are mainly in the roof of the Ark which is sometimes painted and sometimes arched. Sometimes the front of the roof is decorated with

⁸⁷ Krautheimer, 1986, 181-2.

⁸⁸ Blackhouse, 1995, 10.

⁸⁹ Sloane, 1934, 11-12.

⁹⁰ Sukenik, 1932, 22.

a shell. It has almost always a double door, in the wings of which are seen carved squares from two to five in number. Sometimes the Ark is shown with opened doors, and then the scrolls of the law appear lying on shelves inside.

Comparing the mosaic at Beth Alpha with the reliefs carved on a lintel at Capernaum, on an architrave at Chorazin, and on the re-used stone found in the wall of the modern synagogue at Pekiin, Sukenik noted that each of these representations has similarities to and differences from the mosaic at Beth Alpha. For example, one pronounced difference is the birds which occur on the sides of the pediment at Beth Alpha.⁹¹

Following Sukenik, Rachel Hachlili sees Roman glass depictions of the Torah Shrine as representations of a single prototypical chest which appears in Jewish as well as pagan art.⁹² This approach is refuted here, with the view that these depictions do not all represent the same object. Rather, since different communities used different containers for the scrolls, perhaps some of these depictions reflect the *kibotos*, and others, an *aedicula* or Shrine.

4.12. An enlarged façade with columns motif

Turning to a related motif, the 'epistyle on columns motif' has a pediment on columns, but the entablature is extended over an extra bay on either side, allowing two objects to be placed in the extra bays, flanking the central object. In looking for parallels to the gabled façade motif at Susiya, the closest is in the church of the priest John, in Khirbet el-Mekharryat, located about 9.5 km. north-west of Madaba, on the eastern side of the Jordan river.⁹³ This church was added to the earlier church of Amos and Clovis, which is undated. In the nave of the church is a mosaic with a rectangular field bordered by a three-line inscription above and a larger field with an

⁹¹ Sukenik explains these as representations of the Cherubim, whose wings protected the Tabernacle in the Holy of Holies of the First Temple. *Ibid.*, 22.

⁹² "...the general similarity [in the form of the chests] seems to prove the existence of a single prototype for the Diaspora examples. This prototype consists of an open-door Ark and scrolls lying on shelves...these Jewish Ark examples seem to follow a contemporary form of scroll-chest as rendered on a Roman sarcophagus, depicted with open doors and scrolls lying on its upper shelf. Quite possibly a similar prototype was used for depicting scroll-chests and arks in both Jewish and pagan art." Hachlili, 1998, 369.

⁹³ Saller and Bagatti, 1949, 110.

acanthus scroll motif. The central panel has a depiction of a façade with four Corinthian columns supporting a pediment with a conch motif in its centre (Fig. 4:42). The excavator calls this motif a building rather than a façade. On the two corners of the roof are opposed birds; in the centre, below the conch, an inscription, and flanking the inscription also between pairs of columns, are two candlesticks. These candlesticks are typical Byzantine lamp stands, similar to those found in the Kaper Koraon hoard in Syria, dating from the sixth century CE. This whole depiction is interpreted by its excavator as a funerary motif, in memory of the Bishop John and others, mentioned in the inscription.⁹⁴

Foerster compared this depiction in the church of Khirbet el-Mekharryat to that in the synagogue at Susiya.⁹⁵ In both mosaics a pediment is depicted with a conch motif in the centre, and two lamp stands flanking a central object. Whereas the lamp stands in the church mosaic are typical of church furnishings, those in the synagogue mosaic are typical of stone *menorot* sometimes found in synagogue excavations. The central object in the church is the inscription, while in the synagogue, the central object is a cupboard.

Brown, following Wiegand, traced the use of the arcuated lintel from the pre-classical to the classical period on monumental architecture. This design consists of an applied architrave set on pilasters, which curves up into an arch at the centre without interruption. Brown pointed out that the arcuated lintel appears on city gates such as at Bosra, on temple enclosure gates such as at Baalbek, and on numerous temple façades in Asia Minor.⁹⁶ In the fifth century another monumental example would be the Theodosian portico of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. Brown compared these architectural examples to the silver Missorium of Theodosius, where the emperor, flanked by his two sons, is shown sitting on a throne beneath a epistyle

⁹⁴ Saller and Bagatti, 1949, Piccirillo, 1989, 190; Di Segni, 1998, 447.

⁹⁵ In Foerster's opinion, the church mosaic too, as that at Susiya, is a symbolic representation of the Temple in Jerusalem; Foerster, 1989, 546-7.

⁹⁶ Brown, 1942, 394.

façade. Above the central figure, the entablature forms an arch which frames his head. Since the architectural motif appears only on the façades of buildings, and since it would seem odd for the emperor and his sons to be seated outside the palace, Brown concluded that the representation of the Missorium plate is symbolic, although based on real architecture. Brown considered the purpose of this motif as a framing device indicates the higher status of what is placed beneath the arch.⁹⁷

There are several parallels to this motif in contemporary Christian contexts. On one side of an engraved glass chalice, probably from Syria-Palestine and dated on stylistic grounds to the sixth century, is a cross set within a curtained, gabled ciborium (Fig. 4:43). The ciborium is set on top of five steps. Two columns with identical fluting to that of the Nabratein ceramic fragment support a pediment, this one with cross-hatch decorations, rather than the triangles and rhomboids as seen on the Nabratein fragments. This glass chalice has two stylised acroteria curving slightly outward on the edges of the pediment. Curtains below the gable are clearly depicted. It has been suggested that the cross set in the ciborium represents the actual cross set up by Theodosius II on the site of Golgotha in the southeastern corner of the Holy Garden adjacent to the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. The cross, marking the site on which Jesus was crucified, was covered by a roof, and could only be reached by a flight of steps.⁹⁸

If we turn to silver book covers, the cross within a gabled façade motif is again common. Seven plaques dating from the sixth to seventh centuries from silver treasures have a similar generic motif, namely, a depiction of a pair of columns and an arch framing a central object. These plaques, thought to be book covers, are from the Antioch and Sion treasures, dated by silver stamps. Two plaques have portraits of saints as their central figure surrounded by the gable and column frame. The columns

⁹⁷ Brown, 1942, 399.

⁹⁸ Weitzmann, 1979, 609-10.

are fluted and have acanthus capitals. The arch is decorated with a leaf pattern and flanked on either side by peacocks.⁹⁹

4.13. Conclusion

This chapter began with the epigraphic and physical evidence for aediculae in synagogue contexts from archaeological excavations. We then turned to the iconography of depictions of the façade motif in the Jewish realm and tried to relate its appearance to Christian and pagan contexts throughout the late Roman and early Byzantine world. Rather than seeing in these depictions an inherently Jewish motif relating to the Torah Shrine within the synagogue, we have attempted to show that the façade is in fact a generic motif, used as an architectural framing device for such diverse scenes as landscapes, a drinking contest, apostles, crosses, inscriptions, and in the case of synagogues, a pair of doors. The context within which the motif appears determines its symbolism and relationship to Christianity, paganism or Judaism.

When this motif appears on Jewish coins of the Second Revolt against Rome after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, it seems to represent the façade of the ruined Temple in Jerusalem. The motif appears again, about one hundred years later, in funerary contexts in the necropolis at Beth She'arim. Here, it is likely that it represents something different, namely, the container in which the sacred Scrolls were kept, the second holiest object in the synagogue after the Scrolls themselves. From the third century on, the façade motif appears in various contexts and in diverse materials, but nevertheless, seems to retain the same connotation. By the fourth century in the Jewish realm this essentially Roman motif developed into a powerful symbol of the Divine Presence itself. For two Israeli scholars, the motif represents the redemption of the Jewish people.¹⁰⁰ By the medieval period, it represented the Gate of Heaven.

⁹⁹ Mango, 1986, 199; Frazer, 1992, 72.

¹⁰⁰ Weiss and Netzer, 1996, 38.

In the early synagogues, the mundane problem of where to keep the Torah Scrolls was solved in various ways. No single type of container was adopted by every community, nor was the location of the Scrolls within the hall standard. The Jews of Rome and perhaps in Italy as a whole, used a common item of wooden furniture, called a *kibotos* in the inscription from Ostia, for the safe-keeping of the Sacred Scrolls. According to White's analysis of the archaeological evidence, this *kibotos*, originally set on the bench against the curved western wall of the hall, was eventually superseded in the late fourth century by the permanent apse-like *aedicula* built on the opposite side, the eastern side of the hall.

A solution to the problem of storing the Scrolls within the synagogue prayer hall was the small niche-like *aedicula*. This solution was adopted first in Dura-Europos, where a built *aedicula* was probably used as the focus of attention within the synagogue. As the inscription attests, the *aedicula* was the *beit arona*, the House of the Ark. Within the niche was placed a container, similar to the *capsa*, which held the scrolls. Whether the Scrolls were permanently kept here or were brought here only when liturgically needed, is at present unknown. In either case, the *beit arona* built as it was of stone within the prayer hall was a permanent fixture rather than a movable piece of furniture. Another solution seems to have been a larger, built *aedicula*, whether of stone or of wood. Examples of this are known from Sardis and Ostia. At Sardis it was called the *nomophylakion*. This Torah Shrine was a permanent feature within the prayer hall and probably also served as the permanent place for the scrolls. Similar in form to the mosaic depictions of the façade motif on synagogue pavements is the earliest preserved medieval shrine, namely, in the synagogue at Worms, from the 12th century.¹⁰¹ Comparing the depictions on fourth- to sixth-century mosaics with this medieval shrine, it is clear that the basic components of the

¹⁰¹ The shrine underwent several reconstructions while keeping its original form. It was last re-built in the 1890's but destroyed in WWII; Krinsky, 1985, 319-324.

Shrine, that is, two doors set between a façade with columns supporting an entablature and pediment, remained unchanged for centuries.

Chapter Five

Ecclesiastical furnishings in synagogues

5.1. Introduction: apses and ecclesiastical furnishings in fourth to sixth century synagogues

This chapter will examine the archaeological evidence for ecclesiastical furnishings, such as chancel screens and platforms, unearthed in synagogues from the late fourth to the seventh century. This evidence contains clues about the nature of Palestinian Judaism at a critical point in its development. In 362 CE the emperor Julian the Apostate gave the Jews permission to re-build the ruined Temple in Jerusalem. The interruption and cessation of the building project after a massive earthquake on 19 May 363 CE added weight to the arguments of Christian polemicists that the Jewish rôle in salvation had come to an end.¹ By rejecting Christ, the Jews had placed themselves outside God's plan for human salvation. To Church Fathers, such as John Chrysostom, the prophecies written in the Old Testament had been fulfilled. To the Jews, already on the defensive from Christian invective, little hope could have remained that the Temple with its high priests and holy sacrifices would ever be restored. Furthermore, from the fourth century on, Palestine became the Christian 'Holy Land,' where ever-growing numbers of Christian pilgrims came

¹ Meeks, 1978, 31; citing Jesus' prophecy from Matt. 24:2.

to see the sacred sites mentioned in the Old and New Testaments. From the early fourth century onward, too, a growing number of churches was being built, both as imperial foundations, such as the Martyrium next to Golgotha and the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, as well as by private enterprise. In the growing tide of Christianization, Jews had to adapt, to find the means to assert their identity in an ever more complex world.

The record of that adaptation can be found in archaeological remains of synagogues, in which ecclesiastical furnishings appear, as they do in early churches. We will start with an examination of these furnishings in synagogues and then turn to changes in synagogue plans in the next chapter.

Although a wide variety of synagogue plans survive from fourth-century Palestine, not one of them had an apse. By the sixth century however, the layouts of twelve out of more than thirty identified synagogues in Palestine conform to those of the early Byzantine mono-apsidal church, for example, the synagogues at Beth Alpha, Ma'oz Hayyim near Scythopolis, and Beth Yerach (Philoteria).² These synagogues were aligned along a longitudinal axis, often with an atrium, a narthex, a prayer hall with nave and flanking aisles, and an apse at the end of the hall opposite the entrance. In six examples an apse was added to an existing structure, for example at Ma'oz Hayyim, where the apse was built onto the southern wall of the synagogue some time in the fifth century (phase II) (Fig. 5:1).³ The inclusion of an apse in the synagogue plan was a marked and abrupt departure from the earlier convention of placing a single raised platform against the back wall of a rectangular hall, as in the earliest phase (c. 4th century) at Ma'oz Hayyim. In some synagogues consisting of a simple rectangular hall, two platforms were set on opposite sides of the central doorway, as at Meroth in Upper Galilee. In the excavation there, a raised platform built of

² This group includes: Hammat Tiberias 1B, Beth Alpha, Beth She'an North, Ma'oz Hayyim, Hammat Gader, Gaza, Ma'on Nirim, Jericho, Beth Yerach, Na'aran, Zur Natan, Khirbet Samara.

³ Here, an apse was added to the southern wall of the synagogue B (phase II) some time in the fifth century and continued in its third phase into the sixth century. For the excavation report, see: Tzaferis, 1982, 218.

limestone, standing at over 1.00 m. in height, was unearthed *in situ* to the west of the central entrance. A second, eastern, platform is only partially preserved (Fig. 5:2).⁴

Platforms have been found in synagogues dating from the second century on, if we can rely on the as-yet-unpublished finds from Nabratein. There the platform was certainly an interior feature long before the appearance of apses. In fact, in several halls without benches, platforms in synagogues are the sole element of otherwise an empty space. They served several functions. Their primary function seems to have been as a raised location for the Torah Scrolls, which were probably placed in some kind of cabinet or shrine. In other cases, the platform served as a dais, on which the *kohanim* (priests) stood while pronouncing the priestly blessing during the liturgy. Little evidence from Jewish written sources or from archaeology exists to indicate that there was any other distinguishing feature of a Jewish prayer hall in the fourth or fifth centuries, such as an *ambo* or *solea*. The Torah Shrine in which the Holy Scrolls were kept, set on top of a platform, was 'the most prominent feature of the synagogue.'⁵

Instead of a rectangular hall with a simple platform against one wall, on which the Torah Ark was placed, the addition of an apse to fifth- and sixth-century synagogue layouts might suggest a change in liturgical practice. This change might indicate that the Torah Ark was now placed in the apse, where it became the focal point of prayer, if it had not been a focal point earlier. This layout was an architectural means of focusing attention toward the Ark. This arrangement in the synagogue would follow the standard pattern from the fourth century onward in churches, by substituting the Torah Ark for the *mensa sacra* in the apse. However, no example of a Torah Ark has yet been certainly identified *in situ* in the apse of an excavated synagogue, perhaps because they were constructed of perishable wood.

⁴ The final excavation report has not yet been published owing to Ilan's premature death, Ilan and Damati, 1989; Ilan, 1995. Platforms such as these have mainly been found on the wall closest to Jerusalem but also on other walls. For example, synagogues at Sepphoris and Beth She'arim have platforms adjacent to their northern walls, opposite Jerusalem. See: Mazar, 1952, 18; Weiss and Netzer, 1996a, 133.

⁵ Hachlili, 1988, 166.

Near the apse in the synagogue at Beth She'an North, 45 iron nails were found, which the excavator attributed as the disintegrated Torah Ark.⁶ Ornamental bone plaques were found in the south-eastern section of the nave in the basilical synagogue at Gaza.⁷ These unpublished plaques are thought to be decorations belonging to a wooden box or Torah shrine. Several bone and ivory objects were found in the apse of the synagogue at Ma'on (Nirim), not far from Gaza.⁸ These objects include small fittings, part of a carved wreath, and what is interpreted as a catch for a cabinet door. Traces of wood and ashes found in the En Gedi synagogue adjacent to a previously blocked doorway may indicate the location of a Torah Ark.⁹ However, even though these objects may have come from a Torah Shrine, they do not provide conclusive proof for its original location.

Along with the appearance of the apse in synagogue layouts, furniture typical of early churches has also been found in some ancient synagogues. For example, chancel screens have been found in ten synagogues; some with apses, others without. Also discovered were numerous chancel screens and posts (some in fragments) with Hebrew or Greek inscriptions, or with symbols incised or in relief. One common motif is the menorah (Fig. 5:3). Chancel screens are a surprising feature in the repertoire of synagogue furnishings, since there does not seem to be any need for them in the Jewish liturgy. Several explanations for the appearance of chancel screens as a synagogue furnishing have been advanced, but none appears convincing.¹⁰ Another type of ecclesiastical furnishing which appears in four synagogues is the *ambo*, a platform from which the Word was read aloud. This platform does not appear

⁶ A Samaritan origin is indicated by the Samaritan script of one of the inscriptions found in an attached room. For the iron nails and excavation report, see: Zori, 1967, 164. Possible evidence for a wooden Torah Ark was found in the synagogue at 'En Gedi, near the Dead Sea, which was destroyed by fire in the mid-sixth century, where traces of charred scrolls were found on the floor in a niche formed by a blocked doorway. For the preliminary excavation report, see: Barag, et al., 1981, 117.

⁷ Ovadiah, op. cit., 130.

⁸ Rahmani, 1960, 14.

⁹ see chapter 5; Barag, et al., 1981, 119.

¹⁰ Motives for the appearance of ecclesiastical furnishings in synagogues will be examined more fully in the next chapter.

in any Palestinian synagogue dated before the late fourth century. One more, though rare, ecclesiastical furnishing is the stone chair or cathedra, known as the 'Seat of Moses'.¹¹ Only two of these stone chairs have been found in Palestine, at Hammat Tiberias North and at Chorazin in Upper Galilee (Fig. 5:4). These chairs are reminiscent of the episcopal throne, the cathedra, of the church bishop.

5.2. Written sources for platforms in synagogues

Jewish written sources offer a starting point for testimony concerning the interior layout of synagogues. However, whether these sources come from the Palestinian or the Babylonian sphere, they present the same inherent difficulties. Firstly, Talmudic references are difficult to date accurately. Often only internal evidence can be used to identify and date the specific rabbi who mentions features of the synagogue. Lists of particular rabbis belonging to each generation have been compiled, but they are based on references within the Talmudic literature. Secondly, Talmudic literature seldom explains the reasons behind contemporary liturgical practice. For example, in the third-century Mishnah, the question is posed:¹²

...How did they order the matter on the last seven days of fasting? They brought out the Ark (of the Torah) into the open space of the town and put wood-ashes on the Ark and on the heads of the President and the Fathers of the court; and everyone took [of the ashes] and put them on his head.

This passage tells us that at the time of the writer the Ark was portable, but not whether the full religious service was performed outdoors, or if prayer was oriented in a particular direction.

Concerning the interior furnishings, the Mishnah mentions that the synagogue included benches, a couch, a curtain on the Ark, the *bema* and planks, and a reading

¹¹ Rachmani suggests that the use of these chairs in synagogues was an adaptation of the contemporary Christian practice of enthroning the gospel, known as *hetoimasia*; Rahmani, 1990, 212. See also chapter 6, section 6.7.

¹² M. Tann 2:1; B.Sotah 39b.

כיצד מוציאים את תבה לרחובה של עיר ימותנין אפר מקלה על גבי התבה
ובראש הנשיא ובראש אב בית דין וכל אחד ואחד מותן בראשו

table.¹³ These objects are referred to in a discussion of the relative degree of holiness of each of these objects. The criterion for claiming each object's holiness is its distance from the Biblical scrolls. Therefore, the Ark is second in holiness (being the container for the Scrolls), while the curtain is less holy because it is placed on the Ark.¹⁴

5.2.1. The platform in rabbinic liturgical discussion

In the liturgy of the synagogue, between the reading of the Shem'a, and the reading of the 18 Benedictions, various rabbis observed different traditions regarding movement within the synagogue.¹⁵ During the first part of the service, the *shaliach tzibbur* (officer of the synagogue) and the congregation read the Shem'a together, while the officer sat in his place. Then he, or some other person, would 'pass before the Chest' (*o'ver lifnay haTeva*) or 'go down before the Chest' (*y'arad lifnay haTeva*), and stand in that position while the 18 Benedictions were read. The terms 'pass before' or 'go down' have attracted attention because they may in fact refer to a similar movement, but reflect different furnishings within the synagogue. To date, however, scholars have not been able to find either chronological or geographic criteria for distinguishing between the use of 'pass before,' rather than 'go down,' in the rabbinic literature.¹⁶ Perhaps the phrase 'go down' refers to those who sat in the

¹³ P.Meg. 3:1

כל כלי בית הכנסת כבית הכנסת: קפסלה וקלטירה כבית הכנסת, כילה דעל ארונה כארונא. ר אבהו יהב גולתא תחתוי ההן כילן. רב יהודי בשם שמואל, בימה ולוחין אין בהן משוי קדושת ארון ויש בהן משוי קדושי בית הכנסת. אינגלין אין בו משוי קדושת ארון, יש בו משום קדושי בית הכנסת.

"All the furnishings of the synagogue are like (in holiness to) the synagogue. Its bench and its couch are like (in holiness to) the synagogue. The curtain on the Ark is like (in holiness) to the Ark. R. Abbahu put a cloak under the curtain. Rav Judah in the name of Samuel: the *bema* and planks do not have the sanctity of the Ark, and do have the sanctity of the synagogue. The reading table does not have the sanctity of the Ark, and does have the sanctity of the synagogue."

¹⁴ For a discussion of this passage, see: Fine, 1997, 70-71; Levine, 1991, 54-56.

¹⁵ The first part of the service, which is a confession of faith, includes the recitation of the following verses: Deut. 6:4-9; Deut. 11: 13-21; Num. 15:37-41. For the service, see: Schürer, 1979, vol. II, 448-454.

¹⁶ The evidence for a chronological criterion for the term relies upon the term 'go down' not being used in the compilation of the third century Mishnah, but solely the term 'pass before.' Later works use both terms. For the most recent attempt to compare written sources to archaeological finds, see: Weiss, 1990, 14-21.

upper tiers of benches in the synagogue, and needed to step down to get to the Torah Ark located on the floor.

The positions of the various participants, relative to the Torah Ark, during the liturgy are also unclear. In the Tosephta, perhaps dating from as early as the second century, is the statement that:¹⁷

...The elders sit with their faces to the people and backs to the *qodes*, the *teva* stands with its front to the people and back to the *qodes*. When the priests (*kohanim*) give the blessing, they stand with their faces to the people and backs to the *qodes*.

However, the meaning of the term *qodes* (= holy) is still obscure. One modern scholar surmises that the *qodes* in this passage is the niche found in some synagogues.¹⁸ Other scholars believe that *qodes* refers to the Ark of the Covenant, the site of the Holy of Holies in the destroyed Temple in Jerusalem.¹⁹

Some information concerning a platform can be gleaned from discussions concerning the Priestly Blessing during the prayer service. A number of references from the Rabbinic sources reflect the tensions between sages and priests. These discuss the priests (*kohanim*) before their ascent to the platform to pronounce the Priestly Blessing in the second part of the service, during the reading of the Eighteen Benedictions. Some rabbis were concerned with the question of whether their shoes were to be removed by the priests before the recital of the blessing.²⁰ Other rabbis

¹⁷ T. Meg. 4:21-23

כיצד היו זקנים יושבין, פניהם כלפי העם ואחריהן כלפי קודש. כשמניחין את התיבה פניה כלפי העם ואחריה כלפי קודש. כשהכהנים נושאים כפיהן, פניהם כלפי העם ואחריהם כלפי קדש, חזן הכנסת פניו כלפי קודש וכל העם פניהם כלפי קדש

For summing up of the liturgical aspects of the synagogue, see: Shinan, 1996, 133-137; for a discussion of the extent of rabbinic influence on the service: Levine, 1999, 464-469.

¹⁸ Hachlili, 1976, 52.

¹⁹ Sukenik, 1934, 25; Fine, 1997, 73.

²⁰ B.Sotah 40a:

ורבן אמרי מהכא: דאין הכהנים ראשין לעלות בסנדליהן לדוכן, וזהו אחת מתשע תקנות שהתקין רבן יוחנן בן זכאי. מאי טעמא - לאו משום כבוד צבור? - אמר רב אשי: לא, התם שמא נפסקה לו רצועה בסנדלו והדר אזיל למיקטריה, ואמרי: בן גרושה או בן חלוצה הוא.

were interested in the ceremonial raising of their arms, and whether the blessing pronounced by a shorter priest standing behind a taller priest was still valid.²¹ It seems from another remark that, when the priests and the Torah Ark had to share the same platform, there may not have been enough room for everyone. R. Joshua b. Levi (fl. 3rd century) was angry with those priests who refused to ascend the platform.²² R. Oshaia (fl. early 3rd century) taught that priests must not ascend it after a particular point in the liturgy.²³ R. Adda once said in the name of R. Simlai (3rd century) that when all worshippers are priests, all must ascend the platform, but R. Shimi disagreed, saying that some should, and some should not, but those who do not ascend must say 'Amen' after the blessing.²⁴ The platform referred to here is called

"The Rabbis said: It is derived from the regulation that the *kohanim* are not permitted to ascend the platform (*dukhan*) wearing their shoes. This is one of the ten ordinances which R. Johanan b. Zakkai instituted. What was the reason? Was it not out of respect for the congregation? R. Ashi said: No; [the reason] there was lest the shoe-lace become untied and he proceeds to retie it, and people will say, 'He is the son of a divorcee or a Haluzah.'"

R. Johanan founded the academy at Yavneh in the first century; R. Ashi flourished in the early fifth century.

²¹ B.Sotah 38b:

גופא, תנא אבא בריה דרב מנימין בר חייא: עם שאחורי כהנים אינן בכלל ברכה. פשיטא, אריכי באפי גוצי - לא מפסקי, תיבה - לא מפסקא, מחיתה מאי? תא שמע דאמר רבי יהושע בן לוי: אפילו מחיצה של ברזל אינה מפסקת בין ישראל לאביהם שבשמים.

"The [above] text stated: 'Abba the son of R. Minyamin b. Hiyya taught, The people who are behind the *kohanim* do not come within the scope of the benediction.' It is obvious that the tall do not create an obstruction for the short, nor does the Ark [where the Torah-scrolls are deposited] create an obstruction; but how is it with a partition [within the Synagogue]?- Come and hear: R. Joshua b. Levi said: Even a partition of iron does not divide between Israel and their Father in heaven."

R. Minyamin b. Hiyya flourished in the third century.

²² B.Sotah 38b:

ואמר רבי יהושע בן לוי: כל כהן שאינו עולה לדוכן - עובר בשלשה עשה

"R. Joshua b. Levi also said: Any *kohen* who refuses to ascend the platform transgresses three positive commandments..."

²³ B.Sotah 38b

וכדתני רבי אושעיא: לא שנו אלא שלא עקר את רדליו, אבל עקר את רדליו - עולה

"This is as R. Oshaia taught, [the statement that the *kohen* may not ascend after that point in the liturgy] does not apply except when he had not moved his feet, but if he had moved his feet he may ascend."

²⁴ B.Sotah 38b.

אמר אדא אמר רבי שמלאי: בית הכנסת שכולה כהנים - כולן עולין לדוכן

"Adda said in the name of R. Simlai: In a Synagogue where all the worshippers are *kohanim*, they all ascend the platform."

the *dukhan*. Safrai has shown that this term is mentioned often in the Babylonian Talmud, but rarely in the Palestinian Talmud, reflecting of different liturgical traditions.²⁵

On account of the logistical difficulties involved in each priest having take off his shoes, mount the platform, say the Priestly Blessing, and step down to allow all the other priests the same privilege, these liturgical discussions might indicate that some priests did not have the opportunity to ascend the platform before a particular point in the liturgy. In sum, a single platform in the synagogue served the double purpose of elevating the Torah Shrine, or cabinet, as well as the *kohanim* for the delivery of the Priestly Blessing.

5.3. Archaeological evidence for the raised platforms in synagogues

In the archaeological record, remains of one or two platforms may have served some or all of the functions mentioned above. By examining the archaeological evidence for platforms, we should be better able to make distinctions between when and where these platforms existed (Table 5:1). Scrutinising the shape and size of the examples known from archaeological excavations should help to clarify their functions. For example, fewer people would be able to stand at the same time on a small platform than on a larger platform. We can be certain that at least some platforms were stood upon, as worn steps occur leading up to five platforms.²⁶

Twenty-six synagogue phases have been uncovered with significant remains of either one or two platforms. Why did some have only one platform and others two, while still other synagogues have none? In interpreting the archaeological evidence,

והתני רב שימי מבירתא דשיחורי: בית הכנסת שכולה כהנים - מקצתן עולין ומקצתן

עונין אמין! - לא קשיא, הא - דאישתייר בי עשרה, הא - דלא אישתייר בי עשרה

"But R. Shimi of the Fort of Shihori taught, In a Synagogue where all the worshippers are *kohanim*, some ascend [the platform] and the rest respond with Amen! - There is no contradiction; the latter refers to where ten remain [to respond Amen] and the former where ten do not remain."

²⁵ Safrai, 1989, 69-70.

²⁶ Steps have been found in five synagogues: at Hammat Tiberias; Rehov in the Jordan Valley; Qatzrin in the Golan; Susiya and Horvat Anim in Judaea.

difficulties arise when similar platforms are found in secular as well as in religious structures.

At Beth She'arim, in the Jezreel Valley, excavations in the 1930's revealed a third-century basilical synagogue, and nearby another basilica called the 'civic basilica,' which apparently dates to the same period. Both these structures are strikingly similar in building technique, and indeed, some of their interior dimensions are identical. The stones used for both buildings are finely-faced large ashlar. On the one hand, the synagogue lies on a NW-SE axis and was built near the summit of the town (Fig. 5:5). A platform was discovered opposite the southeastern entrances of this synagogue, in the northern end of the hall. Neither the axis of this building, nor the location of this platform is consistent with prayer towards Jerusalem.

On the other hand, the civic building has its axis in a north-south direction. In phase I of this building, dated to the first half of the second or early third centuries, a platform was built at the southern end of the nave. This platform is only slightly smaller than that of the synagogue (Fig. 5:6). If this building were used for prayer, the axis of the basilica, as well as a platform in the south, might indicate that the direction of prayer was toward Jerusalem.

On the basis of the epigraphic evidence, there is little doubt that identification of the synagogue is sound. No epigraphic evidence whatsoever was found in the civic basilica, nor was evidence found to indicate that this building served any kind of religious function.²⁷ Thus, one must conclude that the synagogue, with its platform on the north-west wall opposite the direction of Jerusalem certainly had a religious function, while the civic basilica, with a platform on its southern wall (facing Jerusalem) did not.

Further challenges are apparent in modern reconstructions of buildings, which have been either excavated or surveyed. The synagogue at Meiron in Upper Galilee is one example. More than half of the original southern wall of ashlar remains

²⁷ Mazar, 1973, 17.

standing. The excavator assumed that a platform had to exist against the south wall (facing Jerusalem), and so his isometric reconstruction drawing shows a small platform set against the interior south wall, between the central and western entrances (Fig. 5:7).²⁸ The sole evidence for such a reconstruction, however, is a window in the south wall (Fig. 5:8). This is only one example of how preconceived ideas can influence the study of ancient synagogues. Another example of the difficulties involved in relying on published plans can be discerned in two structures in the Golan. In reconstructed plans of two unexcavated buildings at 'En Nashut and at Umm el-Kanatir made by Ma'oz, the central door has been shifted to the west in order to make room for a purely conjectural platform (Fig. 5:9).²⁹

5.3.1. Platforms in a range of sizes

Excavated platforms have been found in a variety of sizes. These differences have been used for hypotheses about their function. Hachlili emphasises that a single small platform, such as the one at Gush Halav in Palestine, must have functioned solely as a platform for an aedicule and not for any other purpose (see below).³⁰ Where there are two platforms on either side of a main entrance, several functions have been suggested. At Nabratein, for example, the western platform might have been used as the location for the Ark, perhaps on the western platform, with a menorah on the eastern platform. This reconstruction is based on a comparison with the incised decoration of Catacomb 4, Hall A in Beth She'arim, where on either side

²⁸ Meyers, 1981a, 12.

²⁹ Urman's excavation photographs and written notes show no indication of the shift of the central door or the platform. Measurements show that the door is in the centre of the façade wall. Another instance of Ma'oz's misrepresentation of the evidence is a pedestal decorated with a menorah in relief, attributed to the NE pedestal of the 'En Nashut building. In fact, this pedestal was found 10 years before at the site of Fakhura by S. Gutman, see: Urman, 1995, esp. 440-441 and footnotes 70 – 71, 551; Ma'oz, 1988, 121.

³⁰ One must be careful in reading this author's work, since the term 'aedicula' is rather loosely used to describe a platform on which an aedicula might have stood. Typically, few remains in ancient synagogues can be unequivocally identified as an aedicule. According to Pevsner, an 'aedicula' is: 'Properly a shrine framed by two columns supporting an entablature and pediment, set in a temple and containing a statue: but also, more loosely, the framing of a door, window or other opening with two columns, piers or pilasters supporting a gable, lintel, plaque, or an entablature and pediment.' Fleming, et al., 1981, s.v. 'Aedicule' Hachlili, 1988, 167, 198.

of the tomb is a relief decoration of four columns supporting a semi-circular pediment. The right decoration of the façade is similar, although the central motif shows a menorah. However, although the motifs in the catacomb at Beth She'arim might be supposed to reflect reality in synagogues, so far no archaeological evidence has been found to support that assumption.³¹

In twenty-four (or 92 percent) of the twenty-six synagogues in which platforms have been found, the platform is placed against the wall closest to Jerusalem. That is to say, synagogues located north of Jerusalem have the platform against the southern wall, while those located to the west of Jerusalem have the platform against the eastern wall. Those south of Jerusalem have the platform against the north wall. The two to the north of Jerusalem that do not have a platform against the southern wall are the synagogue at Beth She'arim, already mentioned, and the synagogue at Sepphoris, which has a platform against the north wall.³²

We will examine the archaeological evidence by presenting the platforms by size and location: firstly, single small platforms near doors, secondly double small platforms flanking the main entrance, then large platforms, and finally small platforms in other locations. Then, using a statistical analysis of the sizes of different platforms, I will show that there is a size relationship between the average size of fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-century platforms considered 'small' and 'large.' Using this information, we will be better prepared to suggest which functions these platforms served.

1. Single small platforms

Solid archaeological evidence for single small platforms near a main door has been found at three sites: Gush Halav, Chorazin, and Hammat Tiberias. The best published evidence so far for a single small platform near the main door is at Gush Halav. At Chorazin, four basalt stones were found adjacent to the main doorway in

³¹ See: Chiat, 1990-1991, 181.

³² The excavator believes that direction of prayer toward Jerusalem was not obligatory in the fifth century, Weiss and Netzer, 1996b, 13; and see below.

the nave. These stones have been interpreted as the remains of a small platform.³³ The evidence for a platform at Hammat Tiberias is not published.

Remains of a single small platform have been found in the phase I synagogue at Gush Halav (Fig. 5:10). Only one complete foundation-course of stones and partial remains of a second course were uncovered adjacent to the southern wall, west of the central door, and abutting the western stylobate (Fig. 5:11).³⁴ This platform projects 1.75 to the north, and is 1.75 m. wide, measured from the edge of the stylobate.³⁵ Three well-cut rectangular stones form the eastern side of the platform. None of these stones was cut with a moulding, in contrast to the double platforms at Meroth and the single large platform at Horvat Shem'a (see below). Though the original height of this platform is unknown, the north edge nearly reaches the position of the southwest pedestal on the stylobate. Between the outer line of stones of this platform, and the stylobate, the excavators removed a fill of earth. The resulting depression might have served as a repository or *genizah*. Unlike other depressions found in platforms, for example at Hammat Tiberias, or in apses such as the fifth-century synagogue at Ma'oz Hayyim or the sixth-century Beth Alpha synagogue, which all have plaster or tiled surfaces in their depressions, the one at Gush Halav does not. This indicates that the depression at Gush Halav resulted from an earth fill subsequently removed by modern archaeologists, rather than an intentional feature of this platform in the third century CE.

³³ In addition, several carved basalt stones found loose at the site have been reconstructed as two platforms, one as the Torah Shrine, and the second for the basalt 'Chair of Moses', found in the eastern aisle of the synagogue. The chair was found turned over, six metres from the south wall, near the eastern wall. As four stones belonging to the western platform base were found, but no evidence for the second eastern platform, we will treat the evidence for this site as for a single small platform.

³⁴ The second course of stones of this platform are suggested by the excavators as the only remaining paving stones of phases III and IV. However, as no mortar bedding layer for paving stones was found within the synagogue, rather only a thin (ca. 10 cm.) plaster floor, these stones ought to be related to this platform alone. See above, chapter 2.1.2, Gush Halav.

³⁵ The excavators present no evidence for a similar-sized platform in the west aisle (i.e. on both sides of the stylobate) but mention that if it were on both sides of the stylobate, the platform would measure 2.00 x. 4.15 m. Meyers, et al., 1990, 79.

Other unusual features of this synagogue are described in the final report. According to Meyers, the stylobate of the first phase of the synagogue was set on top of the level of the first floor of the synagogue. That is, the floor of the synagogue is ca. 0.45 m. below the level of the stylobate, which forms a kind of step. To explain this unusual feature, Meyers writes that the difference of nearly half a metre between the top of the stylobate and the level of the original floor does not reflect a later building phase of the synagogue, but rather is 'an adaptive measure.'³⁶ It seems more reasonable, however, to assume that the stylobate represents a later phase of the structure unrelated to Meyers' "original floor." Traces of a hard-packed fill and some plaster found in the northern section of the nave, on the same level as the top of the stylobate, then would be the traces of a floor from the phase to which the stylobate belongs.³⁷ This would mean that the level of the floor of the synagogue would have been on the same level as that of the stylobate.

Meyers dates the platform on the basis of material unearthed in the fill below it which contained pottery dated to the Iron Age, Persian, and Hellenistic periods mixed with Middle Roman period pottery and sherds of a late Roman lamp.³⁸ Unfortunately, this lamp sherd does not appear in the list or drawings of sherds in the excavation report. Thus, it is difficult to date this platform absolutely. Since the top of this excavated platform is at the same level as the remains of the plaster floor, and even with the top of the stylobate, it is probably contemporary with the construction of the hall.

³⁶ Meyers explains that the interior slope of the floor (nearly half a metre) was purposely made on account of the high rainfall in this area. The ground slope on the outside of the building of nearly 1 metre was taken account of in the interior of the structure to 'abet drainage.' However, remains of a drainage channel discovered underneath the floor level in the NW corner of the synagogue more than likely relate to an earlier phase of a smaller structure, before the synagogue was built, rather than to the period during the synagogue's existence. It is hard to understand why drainage problems (if any did in fact occur) on the exterior of the building should require the interior floor to have a slope; Meyers et al., 1990, 79.

³⁷ Meyers et al., 1990, 80.

³⁸ This lamp bears registration number R78275.

A second platform, called the 'later *bema*' is also constructed of worked stones, less-well cut than those of the earlier platform (Fig. 5:12). This platform, too, is set against the southern interior wall, but in the western aisle, and rests partially on top of the stylobate. Remains exist of two complete courses of stones, the upper course ca. 20 cm smaller than the lower, frame a step on the north side. This platform is smaller than the earlier platform, and survive to 0.30 m. in height.³⁹ Traces of plaster on the north face of one stone indicate that this whole structure was plastered.⁴⁰

About the two platforms in the synagogue the excavator writes:

The location of the *bema* at the south interior wall of the building corresponds to the special attention given to the south façade wall. Both of these aspects of the synagogue's construction are related to the principle of sacred orientation, whereby the side of a synagogue building facing Jerusalem receives special attention. In addition to the *bema* position, such attention involves, in the case of Gush Halav: the striking appearance of the chiseled masonry of the ashlar facade on the south end [...]; the special attention given to the single main entryway, with its eagle lintel; and the fact that only the south facade was largely unobscured by buildings against or near the exterior synagogue walls. These features draw attention to the south end of the building as viewed from the exterior, that is, by people facing north as they approached from the south [...]. The opposite perspective by worshippers facing south, obtains in the interior of the building with its successive prayer platforms on the west side of the south entryway.⁴¹

These aspects are certainly important in the development of the platforms. However, the excavator does not tackle the thorny question of what purpose these platforms served, nor why the second platform is in a different position from the first, in the western aisle, rather than in the nave. Concerning the smaller, second platform, the excavator mentions that it is

...a rather modest affair that ill-suits the ashlar facade to which it is attached and the interior sanctuary space in which it is located. This apparent anomaly cannot be explained. Perhaps the *bema* was viewed as a functional rather than an aesthetic structure: it was simply a place on which Scripture was read, as a raised elevation and in the front of the hall.⁴²

³⁹ This platform measures 1.46 by 1.17 m. If we calculate its size in square metres, the later platform is 58 percent smaller (1.71 sq. m./3.06 sq. m.); Meyers, et al., 1990, 79.

⁴⁰ Magness suggests that these two platforms ought to be considered as one large platform on account of the similarity in size and shape of their building stones, and the similarity in levels to the stylobate; Magness, 2001, 8-10.

⁴¹ Meyers et al., 1990, 80-84.

⁴² Meyers et al., 1990, 121.

An issue not discussed by the excavator concerns the line of sight of the person reading Scripture there, and of those wishing to hear what is read. On the one hand, if a reader were to stand within the nave of the synagogue on the earlier platform, he would not be obstructed from the view of the congregation. If, on the other hand, he were standing on the second, later platform, in the western aisle, behind the SW column, the western line of columns placed on the stylobate would obstruct the readers' line of sight. In fact, assuming that both platforms served the same purpose, the later removal of the platform from the nave to the aisle ought to be understood as a reduction of the importance of this object. That is, the move to the western aisle would mean that the line of columns there would obstruct the congregation's view of the reader while reading the Holy Scripture. On the other hand, if these platforms were for a Torah Shrine and not for the reader, the move from inside the nave to the western aisle would be a positive one. In considering the line-of-sight argument, when entering the synagogue from the back entrance in the north end of the western aisle, one would immediately see this platform and whatever is on top of it. Worshippers entering from the northern door would then not have their backs turned to the most important object within the synagogue while entering the prayer hall from the northern door. Again, assuming that both platforms (phase I and phase II) functioned as platforms for the Holy Ark, then, after the second platform was built, the Ark would no longer be set behind the front door.

Turning to the fourth-century Chorazin synagogue, several finely cut basalt blocks were found in the rubble at the site. One of these is a finely decorated pilaster measuring 1.67 in height (Fig. 5:13).⁴³ Four stones protrude from the level of the basalt floor between the central door and the western stylobate.⁴⁴ On the basis of several carved stones including the pilaster, and possible similarities to the aediculae flanking the entrances in the synagogue at Sardis, the excavator has reconstructed an

⁴³ The nearest parallel to this pilaster is from Hisham's palace, from the eighth century, Yeivin, 1983, 75; for comments about the design, see: Turnheim, 1987, 153.

⁴⁴ Yeivin, 1985, 272.

aedicule here. This aedicule is modeled on the third-century aedicule at Dura-Europos. The foundation for this reconstruction rests on three finely-carved basalt stones which were found loose in the synagogue, and in the street to the east of the synagogue. A second aedicule set on a platform to the east of the central door was reconstructed, on the basis of three small basalt stones (Fig. 5:14). No evidence however, was found *in situ* for this restoration and hence it is difficult to confirm or disprove Yeivin's reconstruction of the southern wall of this synagogue.

2. Case Study: The "IB" Synagogue at Hammat Tiberias

The synagogue at Hammat Tiberias, phase III, was built over a thick layer of earth which covered (deliberately?) the earlier phase II synagogue with a zodiac mosaic.⁴⁵ One of the largest apses yet discovered was built into its southern wall, and reached by three steps, which form a wide platform. Within this apse is a bench, 55 cm. high and 65 cm. wide. The excavator of the site dates the construction of this phase to the early fifth century⁴⁶ A later phase which lasted until the mid-eighth century, is indicated by sparse remains of a mosaic floor on which is a depiction of a menorah.

This synagogue is interesting for several reasons. It is the only basilical synagogue in Palestine with an apse that has a completely preserved *synthronon*. However, the excavator does not refer to the *synthronon* in his published reports, nor in the final report. In fact, in the original published plan the *synthronon* is shown as part of the foundation wall for the apse.⁴⁷ However, visiting the site, one may distinguish the remains of a wall which was aligned with the southern wall (Fig.

⁴⁵ Dothan, 2000, 18.

⁴⁶ "between 420-423" when the "enforcement of the edict of Theodosius, when the prohibition on construction of synagogues was completely enforced." Dothan, 2000, 12. Johnson, who published Dothan's findings after his death, wrote: ... although the date proposed by Prof. Dothan for Synagogue Ib appears reasonable from the historical and political point of view, it is not supported by the datable artifacts found at the site, especially the pottery, little of which has a date-range beginning in the 6th century and most of which may be firmly dated to the 7th and 8th centuries". Dothan, 2000, 93.

⁴⁷ These features missing from the plan were first pointed out in 1987, Milson, 1987b, 304; Dothan, 1968 (Hebrew); Dothan, 1981 (English).

2:9).⁴⁸ These remains indicate that, at an early stage, the southern wall was torn down in order to add the apse. The addition of this apse to an earlier structure is attested to by the poor join between the southern wall, which is still standing in the west, and the apse (Fig. 5:15). The change from a flat southern wall with entrances to one with an apse is known to occur in early synagogues, at Ma'oz Hayyim phase II, and Hammat Gader phase II.

If we redraw the plan of this earlier phase without the apse, but instead with the main doors in the southern wall with access to the eastern and western aisles, it becomes clear that the internal layout of this structure is paralleled in the Galilean synagogues at Capernaum, Chorazin, and Arbel.⁴⁹ These have a nave flanked by aisles, with a transverse aisle on the north side, and main entrances in the south side. Further examination at Hammat Tiberias reveals another feature not reported by the excavator: a square platform next to the western edge of the steps leading to the *bema* (Fig. 2:10).⁵⁰ Although not shown on the excavator's published plan, this platform can clearly be seen at the site and in several published photographs. The steps leading to the apse partially cover this basalt platform. Particularly intriguing about this built-up platform is the second basalt stone of the western base of it. This carved block, 0.45 m. x 0.30 m., seems to be the right-hand side of a threshold, with door socket nearly 0.10 m. in diameter carved into it, 0.05 m. from the edge of the jamb (Fig. 5:16). One is immediately reminded of the door sockets in the same position relative to the large platform found at Qasrin, located ca. 35 km. north-east, in the Golan, on the opposite shore of the Sea of Galilee. Furthermore, this single platform at Hammath Tiberias, set partly in the western aisle and partly on the stylobate, parallels the location and size of the platform at Gush Halav.

Synagogues at several sites have fragmentary or indeterminate remains of platforms. Fragmentary remains were found in the early fourth-century synagogue at

⁴⁸ In the final report, this is called "W18"; Dothan, 2000, 14.

⁴⁹ See plan in Catalogue, vol. III, p. 98.

⁵⁰ Measurements taken at the site show it is 1.00 x 0.90 m.

Horvat Ammudim. In the southern section of the nave, an excavation was carried out in a small sounding called 'C.' Although no floor was observed, a number of stones 'forming a square' were found. The excavator believes that these remains were part of a later installation in the synagogue.⁵¹ Since no excavation was carried out in the south-eastern section of the nave, it is impossible to determine whether a similar feature existed to the east of the central door.

Similarly, the identification of remains reported by Foerster in his re-excavation of the synagogue at Hammat Gader is uncertain. Here, 'foundations of a raised platform' were uncovered. These foundations belong to the second phase of the building, although a full description of this platform's size and makeup have yet to be published.⁵²

In sum, the two sites where positively-identified single platforms have been found are Gush Halav and Hammath Tiberias. At Gush Halav, the platform might have been moved into the western aisle some time in the late fourth or fifth centuries. This newer platform was smaller than the one it replaced. At Hammath Tiberias, it is not possible to date the platform accurately until further excavation is carried out at the site. At a third site, Chorazin in Upper Galilee, the reconstruction of the Torah Shrine is based on the loose fragments found in the excavation, but the paucity of evidence found *in situ* makes this reconstruction impossible to verify or disprove. Furthermore, the dating of the Hammat Tiberias and Chorazin synagogues remains unclear.

3. Platforms flanking the main entrance

At three sites two platforms have been found flanking the main entrance of the synagogue.⁵³ These sites date from the second to the sixth century. Unlike the unclear chronological situation for the single small platforms located near doorways, the chronology of flanking platforms is more reliable.

⁵¹ Levine, 1981c, 79.

⁵² Foerster, 1995, 90.

⁵³ These are: Nabratein phase I and II, Capernaum phase II, and Meroth phase III.

The earliest dated evidence for double platforms found in a possible synagogue context belongs to the second century CE. At Nabratein in Upper Galilee, a possible synagogue with three phases was found. Evidence for the earliest halls' use as a synagogue (phase I) rests on the fact that it is directly below the later synagogues (phases II and III).⁵⁴ In both the first and second phases, two platforms flanked the southern entrance. However, neither epigraphic nor iconographic evidence was found in the first phase of the structure to identify this hall positively as a synagogue, nor has the final report been published.

When the earliest building was enlarged in the mid-third century (phase I), both platforms flanking the central entrance were re-plastered and built slightly higher. The western platform had two steps in its northern side. When both platforms were re-plastered a second time, possibly between 306-363 CE, a broken stone lintel was placed within the fill of the western platform. This lintel is decorated with two heraldic lions above a pediment, which surmounts a cut semi-domed conch. A hole in the top of this conch is thought to have been used for a chain and lamp. This pediment was probably supported by small columns and attached to the south wall.⁵⁵

Meyers reconstructs this pediment as part of a stone aedicule that stood on the western platform. The second, eastern, platform served either as the dais for a reader, or as a place for a menorah. In Meyers' reconstruction of these two platforms at Nabratein (Phase II), a priestly figure is standing on the western platform next to the Torah shrine, while the eastern platform has a table covered by a cloth, and a *menorah* on the table (Fig. 5:17). It is interesting to note that in this reconstruction drawing, the south-western column has been erased to show the location of the Torah shrine, while the south-eastern column obscures the platform.⁵⁶ Two sets of steps on the western platform in the reconstructed drawing are also not mentioned in the excavation report. Unlike in Yeivin's reconstruction of the synagogue at Chorazin,

⁵⁴ Meyers, 1982.

⁵⁵ Meyers, Strange and Meyers, 1981a, 240; Meyers, 1982, 42; Meyers, 1997, 318.

⁵⁶ Meyers, 1996, 13-14.

where a stone chair is set on the eastern platform, apparently Meyers prefers to use this platform for a table and menorah.

In the synagogue at Capernaum, the tens of thousands of coins that were found give a very good picture of the building chronology of the site. Here, we follow Magness' suggestion, that the construction date is in the beginning of the sixth century, rather than earlier.⁵⁷ In the nave of the synagogue, flanking the main entrance, two areas of plastered floor were found, unlike the rest of the prayer hall, which had flagstone paving. In the excavation report, these two areas are called 'M' (for the western area) and 'N' (for the eastern area).⁵⁸ Both are set against the stylobate. Part of the western area was excavated in a trench down the centre of the nave. In this trench the only remains found were a base of large stones, measuring over 2.5 m. square (Fig. 5:18). The eastern area, only partially cleared, seems to be the same length as the western area, but its width is apparently unknown as it has not yet been excavated. In Loffreda's most recent published plan of the synagogue, the width of the eastern platform is drawn in dashed lines, indicating that it could be the same the western base.⁵⁹

The synagogue at Meroth in Upper Galilee contains one of the best-preserved stone platforms in a Palestinian synagogue from the fifth century onwards. This synagogue was built in the first half of the fifth century and continued in use, with several renovations, until the early thirteenth century. Although the final excavation report has not been published, the chronological evidence for the phases of this synagogue seem secure. Remains of the western platform dating from the early sixth century stand over 1 m. in height.⁶⁰ This platform was rebuilt over an earlier fifth-century platform, whose size is unknown. This new platform is decorated with pilasters bearing *cyma recta* and half-round base moulding. Small column drums, and

⁵⁷ Magness, 2001, 24-15. See above, chapter 2.1.2.

⁵⁸ See plan of the Capernaum synagogue in the Catalogue, Volume III.

⁵⁹ Earlier plans show the width of this 'piattaforma' as 1.1m.; Corbo, 1975, 120; Loffreda, 1997, 224.

⁶⁰ This platform measures 1.76 x 0.9 m. Ilan, 1995, 258.

their bases, found nearby were undoubtedly placed on top of this platform forming an *aedicula*. The back of this *aedicula* was decorated with engaged columns with spiral shafts, one of which is decorated with an engraved menorah.

Of all the synagogues found so far with some type of platform, double platforms existed in 12 percent. If we compare the relative sizes of these platforms in square metres, an interesting pattern emerges: in the two synagogues where accurate measurements can be made, the eastern platforms are both smaller than their western platforms, by over half.⁶¹

4. Single large platforms

The largest number of synagogues in this survey contain single large platforms set against a flat wall of the synagogue, which did have an entrance in it. Eight synagogues from the late third to the fifth centuries have large platforms in them (Fig. 5:19).⁶² From the fifth and sixth centuries, there are seven examples (Fig. 5:20).⁶³ These fifteen examples account for over half of the excavated synagogues with platforms. Again, all, but two, of these platforms are in basilical structures. These two exceptions are open halls without roof supports, and located south of Jerusalem, in the Hebron Hills (at Eshtemo'a and at Susiya). All, but two, of the fifteen platforms are set against the wall closest to Jerusalem. The two exceptions with platforms against the north wall are located in the Galilee, at Sepphoris and Beth She'arim. Some of the platforms have steps, some do not. However, the quality of the excavation reports and dating of these platforms vary greatly. We will first examine the most reliably dated platforms, then proceed to those less well dated, and finally discuss the platforms whose dating is equivocal.

The best evidence for dating a large platform comes from the excavation of the late fourth or fifth-century synagogue at Horvat Shema' (Fig. 3:8). This platform

⁶¹ At Nabratein, the difference is 76 percent (6.82 sq. m./9.02 sq. m.), at Meroth, the difference is 60 percent (1.58 sq. m./ 2.62 sq. m.).

⁶² These are: Horvat Shem'a, Rehov I and Rehov II, Beth She'arim, Sepphoris, Hammath Tiberias II, Horvat 'Anim, Ma'oz Hayyim I, and Horvat Rimmon II.

⁶³ These include: 'Eshtemo'a, Susiya, Rehov III, , En Gedi, Qasrin, Ma'oz Hayyim III (in front of apse), and Arbel II (in front of the niche).

is slightly unusual as it is the only large platform in the southern aisle of a basilical structure (the axis of the synagogue is east-west). This platform is over 4 metres long, one and a half metres wide, and stands over 70 cm. high. Its base has an ovolo moulding along the left and right sides. The centre of the base, however, has no moulding, but consists of rough stone. The incomplete finishing of the base moulding would indicate that these moulding blocks were re-used in this platform, and therefore not originally intended for this location. Furthermore, no steps leading up to this platform were found. As we pointed out in chapter three, the introduction of a platform in this location not only makes access inconvenient, but also the view of it is obscured by the nearby columns.

Two coins found in the fill of this platform were used to date it. Since it is constructed of stone facing over an earth fill, it is highly unlikely that the two coins found in the fill could have slipped from a higher level down into its centre. One coin is an early first-century BCE issue of the Hasmonean Alexander Yannai (103-76 BCE), and hence can not help in dating the platform. The second coin, however, is a barely-worn bronze issue of Constans (337-341 CE). The excavator writes of this coin:⁶⁴

...If we assume that a new coin was either deliberately placed in the fill to signal the time of construction, or merely dropped at that time, the date [for the construction of the platform, *DM*] can be moved back a decade.

If we consider the dating of this platform on one coin alone, it might be preferable to give a deposition date up to about 40 years after the mint date of the coin. Rather than considering the platform being built in 350's CE, as the excavator assumes, it could have been constructed in the last decade of the fourth century.⁶⁵

In Galilee and the Jordan Valley, synagogue platforms were uncovered at Rehov, Beth She'arim, Sepphoris, and Qasrin. These include the two largest platforms found in a synagogue. At Rehov the platform occupies over 23 sq. metres of space. At Beth She'arim it occupies over 30 square metres. These four synagogues

⁶⁴ Meyers, et al., 1976, 34.

⁶⁵ cf. Chapter 2.1.1.

are basilical buildings, with the platform located at the end of the nave opposite the entrances. However, the published material for dating the phases of each of these sites is meagre.⁶⁶

The basilical synagogue excavated at Rehov has a large platform built in the southern end of its nave. This platform seems to have been constructed in the fourth century, enlarged in the fifth century, and slightly modified in the sixth century (Fig. 5:21). Steps cut into the short sides of this platform must have provided the means to ascend the platform from the aisles. In the third phase, probably dating to the sixth century, several renovations were carried out in the area of this platform. The steps were filled in with rubble, and plastered over. Once covered, this renovation created more space on the platform. Two new sets of steps were constructed on the northern side of the nave, on the east and west edges of this platform. A chancel was added in the nave, in front of these new steps. The two small rooms flanking the platform were closed off. Access to the platform would then have been solely from the nave. It is unclear when in the sixth century this change was made.

The late fourth-century synagogue at Qasrin has a large *bema* projecting from its southern wall. This platform, made of large basalt stones, has an area of over six square metres (Fig. 5:22).⁶⁷ Reaching to the bases of the southernmost columns, this platform fills the first bay of the nave. The platform has two steps (0.25 m. in high) on its north, east, and western sides. Interestingly, these steps do not seem to be the primary means of access. On the short, eastern and western, sides of the platform there are thresholds for small doors. These thresholds lead to a fill of rubble between the southern wall and the edge of the platform. As they assumed that the area of the excavated rubble fill was originally intended as a storage space, the excavators were unsure of the function of these thresholds.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Final reports have not been published for these sites (see catalogue entries).

⁶⁷ The platform measures 5.5 m. in length, 1.15 m. wide, and 1.2 m. high.

⁶⁸ Ma'oz and Killebrew, 1985, 291; Ma'oz and Killebrew, 1988, 9.

...Between the base [of the platform, DM] and the south wall, there was a narrow space (4.15 by 0.80 metres) that the discovery of two thresholds *in situ* indicates could be entered by two doors, each 70 cm. wide, at the transverse side of the base. This may have been a special storage space for synagogue utensils or perhaps served as a genizah.

Thresholds and steps would indicate that access to this platform was from both sides, rather than from the front alone, as in the early phase of the synagogue at Rehov. However, whether these were the thresholds of a genizah or of a storage space is another matter. Plastered hollows discovered in two synagogues at Beth Alpha and at Ma'oz Hayyim were used to store money. These were found inside an apse, not in a simple platform of a rectangular hall. However, for this platform at Qasrin, these thresholds were the sole means of approach to the top of the *bema*, as indicated by the cut steps and the thresholds. Thus, the rubble fill was part of the original construction of this platform. Similarly, the platform at Horvat Shem'a has a rubble core.

The early fifth-century synagogue at Sepphoris has a highly unusual plan, being long and narrow with a single nave and a narrow aisle to the west (Fig. 5:23). The axis of this synagogue is north-east to south-west, with a platform built on its north side.⁶⁹ The platform completely fills the northern end of the nave. When it was built, this platform partly covered the mosaic on which it lies, indicating that it was constructed later than the mosaic. The archaeologists give no date for the platform, but we may assume that it was constructed no earlier than the mid-fifth century. Traces of steps were found leading up to the platform from the aisle, but not from the front. These steps are shown on the plan with broken lines, to indicate that their reconstruction is hypothetical.

Two synagogues located in the Hebron Hills have a narrow platform approached by steps abutting the northern wall. At Horvat Susiya the northern wall is believed to have had three niches.⁷⁰ Abutting the northern wall is a large platform (Fig. 5:24), which underwent at least three stages of refurbishment and enlargement.

⁶⁹ The excavators believe that the axis of the synagogue was determined by the road-grid of the town; Weiss and Netzer, 1996b, 13.

⁷⁰ The platform measures 5 m. x 0.7 m. Remains of the wall are too low to determine if niches were in fact located there. Dating of the successive phases of the *bema* is insecure.

In the third phase, the stepped platform was covered with marble, and chancel screens and posts were constructed in the form of two U-shapes, with a central, stepped passage. Next to this platform, slightly to the east, is another, lower rectangular platform (2.5 m. x 1.5 m.), which covered sections of the mosaic at the time it was built. Chancel screens and posts in front of this platform were set into the floor damaging the mosaic, which was subsequently repaired. At Susiya the archaeological evidence of a large, stepped platform in front of the niche, is thought by the excavator to be the large *bema* which was used to reach the three niches housing the Torah Scrolls. The smaller platform to the east of this was used for the reading of the Scrolls.⁷¹

The two phases of the synagogue at Horvat 'Anim in the Hebron hills date from the fourth to the seventh centuries. The platform at Horvat 'Anim is small, over 2 square metres (Fig. 5:25). In its first phase, this platform was a 3-stepped structure with rounded corners.⁷² Interestingly, the only other rounded platform from an ancient synagogue is at nearby Susiya. In the second (undated) phase this platform was enlarged and a new set of steps was built in its centre.

The slightest remains which still point to a platform have been found at Ma'oz Hayyim, near Scythopolis and at Horvat Rimmon in the southern Judean Hills.⁷³ At Ma'oz Hayyim, three phases of a synagogue were uncovered, from approximately the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries respectively.⁷⁴ In the earliest phase, this synagogue had two entrances from the east leading to a small basilical hall. Abutting the southern wall, and beneath the later mosaic (phase II), the excavator found a stone foundation five square metres in area and of unknown height.⁷⁵ On three sides of this platform are stone slabs of the earliest floor. The date of this platform, however, is not determined by ceramic or numismatic evidence, but rather according to the style of the later mosaic and the ceramic repertoire found outside the

⁷¹ See below, and Gutman, Yeivin and Netzer, 1981, 125; Yeivin, 1993, 22.

⁷² Ilan, 1991, 303.

⁷³ The remains of a platform at Horvat Rimmon measure 5.0 x 1.7 m. Little information concerning this platform has been published; Kloner, 1983; Kloner, 1989.

⁷⁴ Tzaferis, 1982, 215.

⁷⁵ This platform measures 2.5 x 2.0 m. Tzaferis, 1982, 217.

building. At Horvat Rimmon, meagre remains of what seem to be a platform were found against the northern wall.

In examining the relative sizes of platforms from the third to the fifth centuries, it is clear that the largest platforms are at Beth She'arim and Rehov, which are over 30 sq. m. and 23 sq. m. respectively. As the steps leading up to these extremely large platforms attest, they were meant to be stood upon. However, later the average total size of platforms decreases in the fifth to sixth centuries. With the earlier examples, their average size is over 12 sq. metres, and the later ones slightly over 9 sq. metres (i.e. ca. 75 percent of the size of the earlier platforms). This decrease in average size is difficult to explain. Perhaps the archaeological evidence is simply skewed in favor of larger platforms from the third and fourth centuries, owing to the small sample size. Another possible explanation is that as the number of synagogues with apses increased, the number of large platforms in synagogues decreased.

5.4. A fourth type of small, stepped platform

In some fifth- and sixth-century synagogues there is a small stepped platform, which does not fit any of the previously discussed categories. This fourth group includes platforms that are found in the nave, and sometimes projecting into the nave of a basilical prayer hall. These platforms are not located against a wall with an entrance, nor are they particularly large. In two examples, at Beth Alpha and at Beth She'an, these platforms appear in synagogues whose layout includes an apse. This platform, we believe, may be compared in its structure and possible functions to the *ambo* in Christian churches of the same period.

However, before undertaking this comparison, we must first cautiously look back two hundred years to Dura-Europos, before returning to fifth-century Palestine. Then, we will compare several of these platforms in synagogues with the *ambo* in

some Christian churches in Palestine and nearby at Gerasa. In discussing the stepped platform in synagogues, we will briefly refer to the probable focus of the liturgy, namely, the Torah Scrolls, and where they were kept, since their location is relevant to the position of the raised platform.

5.4.1. Written evidence for an *ambo* in the synagogue

Synagogue inscriptions shed little light on the problem of raised platforms. One undated inscription from Side in Asia Minor mentions that a certain Isaakis covered an *ambo* in marble in the 15th year of the indiction.⁷⁶ A much later source, two eleventh-century Arabic letters discovered in the Cairo Geniza, mention a structure called an *ambol*, a word that probably derives from the Greek *ambon*.⁷⁷ One of these tells of a public announcement made from the *ambo* in the synagogue at Fustat. In the second letter, dated August 1, 1038, we read that the liturgy was recited from the *ambo* in the synagogue at Ashkelon.

5.4.2 The Seat of the Elder at Dura-Europos

In the synagogue at Dura-Europos, there are steps raised above the surrounding benches north of, and adjacent to, the niche. This area possibly marked the position of one of the elders of the congregation, the prestigious ‘Seat of the Elder,’ the place where Samuel, the builder of the synagogue, may have sat (Fig.

⁷⁶ The inscription is from Side in Asia Minor.

[’Ισ]άκις φροντιστῆς ἀγιωτάτ-
 [ης] πρώτης συναγωγῆς ἔστην εὐτ-
 [ύχω]ς καὶ ἀνεπλήρωσα τὴν μαρμάρωσιν ἀπὸ
 [τοῦ] ἄμβωνος ἕως τοῦ σίμμα καὶ ἔσμηξα
 [τὰ]ς δύο ἑπταμύξους καὶ τὰ δύο κιονοκέ-
 φαλα. ἰνδ(ικτίονι) ιέ μη(νι) δ’.

Lifschitz translated *ambo* (ἄμβωνος) as ‘la chaire’, see: Lifschitz, 1967, 37 (Num. 36).

⁷⁷ Goitein, 1960; Goitein, 1964.

5:26).⁷⁸ Kraeling assumed that for the reading of the Scrolls the reader stood on a wooden platform built in the centre of the hall like the large wooden platform that was a common feature in medieval synagogues.⁷⁹

However, it is not clear why the Holy Scriptures should have been read from a platform in the centre of the hall. In the fresco adjacent to the niche is the image of Ezra reading from the Scroll. According to White's interpretation, this image may be seen as a mirror of the actual reader who stood on the raised steps next to the niche.⁸⁰

5.4.3 Was there a wooden platform in the synagogue at Dura-Europos?

If we postulate that the raised steps in the synagogue at Dura-Europos were used as a platform for reading the Scrolls, a further question arises with the archaeological evidence. Kraeling assumed that four holes in the plaster floor near the centre of the hall marked the location of wooden legs for a central platform.⁸¹ On this hypothetical platform, Kraeling reasoned, the Holy Scrolls were read.

A closer examination of these holes in the plaster floor is called for. Of a total of sixteen holes in the floor, ten were arranged symmetrically, adjacent to the benches (Fig. 5:27). These ten include two sets of three holes in front of the north and south benches, and four single holes, evenly spaced in a straight line in front of the western benches. Each hole, which had been fashioned intentionally when the floor was laid was 0.04 m. wide, and tapered to a point about 0.16 m. below the floor surface. Kraeling pointed out that these ten holes were probably meant for lamp stands, the two sets of three for tripod-bases, and the single holes for simple lamp supports.

⁷⁸ The next to last step was deeply worn, further indicating that it was heavily used. This interpretation was first suggested by Mensil du Buisson, see: Kraeling, 1956, 17, 260.

⁷⁹ Kraeling, 1956, 255.

⁸⁰ White, 1996, 16, footnote 24. However, a reader balanced on this narrow step while holding a heavy scroll would be over 1.5 m. above the floor of the hall, a rather precarious position.

⁸¹ Kraeling, 1956, 255.

Depictions of such lamps appear in the frescoes. However, the six remaining holes located near the Torah niche are different in shape and depth. They are arranged in two groups, with one group of four holes laid out in a trapezoidal pattern to the south, and a pair of holes to the north. Kraeling interpreted oily soot found only in the northernmost hole of the first group, as residue from a lamp. For this reason, the first group of four holes in the trapezoidal pattern were, according to him, the remains of a wooden platform or *bema*, set at an angle, on which a reader recited passages from the Scrolls. Kraeling then compared this hypothetical arrangement with the raised platform in the centre of the hall in medieval synagogues, and with a similar wooden platform mentioned in the Talmud.⁸²

Kraeling assumed that the Sacred Scrolls were taken from a container in the niche, carried down the steps, and placed on a wooden platform in the centre of the hall, from which the scrolls were read. However, if the raised bench thought to be the 'Seat of the Elder' is seen instead as the location of the standing reader, as White proposes, there would be no need to hypothesise the existence of a trapezoidal wooden *bema* platform over the four holes in the floor. Rather, the four holes in front of the west wall might have been used for the same purpose as all the other holes, namely, as sockets for lamp-stands, as already suggested by the 'oily substance' which was found in one of them. Whether all four were used simultaneously, or whether a single lamp-stand was placed in different positions is impossible to determine.

The problem of whether the reader of the scrolls stood on the steps next to the niche or on some hypothetical platform in front of it does not seem to me to be adequately resolved. However, there is one additional piece of evidence that has not

⁸² Kraeling, 1956, 256.

received the attention it deserves. In the southwestern corner of the synagogue prayer hall is a small raised platform (Fig. 5:28),⁸³ which is about the same height and length as the one found in the nearby Christian building. Made of six re-used roof tiles, this platform would have provided a particularly durable surface on which to stand upon. Kraeling assumed that both the platform made of roof tiles and the small recess in the lower bench located south of the southern door, were used as steps to reach the upper benches. However, the absence of such a platform on the floor of any other contemporary synagogue makes comparisons impossible. In fact, one of the holes in the floor is located beside this platform. If these holes were for lamp stands, then this platform is the nearest to a lamp in the whole hall, which might indicate that the reader did not stand in the centre of the hall, but off to one side.⁸⁴

To examine further whether the reader may have more than one possible location, we must now turn to the evidence from Palestinian synagogues.

5.5. Archaeological evidence from Palestine for an *ambo* in synagogues

A rectangular platform that may have served a purpose other than that of elevating the container for the Scrolls can be found in several ancient synagogues in Palestine. Evidence from three synagogues in Palestine may indicate that a small platform such as the tile construction at Dura-Europos was used for standing on while reading from the Scrolls. The synagogues at Susiya in Judaea, Beth Alpha, and Beth She'an North (phase II and III) have small stepped platforms which may have served as a place from which the Scrolls could be read. The first two resemble the *ambo* in early Byzantine churches. The synagogue at Beth She'an North has a simple, four-stepped structure leading to a flat wall next to the apse.

⁸³ This platform measures 0.99 x 0.44 x 0.15 m. Kraeling, 1956, 17, footnote 70.

⁸⁴ Kraeling, 1956, see Plan VI and fig. 7 for a comparison of this platform to the recess in the south step.

The earliest archaeological evidence for a secondary platform added to an apse comes from the synagogue at Beth She'an North, outside the walls of Scythopolis (Fig. 5:29). In the second phase of this building, dated by the excavator to the mid-fourth century, a number of renovations were carried out.⁸⁵ The east entrance to the northern aisle and the west entrance beside the apse were blocked. A rectangular area of floor plaster, better preserved than anywhere else, was noted adjacent to the west wall of the apse. The excavator surmised that this was the location of a piece of furniture, perhaps the Torah Ark. A four-stepped stone structure was built north of the apse, in front of the blocked northern entrance. It is unclear what the function was of these four steps in the aisle, which led to a flat, blank wall. However it should be pointed out that the stone bench abutting the whole north wall of the synagogue was joined to this stepped platform. This plastered bench was used for seating, while the platform which is not plastered was probably used for standing.⁸⁶ It is possible that this platform was used for the reading of the scrolls.

The Susiya synagogue, located in the Judean hills south of Jerusalem, has a broad open hall, resembling the synagogue at Dura, with at least one, and possibly as many as three, niches constructed in the north wall.⁸⁷ A large platform built in front of the niches was in continuous use from the fourth to the eighth or ninth century. According to the excavator, a secondary platform built to the right of the main *bema* platform was added in the last phase of building, that is, in the sixth or seventh century (Fig. 5:30). It is from this platform that the excavator assumed that the Scrolls were read.⁸⁸

Two other synagogues near Scythopolis show evidence of some sort of platform in addition to an apse. A platform similar in size to that at Susiya, but in a different position within the synagogue hall, was found in the sixth-century basilical

⁸⁵ Zori, 1967, 151.

⁸⁶ The bench and plaster are from the third phase (end of the sixth century), Zori, 1967, 154.

⁸⁷ The platform measures: 1.8 x 2.5 m.; Gutman, et al., 1981, 124.

⁸⁸ Gutman et al., 1981, 124.

synagogue at Beth Alpha (Fig. 5:31). A platform was set against the southeastern pier and built on top of the mosaic, dating it later than the mosaic. The two steps on the west side indicate that the platform was approached from the centre of the nave.⁸⁹

5.6. The place from which the Word is read aloud: sources on the *ambo* in early churches

The *ambo* was a common but not absolutely necessary piece of church furniture in the fifth and sixth centuries. It had a number of functions. It was used as a raised platform to proclaim the liturgy and recite the Trisagion hymn, according to the Council of Laodicea in about 368 CE.⁹⁰ The *ambo* was referred to by various names, among them *purgos*, *pulpitum* or *bema*.⁹¹ John Chrysostom preached while sitting on an *ambo* which Sozomen called the '*bema* of the readers.'⁹² In 563 CE, Paul Silentiarius described the *ambo* in Hagia Sophia as having two flights of stairs, one from the east, the other from the west.⁹³

There is also extensive archaeological evidence for the existence of the *ambo* in churches. Four types of platforms are known, ranging from simple stepped platforms adjacent to the *bema*, to high, double-staircase platforms connected to the *bema* by a passage with low chancel screen (*solea*). The plans of early churches show that the position of the *ambo* varied widely. Sixth- and seventh-century churches in Gerasa typically have a small platform on the southern side of the *bema* within the nave. The church of bishop Genesisius, dated by inscription to 611 CE, has an *ambo* on the southern side. The *ambo* in the church of Bishop Isaiah, approximately dated to

⁸⁹ Sukenik, 1932, 13.

⁹⁰ Conc. Laodic., canon 15 .

⁹¹ See: Hickley, 1966, 409-410; Mathews, 1971, 151.

⁹² Chrysostom would "present himself in the midst of all, seated upon the readers' bema", Sozomen, *Hist. Eccl.* VIII, 5, PG 67, 1528. The *ambo* was where "he preferred to preach that he might be better heard", Socrates, *Hist Eccl.* VI 5, PG 67, 673; trans. Mathews, 1971, 151.

⁹³ Paul Silentiarius, *Descr. ambonis*, v. 50ff: "In the center of the wide church, yet tending rather towards the east, is a kind of tower, fair to look upon, set apart as the abode of the sacred books. Upright it stands on steps, reached by two flights, one of which extends towards the night, the other towards the dawn. These are opposite to one another; but both lead to the same space that is curved like a circle..." trans. Mango, 1972, 91.

the seventh century, is similar in form (Fig. 5:32).⁹⁴ Here, the construction of the *ambo* led to the modification of the chancel screen and posts, one of its posts being removed to allow access to this new platform. In contrast, in churches in the southern Negev, for example at Oboda, a rectangular base for the *ambo* was positioned in the nave, at the northern side of the *bema* (Fig. 5:33).⁹⁵

5.7. Chancel screens: marking the 'sacred space' in churches

In the church, the chancel separated the sanctuary and the altar from the nave, thus defining the boundary of 'sacred space.' This separation of space is symbolic of the division between holy and profane, heaven and earth, the divine and human. Offerings brought by the people to the chancel were received by the deacons to be set on the altar before their consecration. Typically, the chancel was raised above the floor of the church one or two steps, and enclosed by a low screen. The height of this screen allowed the service to be seen by the congregation. Chancel posts and chancel screens carved of marble or local stone have been recovered in Palestinian church excavations, for example at early sixth-century Horvat Hesheq, 16 kilometres west of Meiron in Upper Galilee, where one chancel screen and several chancel posts were uncovered *in situ*.⁹⁶

In the fifth and sixth centuries, we also find chancel screens in nineteen synagogues.⁹⁷ Although chancel screens are found in synagogues with apses and

⁹⁴ Clark, 1986, 313; Bowsher, 1986.

⁹⁵ This platform measures c. 1.00 x 1.10 x 0.30 m.; Negev, 1997, 114.

⁹⁶ An inscription on the mosaic floor gives the name of the donor and the date:

+ Ὑπὲρ σωτηρίας Δημητρίου διακ(όνου)
κα(ι) Γεοργίου υἱοῦ καὶ παντὸς τοῦ οἴ-
κου αὐτῶν ἐτελ(ε)ιώθη τὸ πᾶν ἔργω(ν)
ἐν μην(ι) Ἀπριλίου τοῦ πβϕ' ἔτους ἰνδ(ικτιῶνος) ιβ'

"For the salvation of Demetrius the deacon and of Georgius (his) son and of all their household, the whole work was completed in the month of April of the year 582, indiction 12 (April, 519 CE)"; Di Segni, 1990, 383; Aviam, 1995, 50; Aviam, 1990, 364.

⁹⁷ Hachlili, 1988, 187-189.

without, the majority of synagogues with apses also have chancel screens.⁹⁸ In synagogues, this division of space is unknown before the fourth century. By the sixth century, only two out of twelve synagogues had apses but no remains of a chancel.

5.7.1. Evidence for chancel screens in the churches of St. Sophia and St. Polyeuktos in Constantinople

To separate the clergy from the laity, a short screen of wood or marble set off the sanctuary (*hierateion* or *hieron*) from the nave of the earliest churches. In his *History of the Church* Eusebius writes of a wooden screen in the cathedral at Tyre.⁹⁹ The screen had flat panels held upright by square posts. In the fifth century the screen was typically higher, with the short posts being replaced by taller columns, or simply by small columns above short posts. In the mid-sixth century, Paul Silentarius describes in detail at St. Sophia in Constantinople, where the six pairs of silver-covered columns adorned with discs (probably on the entablature) depicted Christ, the Virgin, the prophets, and the apostles.¹⁰⁰ The seventh-century text of the Miracles of St. Artemios describes the church of St. John the Baptist at Constantinople. There, screens set between the columns of the nave are called *kankella*, while the screens separating the sanctuary from the nave are called the *templon* (τέμπλον) and are decorated with icons. Above the central entrance was Christ, to the left was Artemios,

⁹⁸ Two fifth-century synagogues without apses contained particularly extensive remains of a chancel arrangement. These synagogues are located south of Jerusalem in the Judean hills, at Susiya and at Horvat 'Anim.

⁹⁹ See chapter 3.

¹⁰⁰ The poem was recited in 563 CE after the reconstruction of the dome; Mango, 1972, 87.

"Not only upon the walls which separate the priest from the choir of singers has he set plates of naked silver, but the columns, too, six sets of twain in number, he has completely covered with the silver metal, and they send forth their rays far and wide. Upon them the tool wielded by a skilled hand has artfully engraved the figure of the immaculate God who, without seed, clothed himself in human form... Elsewhere the sharp steel has fashioned those former heralds of God by whose words, before God had taken on flesh, the divine tidings of Christ's coming spread abroad. Nor has the artist forgotten the images of those who abandoned the mean labours of their life-the fishing basket and the net-and those evil cares in order to follow the command of the heavenly King...And elsewhere art has depicted the Mother of Christ, the vessel of eternal life, whose holy womb did nourish its own Maker."

and to the right, John the Baptist.¹⁰¹ However, whether an iconographic program was well-established by the seventh century is still unknown.¹⁰²

Archaeological evidence from the excavation of Anicia Juliana's church of St. Polyeuktos in Constantinople (completed in 527 CE) provides some information on the features extant from an early sixth-century church. In the excavation, seven or possibly eight marble plaques with depictions of Christ, the Virgin, and the apostles were found. These are very similar to the fifth-century chancel screens described by Paul Silentiarius. Since the back sides of these plaques are polished, and square dowel holes are carved in the bottom, these plaques may have been used as part of the *templon* in St. Polyeuktos.¹⁰³

5.7.2. Evidence for chancel screens in the churches in Palestine

Chancel posts and chancel screens, often of marble but sometimes of local limestone, have been found in numerous excavations of churches in Palestine. In particular, it should be pointed out that the churches in western Galilee often have remains of chancels reaching to the first bay of the nave. For example, they are found at Horvat Hesheq, already mentioned, and from the sixth-century church Horvat Kenes, in the modern town of Carmiel, where remains of a chancel screen were found in the first bay of the nave.¹⁰⁴ In Crowfoot's restoration of the chancel in the mid-sixth century church of SS Peter and Paul in Gerasa, the chancel screen encloses all three apses, but reaches into the second bay of the nave (Fig. 5:34). The *ambo* is attached to the southern side of the chancel screen, in the nave. A *synthronon* for clergy is in the apse, behind the altar.

¹⁰¹ Mango, 1979, 8.

¹⁰² Nees, 1983, 24.

¹⁰³ These panels measure on average 0.38 m. high, 0.35 m. wide, and ca. 0.08 m. thick. Six of these panels were found in a destruction layer (U/16) in the narthex of the church. Harrison, 1986, 156-7.

¹⁰⁴ Aviam, 1995, 53.

In several excavated churches, remains of an early chancel screen were found below the *bema* platform. That is, earlier chancels were not as large as the later ones, often only reaching to the edge of apse. Examples of this were found at Shavei-Zion and at Nahariya.¹⁰⁵

Churches in Jordan follow a similar pattern. Duval's study of the archaeological evidence notes that the major transformation in the chancel from the sixth century was its extension into the nave and, in some cases, the extension of the *bema* and chancel into one or two lateral aisles.¹⁰⁶

5.8. Chancel screens in synagogues

We will now turn to the second most common furnishing after platforms found in late fourth- to sixth-century synagogues, namely, the chancel screen. We have noted that synagogues having apses as well as chancel screens are found near cities whose population was not primarily Jewish, such as Scythopolis and Gaza.¹⁰⁷ The focus of worship in the synagogue was probably the Torah Ark or Torah Shrine, placed on a raised platform (the *bema*) in the apse, which was set off from the nave by a chancel screen. This arrangement follows the standard Christian pattern of the sanctuary in the Church, but instead of the altar in the apse, the Torah Ark is the focus of worship. As the chancel screens in churches form the boundary between the nave and the sanctuary, so the chancel screens enclosing the *bema* of synagogues provide a physical boundary between the prayer hall and, probably, the Torah Ark.

5.8.1. Archaeological evidence for chancel screens in synagogues

Synagogues with chancel screens and chancel posts are located in or near large cities with Christian populations, in particular, Tiberias, Scythopolis, and Gaza (see Map 2). Presumably, these were the locations where most interaction between

¹⁰⁵ Prausnitz, 1967, 27; Dauphin and Edelstein, 1984.

¹⁰⁶ Duval, 1994, 167.

¹⁰⁷ Chiat, 1980, 21.

Jews and Christians would have taken place. There are also similarities in the artistic repertoire of chancel screens and chancel posts in both the churches and synagogues. Marble chancel screens from churches at Nessana in the Negev and a monastery at Scythopolis have a wreath motif with a cross in the centre (Fig. 5:35). A similar wreath motif from a synagogue occurs on the chancel screen from the one at Hammat Gader. Within this wreath motif is a menorah (Fig. 5:36). The screen from an unidentified synagogue was found near Ashdod, which is similar, though of a higher quality, than the one from Nessana.¹⁰⁸ On the chancel screen from the synagogue at Rehov there is a menorah depicted surrounded by a wreath. A similar decoration but of a cross within the wreath comes from the church at Massuot Itzhak, near Acre (Fig. 5:37).¹⁰⁹ Fragments of an open-work chancel screen were found in the synagogue at Gaza (Fig. 5:38).¹¹⁰

The most extensive nearly-complete chancel arrangement in a synagogue has been uncovered at Susiya, mentioned above. Here, in a late phase (perhaps fifth or sixth century), the large platform next to the north wall was covered with marble veneer, and a marble chancel arrangement was constructed. The excavator suggested a reconstruction of the chancel screen along the grooves in the steps of the platform and the square post-holes (Fig. 5:39),¹¹¹ so that it flanks the central staircase. Thus, two areas of the stepped platform were enclosed by the chancel screen.

In the synagogue at Hammat Gader, extensive white marble fragments of a chancel and chancel posts were found, as well as the imprint of their original location adjacent to the steps leading up to the apse.¹¹² One complete chancel post of limestone was found, square in section and 0.65 m. in height (Fig. 5:40). Another post with a similar square section was made of marble, as were two cylindrical posts. These cylindrical posts have single grooves for a chancel screen. Relying on the imprints of

¹⁰⁸ Foerster, 1989a, 1810.

¹⁰⁹ Hachlili, 1996, 127.

¹¹⁰ Ovadiah, 1969, 197.

¹¹¹ Yeivin, 1989, 93-98.

¹¹² Sukenik, 1935, 122-123.

these posts and the groove for a screen on the step in front of the apse, Sukenik reconstructed the chancel for this synagogue with these two cylindrical posts flanking the steps leading up to the platform.¹¹³ The two square posts, one of marble, the other of limestone, would have stood near the edge of the apse. Of these two square posts, the marble post fragment has a corresponding single groove for a chancel screen. Yet the complete limestone post has a groove on either side for flanking chancel screens, instead of a groove on a single side. This seems to have been overlooked by the excavator, for he does not mention this curious fact. Several grooves on the single non-marble chancel post may indicate on the one hand that several different possible layouts for the chancel screen existed. On the other hand, one might suppose that since this chancel post was the only one not made of imported marble, it may have been of local manufacture and may not have been originally intended for this synagogue. Perhaps an additional chancel post, ready-made, but with grooves on opposite sides was bought for use in the synagogue. Whatever the case, the archaeological evidence indicates that this synagogue did not have a full set of marble chancel screens and posts, but re-used one limestone post.

5.8.2. Synagogues with chancel screens generally located near cities

Eight synagogues with all features discussed (chancel screens, raised platforms and apses) have been uncovered.¹¹⁴ Two of these synagogues are in the vicinity of Gaza on the southern coast, three are near Tiberias, and three near Scythopolis-Beth She'an. Southeast of Scythopolis at Rehov, another rural synagogue with a rectangular layout, but without an apse was uncovered. In the late fifth century, the platform in it was separated from the prayer hall by a chancel screen.¹¹⁵ The

¹¹³ Sukenik, 1935, 148-149.

¹¹⁴ These include near Scythopolis: Beth She'an North, Ma'oz Hayyim; near Tiberias: Hammat Tiberias, Hammat Gader, Beth Yerach; Gaza, Ma'on Nirim.

¹¹⁵ The platform existed in all phases of the building, with minor modifications. The chancel screen was introduced in the third phase of this synagogue, which dates from the late fifth to the seventh centuries, see: Vitto, 1980; Vitto, 1993; Vitto, 1995.

synagogues with apses at Hammat Tiberias and Beth Yerach (Philoteria) are situated in large walled cities. The synagogue at Beth Yerach is located less than 300 yards from a church.¹¹⁶ The synagogue at Gaza Maioumas is included in this category, since large quantities of carved marble thought to be parts of a broken chancel screen were found near its south-eastern wall, at the end of the southern end of its nave.¹¹⁷

The archaeological evidence for marble chancel screens from Palestine and Jordan is indicative of a well-organized trade in expensive materials. The chancel screens and posts found in Christian and Jewish contexts are nearly identical. Numerous examples of chancels, from both synagogues and churches are made of marble, a stone that is not found in the country. Marble found in Palestine must have come from quarries in Asia Minor, Greece or from Italy. Often the only means of identifying whether a chancel screen or post not found *in situ* comes from a Jewish milieu is the presence of an inscription or Jewish symbol.

5.8.3. Reasons for the introduction of chancel screens into the synagogue

Why did chancel screens come to be incorporated in synagogues? Three possible explanations have been proposed. In the 1930's, after Sukenik discovered two synagogues with many of these features, he argued that chancel screens were introduced into synagogues in imitation of contemporary Christian practice.¹¹⁸ Twenty years later, Goodenough adopted the opposite view, assuming that the Christian chancel screen was adapted from its earlier use in the synagogue.¹¹⁹ However, since Chiat has shown that most chancel screens from synagogues have been found in contexts from the fifth to sixth centuries, namely, one hundred years later than in Palestinian churches, Goodenough's idea has been abandoned.

¹¹⁶ Delougaz and Haines, 1960.

¹¹⁷ Meagre remains of the south-eastern wall furnish insufficient proof that the nave ended in an apse; Ovadiah, 1981.

¹¹⁸ Sukenik, 1934, 57.

¹¹⁹ Goodenough, 1952, I, 265.

According to Chiat, chancel screens ‘safeguard’ the Holy Scrolls in the Ark.¹²⁰ Other scholars have more cautiously suggested that although they may be derived from church architecture, synagogue screens did not have the same ‘status’ as those in churches.¹²¹ Tsafrir agrees with Chiat on the dating of the surviving synagogue screens to a period later than the first screens in churches. Continuing this line of reasoning, but against Chiat’s hypothesis of ‘safeguarding the scrolls,’ Foerster has argued that screens merely decorate the more important parts of the synagogue. However, this cannot be the case, since it is clear that chancel screens are located in similar positions within the prayer halls of synagogues to those in churches, that is, in front of the apse. Foerster has rightly pointed out, however, that the literary sources do not mention a need for a separation between the Torah Ark and the congregation.¹²²

Branham summarizes up these hypothesis and observes that they: ‘minimize the significant, provocative, and unexplained appearance [of the chancel screen] in synagogues.’ She proposes that either leaders of those synagogues with chancel screens borrowed from the church to ‘satisfy a particular liturgical need’ of which we have no knowledge, or they ‘appropriated the chancel screen as a decorative object.’¹²³ Over time, Branham continues, the use of chancel screens acquired a liturgical significance, as well as sacred associations, as the chancel screen came to evoke the imagery of the Temple in Jerusalem.

There are several pieces of evidence indicating that the chancel screen was not merely a decorative object within the synagogue. Firstly, as all chancel screens found *in situ* attest, they invariably separate a platform, niche or apse from the prayer hall. The holiest objects within the prayer hall, namely, the Torah Scrolls set in some kind of chest, were probably the objects that the screen was meant to protect. If the chancel

¹²⁰ Chiat, 1980, 20.

¹²¹ Tsafrir, 1987, 152.

¹²² Foerster, 1989a.

¹²³ Branham, 1992, 380.

screen was merely a decorative object, we would expect it to be found in other locations within the hall, for example, dividing groups of people. Secondly, the evidence from the synagogues at Rehov near Scythopolis, and at Susiya and at Horvat 'Anim in the Judean hills is of great importance. At these sites, the evidence for the chancel screen was found *in situ*. None of these synagogues had an apse, but all had large platforms built against one wall of the hall. The synagogue at Rehov has a large platform built against its southern wall. In this synagogue's third phase (sixth century CE) the steps accessible from the aisles built into the short sides of the platform were filled in, and a new set of steps was built within the nave, abutting the platform. A chancel screen and posts, as well as fragments of others, were found within the nave, in front of these steps. The chancel screen, therefore, separated the prayer hall from the platform and restricted access to the platform. Worshippers called from the prayer hall must have passed through the central opening of the chancel screen before ascending the steps to the platform. Here at least, the chancel screen should be understood not merely as a decorative feature, but as a particular furnishing which restricted movement within the synagogue to the raised platform.

As mentioned, the appearance of chancels in synagogues has been understood by some scholars as an indication of the close affinities between Jewish and non-Jewish communities.¹²⁴ Evidence such as this is sometimes used as proof of contacts between Christians and Jews. Tsafir sees in these similarities:

... The common background of the Jewish and Christian communities, and the day-to-day contacts between them, finds its expression in the detailed construction, ornamentation, furnishing, stone-carving, and mosaics of their respective houses of worship in the Byzantine period.¹²⁵

While this statement is valid, there is still no clear-cut explanation for the appearance of chancel screens in synagogues, nor has a liturgical reason been found.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Tsafir, 1987, 152.

¹²⁵ Tsafir, 1987, 152.

¹²⁶ We will discuss reasons for the chancel screen along with the apse in the next chapter.

In a recent paper by Habas, the depictions of the *stephanostaurion* (cross set inside a laurel wreath with tendrils, enclosed in a frame) are shown to be the model for a later Jewish tradition, in which a menorah is substituted for the cross in the sixth century.¹²⁷ Habas suggests that the symbolic meaning of the *stephanostaurion* – the symbol of Jesus's redemption and salvation – was known to Jews, who adapted it for their own expressions for redemption and resurrection.¹²⁸

5.9. The 'Chair of Moses' or Kathedra in synagogues

Another item of synagogue furniture in the written sources is the '*kursaya*,' a Syriac word meaning a kind of chair. Babylonian rabbis in the fifth century expressed differing opinions over the kind of chair or table on which the Scrolls may be set. While the Scrolls were being read, the speaker invariably stood. Of particular concern to the rabbis was the '*kursaya*' which was made from an Ark or *teva*, and whether the Scrolls may be set upon it. One passage states that a ruined *teva* may be made into a smaller *teva*, but not into a *kursaya* and another passage states that it is forbidden to place a Torah Scroll on it.¹²⁹

The archaeological evidence for a special chair in Palestinian synagogues consists of two stone chairs. One which was discovered in the synagogue excavation at Hammat Tiberias (North) was reportedly made of white limestone, but its present location is unknown, and it was not photographed (Fig. 5:41). Three holes were cut

¹²⁷ Habas examined 104 churches from Palestine and Arahia where chancel screens were found; Habas, 2000, 115, 129.

¹²⁸ Habas, 2000, 130.

¹²⁹ B.Meg. 26b:

אמר רבא מריש הוה אמינא האי כורסיא תשמיש דתשמיש הוא ושרי כיון דחזינא
דמותבי אליוה סיית אמינא תשמיש קדושה הוא ואסור.
ואמר רבא האי תבנותא דאי רפט מיעבדה תיבה זוטרתית שרי כורסייא אסור.

"Raba said: at first I used to think that the chair [on which the sefer Torah is placed] is an accessory to an accessory and that it is permitted [to use it for secular purposes, when it is worn out]. When however, I saw that the sefer Torah is placed actually on it, I came to the conclusion that it is an accessory of holiness and is forbidden. Raba further said: when an Ark is falling asunder, to make it into a smaller is permitted, but to make it into a stand (*kursaya*) is forbidden."

into the seat of this chair, which might date to the fourth century. A chair which was found in the synagogue excavation at Chorazin (Fig. 5:4), was of black basalt left rough at the back. It has two armrests, of which the right one is carved in the form of an eagle with out-spread wings. The damaged left armrest was in the form of a lion's mane. On the chair's front edge is a four-line Aramaic inscription for the well being of a certain Yudan bar Ishma'el, "who made this stoa and its steps."¹³⁰

5.10. Rectangular depressions in the centre of synagogue floors

Only two synagogues contain rectangular depressions in the centre of their floors that may have been the location of a piece of wooden furniture. In the first phase of the synagogue at Dura, a rectangular depression in the center of the plaster floor, which was filled in at a later phase, might have been the location for a wooden table.¹³¹ Nearly contemporary is the first phase of the synagogue (?) at Nabratein (150-250 CE), where a similar rectangular depression was discerned in the center of the plaster floor.¹³² What this depression might have been used for is still unclear.

5.11. Conclusion

The remains of synagogues and churches reflect where the concentrations of Jewish and Christian communities were in the early fifth century.¹³³ Synagogue remains are concentrated near the Sea of Galilee, in Upper and Lower Galilee, and later in the Golan.¹³⁴ Christian sites are concentrated near the coast (at Caesarea and Gaza), in western Galilee, in major centres in Lower Galilee (Sepphoris,

¹³⁰ Sukenik, 1934, 21-24, and 60.

דכיר לטב יודן בר ישמעל דעבד הדן סטוה ודרגוה מפעליה יהי לה חולק עם צדיקיה

Remembered be for good Yudan b. Ishmael/
who made this stoa [stava ?]/ and its steps.
For his work/ may he have a share with
the righteous.

¹³¹ Kraeling, 1956.

¹³² Meyers, 1982.

¹³³ For maps of the remains of all synagogues and churches see: Tsafir, et al., 1994.

¹³⁴ Urman, 1995.

Scythopolis), in and around Jerusalem, and further south, in the Negev.¹³⁵ This demographic situation remains essentially unchanged in the later fifth and sixth centuries. Jews in Upper Galilee and the Golan lived in relative seclusion, while contact between Jews and Christians occurred in the border towns of Galilee as well as in the major centres.¹³⁶

In a recent paper, Fine discussed the ways in which Rabbinic sources documented the relations between Jews and non-Jews in late antique Palestine.¹³⁷ Liturgical poetry produced for the synagogues of the fifth and sixth centuries often referred to Christianity negatively, in a way that demonstrates a deep-seated animosity toward Christians. The vitriolic poetry written by the sixth-century Rabbi Yannai is one example of anti-Christian polemic.¹³⁸

Fourth-century synagogue plans exhibit a wide variety of layouts, but not a single apse has been found in any synagogue in Palestine in this period. Concurrently with church building, two synagogues with apses survive from the fifth century, and from the sixth century a total of twelve survive. Of these sixth-century apsidal synagogues, at sites ranging from Gaza in the south to Tiberias in the north, most have a chancel screens separating the apse from the prayer hall. Even in the three fifth and sixth century synagogues that have no apse, substantial remains of chancel screens and posts were discovered. Thus, the chancel screens were probably not simply decorative, but would have served some liturgical function, although it is still unclear what that function was.

The placement of the Torah Scrolls in the hall seems to have been an enduring problem for Jewish communities. Many different solutions were adopted. Some congregations chose to place the sacred scrolls in a niche; others probably placed them in a cabinet, cupboard or shrine. Remains of platforms for supporting a cabinet

¹³⁵ Stemberger, 1987, 65 f.

¹³⁶ Stemberger, 1998, 133-4.

¹³⁷ Fine, 1999b, 231.

¹³⁸ Rabinovitz, 1985; Stern, 1994b, 218-20.

tended to be located against the wall closest to Jerusalem, but this is by no means the only place where these platforms have been found. A further problem was the location of the reader. In his study of the synagogue at Dura-Europos, Kraeling assumed that the reader must have stood in the centre of the hall. A re-examination of the archaeological evidence indicates other possibilities, that the reader stood high on the bench next to the niche, as White suggests, or perhaps on the platform in the southwestern corner of the hall.

During the sixth century, Jewish communities in Palestine at Beth She'an, Beth Alpha near Scythopolis, and at Susiya in the Judean hills (all living near large Christian communities) introduced raised platforms into their synagogues. These platforms probably served functions similar to those of the *ambo* in Christian churches. In the basilical synagogue at Beth Alpha, the *ambo* was set in the nave against the left pier nearest the apse. At Beth She'an North, there was a stepped structure in the north aisle. At Susiya, the *ambo* was placed to the right of a niche, against the north wall. The fact that the raised platforms were additional features in these three synagogues in Palestine suggests a change from earlier arrangements. These diverse solutions indicate that there was no single higher authority dictating uniform interior furnishings for synagogues. Whereas the few platforms found so far might suggest that this was not a central problem within the synagogue, it does suggest that these communities were facing some similar problems to those felt in the church and dealing with them in a similar manner.

Chapter Six

The Niche and the Apse in Synagogues

6.1. Introduction: Where were the Holy Scrolls kept in the ancient synagogue?

The problem of where to keep the Holy Scrolls was an enduring one for the Jewish communities of the ancient world. As early as the second century CE, the Torah Scroll, containing the Five Books of Moses in Hebrew (the Pentateuch), was considered to be the most holy object within the synagogue.¹ Where were they kept? Until the fifth century, the Scrolls were not kept exclusively within the synagogue building, but this led to even more difficulties involving their sanctity. The Palestinian Talmud mentions that Torah Scrolls were kept in private houses, sometimes on the ledge of a window.² Cabinets were also used to store scrolls, but not exclusively, since a hammer was placed in the same cabinet as a scroll.³ In the same

¹ M.Meg 3.1 (See below, section 5.2)

² The Palestinian Talmud refers to the issue of sanctity when a Torah Scroll is kept in the bedroom of a private house (P.T. Berakhot 3:5, 6d):

לא ישמש אדם מיטתו וספר תורה עמו בבית
ריירמיה בשם ר' אבהו אם היה כרוך במפה או שהיה נתון
מחלון שהוא גבוה עשרה טפחים מותר

A person may not engage in sexual relations if there is a Torah scroll in the house with him. R. Jeremiah in the name of R. Abbahu, if it is wrapped in a cover or placed up in a window recess ten handbreadths high, it is permitted

See the discussion in Fine, 1997, 70.

³ PT Meg. 3:1:

location in the Palestinian Talmud, the question of the sacredness of a cabinet that was used for secular purposes is raised, and whether consecrating a secular cabinet is valid.⁴

In the study of the evolution of the synagogue building, the Ark containing the Torah Scrolls is assumed to have been portable, being brought into the synagogue only when necessary, and removed before the congregation was permitted to leave the prayer hall.⁵ Scholars in the early part of the twentieth century thought that second- and third-century synagogues had no permanent place for the Torah Ark.⁶ When sixth-century synagogues with apses were uncovered, it was assumed that the apse had become the permanent location for the Torah Ark. Furthermore, in the magnificent synagogue at Sardis, in Asia Minor outside the Land of Israel, the large and imposing apse contains three tiers of benches which proves that here, at least, the apse could not have contained the Torah Ark (Fig. 6:1).⁷ In this synagogue, at the opposite end of the hall, flanking the entrances, are two large platforms each

ר' ירמיה אצל לגוולנה חמתון יהבין בכושא בנו ארונא

R. Jeremiah went to Gavlannah. He saw them putting a hammer into the Ark.

See also: Levine, 1991, 55.

⁴ PT Meg. 3:1:

ומה אם אלו שנעשו לשם ספר אינן קדושות אלא בשעי, התשמיש זו שבניי לשם
חצר לא כייש אלו שעשאו לשם חולין והקדישן מה הן כמה דאת אמר תמן בנייה
לשם חצר והקדישי קדשי והכא עשאו לשם חולין והקדישן קדש

As to these [namely, the Ark for a scroll or coverings for a scroll] - if one had made them to begin with for secular purposes, and then went and consecrated them, what is the law governing them? It is in accord with that which you say there: 'If one built it for a courtyard and declared it consecrated, it is regarded as holy.' Here, if he made them for a secular purpose and then consecrated them, they are deemed consecrated.

⁵ B. Sotah 39b:

ואמר רבי תנחום אמר רבי יהושע בן לוי: אין הציבור
ראשין לצאת עד שינטל ספר תורה ויניח במקומו

'Rabbi Tanhum said in the name of Rabbi Yehushua ben Levi, the community is not permitted to leave (the synagogue) until the Torah Scroll is removed.'

It is unclear whether this Babylonian source refers to the scrolls alone, or if the scrolls were stored in a chest, so that both the chest and the scrolls would have been removed from the prayer hall; see also Fine, 1997, 77.

⁶ Sukenik, 1934, 18,52; Kraabel, 1979, 479 footnote 7.

⁷ The unique *synthronon* in the apse was added in the third phase of the building, on top of a mosaic floor dating to the late third century; Seager, 1972, 430-3.

surmounted by columns supporting a pediment. At least one of these *aediculae* is thought to have been the location for the Torah Shrine (Fig. 6:2).⁸

In the previous chapter, we discussed simple platforms made of stone or covered by plaster in second- to sixth-century synagogues. Presumably the Torah Ark stood on single small platforms or, in the case of two platforms, one Ark was placed on each. This is not a fully satisfactory solution. The difficulty attempting to interpret the archaeological evidence lies in trying to answer whether the Ark was on permanent display. Sukenik's solution to this problem was to assume that synagogues with apses were the evolutionary result of not having a permanent place in the early synagogues for the Torah Ark.⁹ In these synagogues, the Ark certainly was placed in the apse. At that time, Sukenik did not know of the 26 excavated synagogues with platforms mentioned above. Another possibility is that an aedicule built of stone stood on one or both of the platforms in these synagogues.¹⁰ However, these questions can not be answered by the archaeological evidence alone. In synagogues with two platforms, if one were used as a base for the Torah Ark, then, was the second for an additional Torah Ark? This question remains unanswered. As the diversity of platforms in different sizes and in diverse positions within prayer halls attest, there was no single solution to the problem of where to keep the container for the Word of the Lord.

Various practices were followed. Some communities in Palestine erected a single platform by the wall closest to Jerusalem in their synagogue, regardless of whether there was also an entrance in that wall. Where a platform has been found adjacent to a main door, scholars have noted several logistical difficulties. Firstly, the Torah Ark would have been partially hidden when the front door was open. Secondly,

⁸ The fourth-century aedicule at Ostia has been reconstructed in a similar fashion, (excavated from 1961-2). See: Squarciapino, 1963, 196-197; Seager, 1981, 183; Fine, 1995, 52-55; White, 1997, 36-37.

⁹ References in the Mishnah, Tosephta, and Talmuds refer to the scrolls being brought out, or being taken away. For example: M. Ta'an 2:1 (see above and Sukenik, 1934, 52).

¹⁰ In Roman public buildings, a statue was a typical feature set within the aedicule; Fleming, et al., 1981, s.v. *aedicule*.

after entering, worshippers would have been required to turn 180 degrees in order to see the focal point of the prayer hall, namely, the Torah Ark. This turn would mean that on entering the prayer hall, worshippers' backs would have irreverently been turned to the most holy object in the hall. Unlike the axis in a church, there was no direct line of sight between the main entrance and the receptacle for the holiest object within these synagogues. Thirdly, since the doors were adjacent to the focus of attention, those entering or leaving the synagogue would have disturbed the prayer service.¹¹

In addition to simple platforms for placing the container of the Scrolls during the service, several synagogues had a niche, for the Sacred Scrolls alone, or perhaps for the Scrolls set in a small container. In Roman architecture, a niche is a small vertical recess in a wall. These are often curved as a half-cylinder, with an arch and semi-dome above. They often contain an object such as a statue. Niches regularly appear in public buildings such as theatres and baths. However, in the archaeological record, only four or possibly five synagogues retain clear evidence for niches. This may be due to the general paucity of well-preserved remains. The earliest evidence for a niche in any synagogue comes from the third-century synagogue at Dura-Europos, where a niche is framed by a built aedicule (Fig. 6:3). In Palestine, the earliest evidence for a synagogue niche appears one hundred years later, in the fourth-century synagogue at Eshtemo'a, in Judaea (Fig. 6:4).¹² Near Eshtemo'a is the early fifth-century synagogue at Susiya, which is conjectured to have had a niche on the basis of the similarity of its plan to the one at Eshtemo'a.¹³ Other niches appear in

¹¹ Little is known about synagogue ritual in general and the Scrolls in particular. A brief passage in the Tosephta Soferim 14:4-11 discusses verses from the Psalms to be recited when the Torah Scroll is taken out and raised so that the congregation views the written Word. Modern studies rely on the earliest MS of the Tosephta which dates to the beginning of the fourteenth century (MS Vienna, National Library Vienna, Hebr. 20). The compilation date of the Tosephta itself is uncertain, with scholars dating it anywhere from 200 and 450 CE. For a translation of this particular passage and relevant discussion, see: Levine, 2000; Fine, 1997, 77-79. On the Tosephta and its dating, Stemberger, 1991, 149-163.

¹² Yeivin, 1981, 121.

¹³ The remains of this wall are too low for a niche to have been preserved; Gutman, et al., 1981, 124.

Galilee in the sixth-century synagogue at Arbel (Fig. 6:5), and in the undated building at Nawa in Syria. The chronology of known synagogues with niches indicates that this feature first appeared in the late second century CE in the earliest positively-identified synagogue at Dura-Europos, whereas in Palestine the niche emerged only in the late fourth century CE, long after the appearance of the simple platform.

By the end of the fourth century, another possible feature meant for the placement of the Scrolls in synagogues is found, namely, an apse built onto the short end of a basilical hall. In most synagogues, the apse faced Jerusalem.¹⁴ Therefore, the apse appeared in different walls depending on the geographic location of the synagogue in relation to Jerusalem. In contrast to the smaller niche set within a wall, the apse is a semicircular or occasionally polygonal termination of the nave, usually with a semi-dome above. In Palestine, when several simple rectangular synagogues like the one at Ma'oz Hayyim were renovated in the late fourth century, the earlier flat, blank southern wall was pierced in its second phase to make an opening for the newly-built apse. Other synagogues had apses from the start, such as at fifth-century Beth Yerach (Philoteria), which is the largest synagogue found in Palestine to date.¹⁵ Again, by the sixth century, about a third of the known synagogues in Palestine had central apses.¹⁶

Inasmuch as apses do not appear in synagogue layouts until approximately two hundred years after the niche at Dura-Europos, some scholars have posited that the niche evolved into the apse.¹⁷ However, since niches as well as apses were

¹⁴ Apses in three synagogues do not face Jerusalem: at Gaza, at Na'aran, and at Jericho. If the reconstruction of an apse for the synagogue at Gaza is correct, the apse would face south-west, rather than north-west toward Jerusalem; Ovadiah, 1981, 129. At Na'aran and at Jericho, apses point south, rather than the more correct south-west. In addition, several Samaritan synagogues (Khirbet Samarra, Zur Natan), have apses in the direction of Mt. Gerizim; Pummer, 1999, 143.

¹⁵ The building is poorly dated, but probably belongs to the fifth century. On the basis of the meagre finds and the direction of the apse not toward Jerusalem but to the south-east, and its extremely large size, Reich believes that this building should not even be identified as a synagogue, but as a church. See chapter 2.1.6, and Reich, 1993, 142-143.

¹⁶ Twelve synagogues with apses are: Hammat Tiberias 1B, Beth Alpha, Beth She'an North, Ma'oz Hayyim, Hammat Gader, Gaza, Maon Nirim, Jericho, Beth Yerach, Na'aran, Zur Natan, Khirbet Samara (see chapter 4).

¹⁷ Foerster follows Hachlili: Foerster, 1995, 91; Hachlili, 1976, 50.

common architectural features in buildings throughout the Roman world, the assumption that niches in synagogues ‘evolved’ into apses seems unfounded. No known example exists of a synagogue whose early phase contained a niche, which was later converted into an apse.¹⁸ A more reasonable assumption concerning the apse was first made in 1935 by Watzinger, who pointed out the parallels between synagogues with apses and Christian basilicas, and suggested that the appearance of the apse in synagogues must have been influenced by church architecture in Palestine.¹⁹

After examining the archaeological evidence for platforms and chancel screens (in Chapter 5) as well as the remains of niches and apses in ancient synagogues, I would like to consider the larger question of what motivated Jews to introduce such typical church furnishings into their synagogues? Several theories have been advanced as to why this feature appeared, but I will venture a different explanation.

6.2. Semicircular Niches in Synagogues

Introducing evidence from synagogues in the Diaspora must be done with caution, as the comparisons may not be necessarily valid. However, here we must turn to the earliest positively-identified synagogue, in Syria, for evidence of a niche. Then, we will return to Palestine for later parallels.

6.2.1. Dura-Europos

The first phase of the synagogue at Dura-Europos dates from the second half of the second century. It was a typical house consisting of several rooms surrounding a central courtyard which was renovated so that the western rooms were combined

¹⁸ Such an example would be impossible to verify once a niche was removed and an apse built in its place.

¹⁹ Watzinger, 1935, 114; Meyers, 1996, 17.

into a single trapezoidal room (Fig. 6:6).²⁰ Plastered mud-brick benches were placed along the walls. A square hole in the plaster floor (c. 0.82 x 0.86 m.) which was later filled in, may indicate the location of a platform which was removed in the second stage (Fig. 6:7). On the west wall, in line with the eastern doorway and this square hole, the excavators noticed a bench constructed of stone rather than mud-brick. Traces of paint and two small columns found in the debris nearby suggest that an *aedicula* was constructed on the bench at this point on the west wall.²¹

Both phases of the synagogue at Dura-Europos are securely dated. The first synagogue underwent major renovations in 244/5 CE, according to the Aramaic inscription found on a roof tile, and was destroyed in the Persian attack of 257 CE.²² The renovations included the enlargement of the prayer hall, the removal of the rooms surrounding the atrium to make a large courtyard, and the creation of a new entrance through the adjacent house (House H).²³ The renovations were carried out by Abram the Treasurer and Samuel son of Sapharah.²⁴ Structural changes included re-building the exterior walls thicker, probably to carry the weight of the roof beams over the assembly hall. At approximately the centre of the west wall, over one metre above the floor level, a niche was constructed in the form of an *aedicula*. This niche was reached by a step flanked by pedestals supporting two columns. The niche measures: 1.51m. height x 0.83m. width x 0.91m. depth.²⁵ Above the niche is the inscription

²⁰ The room measures: L: 10.65-10.85; W: 4.60-5.30 m., Kraeling, 1956, 29.

²¹ The colonnettes measure: H: 0.48 m.; Dia: 0.15 m.; see also: White, 1996, vol II, 277-280.

²² Kraeling, 1956, 263-5; White, 1996, vol II, 288-90; MacDonald, 1986, 64.

²³ The enlarged prayer hall measures: L: 13.65; W: 7.86 m., Kraeling, op. cit., 14.

²⁴ The relevant inscriptions on roof-tiles are:

Σαμουήλ| Είδδέου| πρεσβύτερος| τῶν Ἰουδέ| ων ἔκτισεν

Samuel, son of Idaeus, presbyter of the Jews, built (the synagogue)
(CIJ 829)

Σαμουήλ| Βαρσαφάρα| μνησθῆ ἔκ-|[τ]ισεν ταῦ|τα οὕτως

Samuel, son of Sapharas, may he be remembered, built this (building) thus (as you see).
(CIJ 2. 831)

Ἄβραμ| καὶ Ἄρσά-|χου καὶ Σιλᾶς| κὲ Σαλμάνης| ἐβοήθησαν

Abram and (the son of?) Arsaches and Silas and Salmanes assisted.
(CIJ 830)

See also White, 1996, 287-293.

²⁵ White, 1996, 290.

1.51m. height x 0.83m. width x 0.91m. depth.²⁵ Above the niche is the inscription previously mentioned with the name of either the builder or the maker of the *beit arona*. The *aedicula* had an ornamented façade whose arch was decorated with plaster and the painted fluting of a conch (Fig. 6:8). Kraeling noted that the element of the conch decorating a niche has a long tradition in the Roman Orient.²⁶ *Aediculae* similar to this one appear in several temples at Dura-Europos, such as those of Bel, Adonis, and Gadde (Fig. 6:9).

To reach this niche, three steps led up from the prayer hall. Kraeling assumed that several holes on the sides of the entablature above the columns held a curtain rod for the *parochet* (Heb.), the cloth covering the niche. Within the niche would have been the Torah Scrolls. It is impossible to say whether this was the permanent location for the scrolls, or whether they were removed from the prayer hall after prayer. In any case, since the *aedicula* is set in the western wall (i.e. facing Jerusalem), it has been assumed that the direction of prayer must have been toward Jerusalem. However, inasmuch as pagan temples from the third century CE, in the same quarter of the town at Dura-Europos also have niches in their western walls, it would be premature to claim that placing the niche in this position is a custom adhered to by Jews alone.²⁷

6.2.2. Eshtemo'a

Returning now to Palestine, two synagogues with plans resembling the synagogue at Dura-Europos were discovered in the Judean Hills southwest of Jerusalem at Eshtemo'a (Fig. 6:10) and Susiya (above, Fig. 2:8). Both of these synagogues also consist of broad halls without columns or piers for roof supports, and the one at Eshtemo'a also has niches in the north wall of the hall. Although all these synagogues have their entrances in their eastern walls, the major difference is that the

²⁵ White, 1996, 290.

²⁶ Kraeling, 1956, 23.

²⁷ Gates, 1984, 173.

long axis of these two synagogues in Palestine is east-west, rather than north-south as at Dura. At Eshtemo'a, which the excavators date to the fourth to seventh centuries, the north wall closest to Jerusalem contains a large central niche flanked by two smaller ones. The height of these niches is unknown, owing to the poor preservation of this part of the northern wall. In both these synagogues, the niches are located ninety degrees to the right of the entrance to the prayer hall. The single axis from the central door to the niche (as at Dura) is not found in this area of the Judean Hills until the sixth century at Horvat Ma'on.²⁸

In the second phase of the synagogue at Eshtemo'a, a stone platform was built abutting the northern wall in front of these niches (Fig. 6:4).²⁹ This platform, too, has a semicircular niche in its centre, but the original height of the platform is unknown. Since the niches in Eshtemo'a are in the northern wall, closest to Jerusalem, if prayer was in the direction of the niche, then it was also directed toward Jerusalem.

6.2.3. Susiya

The second Palestinian synagogue whose plan resembles the one at Dura-Europos is at Susiya (Fig. 6:11). Located a few kilometres to the east of Eshtemo'a, this synagogue resembles its neighbor in several ways: in layout, in the existence of entrances in the eastern wall and of benches along the interior walls. Unlike the synagogue at Eshtemo'a, in this synagogue a narrow room to the south of the prayer hall was built as part of the original plan. Furthermore, extensive mosaic remains were preserved. On this mosaic, depictions of Jewish objects and scenes were found, including a Torah Ark, *menorot*, a zodiac, Daniel in the Lion's den (?), as well as fruits and geometric patterns. Four dedicatory mosaic inscriptions were preserved in Hebrew and Aramaic. Even though the excavators admit that no evidence was found for a niche in the northern wall, 'its existence can be surmised from various remains,'³⁰ particularly the expensive marble veneer of the platform built against the

²⁸ Amit, 1995, 153.

²⁹ The platform measures 1.48 m. x 4.30 m.; Yeivin, 1981, 120.

³⁰ Gutman, et al., 1981, 124.

northern wall (see chapter 4). However, inasmuch as no evidence was in fact found for a niche, we will not assume that it existed here. This synagogue dates from the fourth to the eighth centuries.

6.2.4. Arbel in Galilee

In 1852, the American explorer Edward Robinson saw a standing corner-column of the prayer hall at Arbel in the Galilee by (Fig. 6:12).³¹ In 1880, Guérin surmised that the niche in the southern wall was made by Muslims in the process of converting the synagogue into a mosque, since in the 1880's no other synagogue was known to have had a niche.³² In 1907, as research into ancient synagogues progressed, it became clear to Kohl and Watzinger that the plan of the synagogue at Arbel conformed overall to the usual 'Galilean' type found at Capernaum, Chorazin, and Meiron, but with some minor differences.³³ Again, the identifiable features of Galilean synagogues included from one to three entrances in the southern wall, three U-shaped rows of columns joined by a decorated architrave in the interior, a flagstone floor, and benches set along all the walls except the southern one. That southern wall was the only one without an architrave (i.e. the top of the 'U'). By contrast, the Arbel synagogue was built with its southern wall against a hillside, which precluded placement of the main entrances along that wall. The main entrance to this synagogue was in the east wall and consisted of a monumental threshold, jambs, and lintel carved from a single piece of stone. The nave of the Arbel synagogue is three steps below ground-level, so that the aisles, including the transverse aisle in the north, are raised above the level of the central nave. Three steps forming a bench are set behind the eastern and western rows of columns. While the columnar layout of this synagogue is similar to the ones at Capernaum and Chorazin, the different levels for the nave and the aisles have no parallel in similar synagogues of this period. The base of the niche at Arbel is set two metres above the floor of the synagogue, which would

³¹ Robinson, 1867, 342.

³² Guérin, 1880, vol. IV, Galilee, 199.

³³ Kohl and Watzinger, 1916, 60-61.

have necessitated a platform and steps in order to reach the niche. In fact, fragments of a small platform were found attached to the southern wall in front of this niche.³⁴ The dating of the niche was secured only after modern excavation of the site.³⁵ The excavator showed that the semicircular niche was part of the synagogue, but related to a late, sixth-century phase (Phase II).

6.2.5. Nawa in Syria

One further example of a synagogue with a niche was found at Nawa in southwest Syria (Fig. 6:13). The only information we have about this building was gained from two short visits to the site by Schumacher in the 1880's and by Mayer and Reifenberg in 1936. These latter scholars report that the building was a broadhouse synagogue with a niche in one of the broad walls.³⁶ The niche, set more than two metres above the pavement, was flanked by two pillars supporting a conch. However, since no excavation has yet been done and no plan of this site has been published, it is difficult to gauge when this building was erected.³⁷

To sum up: there is unambiguous archaeological evidence of a niche in only two synagogues in Palestine: at Eshtemo'a in the Judaeen Hills and at Arbel in Galilee. Indications of a niche at Susiya are equivocal. The building at Nawa has one, but it is neither well-documented nor accurately dated. The synagogue at Dura-Europos still offers the most complete picture of an ancient synagogue with a niche within an *aedicula*.

The size of the object which could fit inside the niche in these synagogues is critical to a discussion of the placement of Torah Scrolls in synagogues with similar niches. In his study of the synagogue at Dura-Europos, Kraeling mentioned that in the

³⁴ The niche is 1.53 m. deep and 1.60 m. high; Ilan, 1991, 118; Ilan, 1989a, 102.

³⁵ Stern, 1994a, s.v. Arbel, 87.

³⁶ Mayer and Reifenberg, 1936, 1-8; see also: Goodenough, 1952, I, 236; III, ill. 617-625.

³⁷ Chiat repeats Mayer's assumed third- to fourth-century dating on the basis of similar decoration at Bar'am; see: Chiat, 1982b, 296. However, dating of the synagogue at Bar'am is not secure. Aviam carried out several soundings in the nave of the Bar'am synagogue in 1999, and found over sixty fourth- and fifth-century coins. See: Aviam, 2001, and above 2.2.16.

depiction of Ezra holding a scroll there is a small, cylindrical object covered by a red cloth near his right foot and reaching up to his knees (Fig. 4:27). Since this object is similar to other depictions of the Ark, and since the red cloth which covers it is the same colour as that in other scenes with the Ark, Kraeling suggested that the scroll in Ezra's hands was stored inside this object. We may assume that, as they were of semi-circular plan, these niches were large enough for only a few scrolls standing in them stored within the small container. Meyers has pointed out that since the average size of a scroll rolled on two wooden rods at each end would be approximately 20 - 25 cm in diameter, the niche at Dura-Europos could have held only a few scrolls.³⁸

6.3. Rectangular Niches in Synagogues

The rectangular niche is another feature of synagogue layouts. Two types of rectangular niches have been found. One is a rectangular recess, such as the one built into the northern wall at the Horvat Rimmon synagogue, 10 km. south of Hebron. The second type of rectangular niche is simply a partly-blocked doorway which creates a recess in an otherwise plain wall. Synagogues with this feature have been uncovered at Beth She'arim in Lower Galilee and at 'En Gedi on the Dead Sea.

6.3.1. A Shelf or Recess?

The only example of a built rectangular niche was found in the early phase of the synagogue at the Horvat Rimmon, in the southern Judean hills (Fig. 6:14). Here, partial remains of the northern wall contain a rectangular niche resembling a built-in shelf, covered in white plaster with red painted lines. Since this niche or recess is in the northern wall of the structure, closest to Jerusalem, the excavator assumes that this rectangular niche was the location of the Holy Ark.³⁹

³⁸ Meyers, 1984, 174; Meyers, 1997, 310.

³⁹ Kloner, 1983, 66-67; Kloner, 1989, 45. Another possible example is in the synagogue at Kafr Misr. The excavator of this synagogue reports that the thickening of the southern wall in the second phase and several stones found below the third phase indicate the existence of a rectangular niche. However, the report and finds are not unequivocal, see: Catalogue, Volume III, and Onn, 1994, 120.

6.3.2. Blocked Doorways

The second type of rectangular niche, formed by a blocked doorway, is found in two synagogues. One is at Beth She'arim, where two phases of a synagogue were uncovered near the summit of the town in Lower Galilee (Fig. 6:15). In the first phase, a long basilical structure with three doorways was dated from the first half of the third century to the early fourth century. These doors, set in the southern end of the synagogue, led from a terrace courtyard to the prayer hall. Set in the north of the nave was a rectangular platform. In the early fourth century, the central doorway was partially blocked, creating a vertical recess in the south wall.

At 'En Gedi, a doorway in the northern wall was blocked in Stratum IIIB, dated by the excavators to the early fourth century (Fig. 6:16). The excavators called this blocked doorway an 'oblong niche.'⁴⁰ A wooden cabinet abutted the northern wall. When the synagogue was destroyed by fire in the mid-sixth century, this wooden cabinet and platform nearby were burnt. Traces of the wooden supports belonging to this platform were found *in situ* by the excavators in the early 1970's. Several objects found nearby were probably in the cabinet when the synagogue was destroyed (Fig. 6:17).⁴¹ These include a small cast-bronze menorah, a bronze goblet with a hinge for a lid, charred traces of scrolls and codices, and a hoard of thousands of coins. These charred fragments are the physical evidence that a wooden Torah Ark was set in the niche at 'En Gedi.

At this point it is necessary to examine in some detail the archaeological evidence for what the excavator of this synagogue calls a 'niche.' According to the excavation reports, a semi-circular niche was found in the middle of the northern wall. In front of this niche was a rectangular area, approximately 2.0 m. x. 4.0 m. which formed a *bema*, or platform. In an interview in 1977, the excavator hypothesised that this platform might have served as an *ambo*.⁴² The corners of this

⁴⁰ Barag, et al., 1981, 117.

⁴¹ Barag, et al., 1981, 117.

⁴² Chiat, 1982b, 222.

platform had small sockets for a wooden chancel screen. To the north of this platform, that is, between the edge of the platform and the north wall, was built a wooden cabinet 1.5 m. x 3.25 m., which must have abutted the platform (Fig. 6:18). This structure was destroyed during the mid-sixth century. According to the excavators, a small lamp with a cross found on the nave pavement attests to the destruction of the synagogue by Christians.⁴³

At Beth She'arim and at 'En Gedi we witness the curious blocking of the main doorway at the same time as a new entrance was built to the west side or in the opposite wall. The change at Beth She'arim occurred in the early fourth century, and at 'En Gedi about one hundred years later. At Beth She'arim the southern doors were blocked, thereby preventing access from the south. At 'En Gedi, access was blocked from the north. Two further examples of blocking doors and creating new entrances in the opposite wall occur at Hammat Tiberias (North) in the late third century (phase II) and at the Meroth synagogue (phase III), in Upper Galilee in the late fifth–early sixth century. At these sites the southern doors were blocked, but do not seem to have been used as niches. At Hammat Tiberias (North), the southern doorway was blocked, then an area of ca. 50 cm. in front of that blocked doorway was enclosed by a chancel screen.⁴⁴

The blockage of doorways adjacent to the most holy object within the prayer halls, namely the Torah Ark, and the re-location of the main doorway elsewhere has several consequences. Upon entering, worshippers had a direct line of sight to the Ark. They did not have to turn 180 degrees to see the Ark, nor was it located behind the front door. These doors thus assume the simple function of allowing access into the hall, without any religious connotation attached to their direction. In the case of Meroth, where very good chronological evidence was found for this change in the

⁴³ Avi-Yonah interpreted traces of burnt destruction of synagogues at 'En Gedi, Caesarea, and Husifa as evidence of Christian destruction of these synagogues. However, recently Stemberger has shown that fire was a frequent occurrence, and broke out for various reasons; Avi-Yonah, 1984, 240; and Stemberger, 1998, 136-138.

⁴⁴ No evidence of a platform was reported from the first phase of the synagogue; Slouschz, 1925.

first half of the seventh century, the platforms originally flanking the central entrance were not moved from their original positions. Thus, worshippers in the renovated hall would still have seen a flat wall with two focal points: a platform adjacent to the western stylobate, and another adjacent to the eastern stylobate (Fig. 6:19).

6.4. Rectangular chambers as the synagogue's focal point

Two different types of rectangular chambers have been found: one, a room attached to the synagogue, the other a recess along the full width of the nave. Examples of the first type occur at Hammat Tiberias (phase II) and at Horvat Summaqa; examples of the second have been found at Gerasa east of the Jordan River and at Horvat Ma'on in Judaea.

6.4.1. The Rectangular room

As an example of the first type, the phase II synagogue at Hammat Tiberias is an almost square basilical structure which underwent several modifications before evidence of its ritual character first appears (Fig. 6:20). In the first half of the third century, a broad basilical hall was erected (phase I).⁴⁵ Attached to the hall was a narrow passageway located to the southeast. One, or more, entrances from this narrow passageway allowed access to the aisles and nave. The sole explicit evidence for the religious purpose of the first phase of this building is a small section of mosaic depicting a coloured guilloche in a frame.⁴⁶ Further evidence of the building's religious character as a synagogue is the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek inscriptions of phase 2, dating to the first half of the fourth century.

⁴⁵ Dothan, 1983, 27; and see above, 2.2.9.

⁴⁶ The excavator states that "the contention that it was a synagogue already in Stratum IIb is supported by the evidence from the later stage, Stratum IIa, when it was definitely a synagogue", see: Dothan, 1983, 24.

Several changes were made in this structure after a partial destruction which occurred, according to the excavator, in the late third or early fourth century.⁴⁷ These changes include a new mosaic floor depicting the zodiac, with Helios in the centre and personifications of the four seasons, the blocking-up of the narrow southern hall and its conversion into four small rooms, and the construction of new entrances in the northern wall leading to the nave and flanking aisles.⁴⁸ This example is one of the earliest instances of the main entrance to what is possibly a synagogue hall being blocked, and new entrances built in the opposite wall. The single step at the southern end of the nave gives access to the basalt stone pavement of a raised platform, set in the exact position of the previous door. The level of this platform is approximately 0.65 m. higher than the level of the floor of the nave. Within this platform set into the southwest side is a rectangular cavity, measuring 1.80 m. x 0.80 m. and about 0.80 m. deep which the excavator called a 'cist,' (*sic*) (Fig. 6:21).⁴⁹ Similar cavities have been found in several synagogues, with and without apses.⁵⁰

A synagogue at Horvat Summaqa on Mount Carmel was first identified by Conder and Kitchener during their survey of western Palestine (Fig. 6:22).⁵¹ Although less than one-third of the synagogue has been uncovered by modern scholars, Dar and Mintzker make several important points about the interior layout.⁵² The basilical building has its main doorway in the short, eastern wall. Two rows of four columns divide the hall into a nave and flanking aisles. According to the plan published in 1989, the aisles of the western bay of the hall were enclosed by two walls which

⁴⁷ Evidence for a destruction is unsubstantiated. Dothan mentions that "... the distinction between the walls of IIb and IIa is difficult to make because no clear indications of destruction or repair are visible." Dothan, 1983, 21-22.

⁴⁸ Dothan at first called these small rooms "cells". See Dothan, 1981, 65; Dothan, 1983, 27.

⁴⁹ Dothan, 1983, 28.

⁵⁰ Synagogues with a cavity within a platform include Beth Alpha, Beth She'an North, Ma'oz Hayyim, and perhaps Qatzrin. Hachlili calls such a cavity a "genizah" (repository) since "The genizah in most of these synagogues usually yielded coins, and probably served, therefore, as the community's hiding place for its treasure and for discarded scrolls." Hachlili, 1988, 192-3.

⁵¹ Conder and Kitchener, 1881, 318-20.

⁵² Dar and Mintzker, 1989, 19.

extend into the nave.⁵³ In the final excavation report published in 1999, mention is made of these two short walls attached to the back of the hall, which might indicate some kind of square apse-like area in the prayer hall. However, the excavator notes that these walls were 'too short' to enable their original identification to a particular building phase.⁵⁴ A better resolution of the building's architecture may never be known.

6.4.2. Rectangular recesses

An example of a rectangular recess set into the short wall of a basilical structure appears in the synagogues at Gerasa and at Horvat Ma'on in Judaea. The synagogue at Gerasa was found underneath the 'Synagogue Church,' which dates to 530-1 CE, according to the dedicatory inscription on the church mosaic pavement (Fig. 6:23).⁵⁵ This synagogue was a basilical structure with a nave flanked by aisles with eight columns on each stylobate. Portions of the mosaic belonging to the synagogue were found in the east end, below the apse of the later church. Although the excavators had a difficult time determining the inner outline of the synagogue, a rectangular recess, was uncovered below the western entrance of the later church. Two courses of stones are all that were found of this small chamber, which measures approximately 2.5 m. x 5.5 m., or slightly less than the width of the nave. The remains of the western wall consist solely of a foundation course which indicates that the western recess is a later addition to an earlier phase of the structure. Between these walls, a mosaic pavement was found, but there are two difficulties in attributing the mosaic to the synagogue. First, the style of the mosaic does not correspond to that of the other traces of mosaic identified from the synagogue. Second, the outer face of the southern wall is not parallel to the inner face, and is thicker where it attaches to the prayer hall in the east. We also note that the northern row of columns of the later

⁵³ In 1995 the excavator modified this plan to indicate that sections of the interior of the hall were walled off, see: Dar and Mintzker, 1995, Fig. 10, 162.

⁵⁴ Dar, 1999, 23.

⁵⁵ Crowfoot, 1931, 16-20; Crowfoot and Hamilton, 1930, 40.

church is aligned with the northern wall of this small chamber, whereas the southern wall is not in alignment.⁵⁶ Concerning this recess, Crowfoot and Kraeling wrote, 'the Torah shrine, with a dais in front of it for the seats of the elders [was] at the west end.'⁵⁷ Again, it must be pointed out that no actual remains of a Torah Ark or of a wooden dais have been found.

The second excavated synagogue with a rectangular recess was uncovered in Judaea, at Horvat Ma'on. This synagogue, excavated by Ilan and Amit between 1987 and 1988, was a rectangular structure built in the second half of the fourth century. Three doors in its long, eastern, wall opened onto a hall. The phase I synagogue was built as a rectangular hall without roof supports. In the sixth century, piers were added to the hall to support a new roof (phase II). The original eastern doorways were blocked, and a vestibule with two entrances was erected in the southern part of the building, reducing the length of the hall by about 3 metres. In both stages, the short northern wall had a recess in it, measuring 5.0 m. x 0.6 m. The excavator calls this recess an 'alcove for the Holy Ark.'⁵⁸ In the reconstruction drawing of this synagogue, the excavators depict a marble free-standing menorah on the eastern side standing on a large platform. This platform is, in fact, wholly hypothetical.

The synagogues at Gerasa, Horvat Ma'on, and Horvat Summaqa have several features in common. All are rectangular halls with a rectangular recess in a short wall. The recesses at Gerasa and Horvat Summaqa are both in the western side of the hall, opposite the entrances in the eastern wall. Horvat Ma'on also has entrances in the eastern wall in its first phase, but unlike Gerasa and Horvat Summaqa, this structure was built with a north-south axis. The recess at Horvat Ma'on in Judaea is about 0.60 m. deep, while that at Gerasa is over two metres deep. Again, no physical evidence has been found to support the assumption that this recess held the Torah Ark

⁵⁶ This may indicate that the northern row of columns were re-used in the church above the synagogue in their original position, while the southern row was not in its original position; see: Kraeling, 1938, 238-9.

⁵⁷ Crowfoot, 1931, 18.

⁵⁸ Amit, 1995, 133.

permanently. Furthermore, at Horvat Ma'on the rebuilding occurred in the sixth century. Entrances were moved from the eastern wall to the southern wall, reinforcing the south-to-north axiality toward the recess in the northern wall.

The evidence presented by niches and rectangular recesses found in ancient synagogues so far indicates that while there was no single layout used in all synagogues, the blocking of doors and their repositioning on another side attest to a fundamental change. The common denominator seems to be a desire for a niche or recess on the side of the prayer hall nearest Jerusalem. When rebuilding, the axiality of the layout was emphasised, by setting doors on the wall opposite the niche, recess or platform. Axiality, then, seems to have been part of the underlying motive for these changes to synagogue layouts.

6.5. Apses in churches and synagogues

In 1935, there were three known synagogues with apses and mosaic floors whose plans resembled the basilical layout of contemporary small village churches. These were the synagogues at Beth Alpha, Hammat Gader, and the partial remains of the synagogue at Na'aran near Jericho. In the opinion of Carl Watzinger, these three buildings provided evidence that Christian art and architecture exerted a considerable influence on the layouts and interior furnishings of ancient synagogues (see above, ch. 3). Since then, the number of excavated synagogues possessing apses has more than quadrupled. Besides the characteristic apse, several of these also have chancel screens. Another synagogue with chancel screens but without an apse was found at Rehov to the south. In Chapter Two we showed that three of these sites are located within a 10-km. radius of Scythopolis, less than a day's journey from that city. At Ma'oz Hayyim and possibly at Beth Alpha the apses were built onto an earlier phase of the synagogue where the southern wall of the prayer hall had been flat. Whether these walls were intentionally destroyed or whether the building collapsed as a result of a natural disaster is unknown. In any case, it is reasonable to suppose that these

changes in the layout of synagogues near Scythopolis, as well as elsewhere, attest to the willingness of the congregations to change even long-standing practice.

6.5.1. Assumptions concerning apses in synagogues

In order to understand the reasons for changes in synagogue layout, we will attempt to trace the development of scholarly explanations for this phenomenon.

When Sukenik uncovered the ancient synagogue at Beth Alpha during January and February of 1929, the church-like apse in the southern wall was the first of its kind found in a synagogue in Palestine.⁵⁹ All other known buildings thought to be synagogues were simple rectangular halls, some with two rows of columns, others with an additional transverse row of columns along one short wall. Entrance to the prayer hall at Beth Alpha was through an atrium and narthex in the north, rather than the south. The apse in the short southern wall of this synagogue was a particularly perplexing feature. Within the apse was a fill of earth 0.75 m. above the level of the floor. A cavity was found in approximately the centre of the fill in the apse (Fig. 6:24).⁶⁰ Its walls were plastered, and the cavity had been covered by paving-stones, one of which was still *in situ*. Inside this cavity 36 coins were found, seven of which could be identified as dating between the time of Constantine and Justin I.⁶¹ To reach this platform and the cavity in the apse, three steps led up from the prayer hall to the apse. On either side of these carved steps, two semi-circular vertical hollows were cut into the stones at floor level. Sukenik assumed that these hollows were the impression left by two columns which flanked the steps and supported a rail used to hold a curtain which concealed some object within the apse, probably the Torah Ark. However, since no archaeological evidence was found indicating the height of these columns, and no evidence for a rod or curtain rings was found, this reconstruction remains conjectural.

⁵⁹ Sukenik, 1932, 50.

⁶⁰ We measured the cavity as: 1.0 m. long x 0.80 m. wide and c. 0.80 m. deep.

⁶¹ Sukenik, 1932, 13.

Three years after the discovery of the synagogue at Beth Alpha, which was thought to be unique, Sukenik uncovered a second synagogue with similar features at Hammat Gader. Here, as at Beth Alpha, an apse projects from the south wall of the synagogue. A raised area set in the apse was reached by two steps from the floor. Little is known about this area because the earth fill between the steps and the back wall of the apse was inadvertently excavated below the level of the floor of the nave, thereby removing all traces of a possible floor level within the apse.⁶² In 1980 during restoration work on the mosaic floor, Foerster noticed that two earlier phases of the building lay buried 20 cm. below the mosaic floor uncovered by Sukenik.⁶³ Clearly, the building's history was much more complicated than Sukenik had thought.

At the time of this discovery, in the early 1930's, it was believed that synagogues in Palestine did not possess a Torah Shrine permanently positioned against one wall. Rather, it was theorised that early synagogues dating from the first to the fifth centuries were communal buildings in which the Holy Scrolls, kept in their cabinet, were only brought into the prayer hall when needed and then returned to another room. To explain the unusual discovery of apses in the layouts of the fifth- and sixth-century synagogues at Hammat Gader and Beth Alpha, Sukenik assumed that the introduction of the apse and raised platform into synagogue architecture reflected the need for a permanent place for the Torah Shrine, namely, in the apse.⁶⁴ Since no fourth-century synagogue had an apse, Sukenik assumed that only in the fifth century was there a specific place within the prayer hall required for this most sacred object. Of the ten excavated synagogues from Palestine at that time, none had

⁶² Sukenik found a paved apse floor 1.18 m. lower than the highest step, and did not consider it related to an earlier phase of the structure; Sukenik, 1935, 165.

⁶³ See: Foerster, 1983, 41; Foerster, 1986, translated to English as: Foerster, 1995. Sukenik made the same error of not excavating below the floor mosaic at Beth Alpha during the original excavation. An earlier floor became apparent almost 20 years later, during restoration work, cf. Sukenik, 1951, 26.

⁶⁴ "As the synagogue came to occupy a more and more central position in Jewish religious life, there was a tendency to increase its impressiveness by the permanent presence of the most sacred ritual object, the Scroll of the Law; for which later a special repository in the form of an apse was constructed." Sukenik, 1932, 52.

a feature that might have housed the Holy Scrolls.⁶⁵ With no archaeological indication to the contrary, Sukenik's hypothesis provided a plausible motive for the introduction of the apse into synagogues in Palestine. Furthermore, since the partial remains of the synagogue at Na'aran (Ein Duk) near Jericho had a similar layout to that at Beth Alpha, including a mosaic floor depicting the zodiac, and doors located in the northern wall instead of the southern wall, Sukenik used this synagogue as a further example of how fifth- and sixth-century synagogues solved the practical difficulty in Galilean synagogues, where the congregation enters through the southern doors, and then turns around to pray toward Jerusalem. Doors placed in the north provide axiality toward Jerusalem, as well as an unobstructed view of the Torah Ark in the south.

In considering Sukenik's theory, we must realize that several of his basic assumptions about 'early' synagogue layouts have been disproven by subsequent archaeological discoveries. First, Sukenik did not question the dating of the Galilean synagogues such as the one at Capernaum to the second and third centuries, as proposed by Kohl and Watzinger on the basis of stylistic analysis of several architectural features. However, excavation below the flagstone floor of the prayer hall has uncovered fourth- and fifth-century coins, which date this building 200 years later than originally thought.⁶⁶

In the early part of this century, the application of numismatic studies to archaeology was in its infancy. Nor was the dating of ceramic assemblages and its applicability to standing remains well-known in Palestine. Since no trenches were dug below the flagstone pavements of many excavated synagogues, Sukenik had no way of knowing that the excavations of Corbo and Loffreda would show that the

⁶⁵ Sukenik rejected the German reconstruction of a stone aedicula within the nave in the synagogue at Capernaum on account of the impressions of bars on the underside of several stones used in the supposed aedicula's construction. Sukenik showed that these stones were in fact windows with a metal grating, Sukenik, 1931, 22-25.

⁶⁶ For a recent analysis of the coin finds relating to the dating of the synagogue see: Loffreda, 1997, Arslan, 1997.

synagogue at Capernaum was completed hundreds of years later, in the late fifth or possibly early sixth century.

To sum up, Sukenik assumed that the change in synagogue layout from one with entrance doors in the south, (for example, Capernaum which at the time was misdated to the second – third century), to one with doors in the north (as at sixth century Beth Alpha), was due to the desire of these Jewish communities to place the Torah Ark in a permanent position within the prayer hall.⁶⁷ Sukenik believed that the plain rectangular hall of synagogues dating earlier than the fifth century indicated that they had no place for the Torah Ark. The existence of the niche in the third-century synagogue at Dura-Europos and in the comparable fifth-century synagogues at 'Eshtemoa' and Susiya in Palestine, implied that the niche appeared in synagogue layouts and continued to be used long before the apse. Sukenik therefore suggested that the niche was a precursor of the apse, and that the apse developed from the niche in synagogues.⁶⁸ Sukenik did not explain the use of the chancel screens set in front of the apse at Hammat Gader, although he did note their dimensions and artistic features as similar to chancel screens in Christian churches.⁶⁹

6.5.2. Some explanations for the appearance of the apse in synagogues

Two explanations have been advanced for the appearance of the apse in synagogue architecture in Jewish communities close to large Christian populations, such as those near Scythopolis and Gaza. One is that the apse was adopted as a result of the unavoidable day-to-day contacts between peoples belonging to the two religions. A hint of the extent of these contacts is found in Canon 84 of the Fourth Council at Carthage (408 CE), where bishops are reminded not to prohibit Jews from attending services of the church up to the *missa catchecumenorum*.⁷⁰ In the late fourth-century Syrian *Apostolic Constitutions*, several canons prohibit bishops and

⁶⁷ Sukenik, 1932, 50.

⁶⁸ Sukenik, 1935, 165; this view has been repeated more recently by Hachlili, cf. Hachlili, 1976, 50; also see: Hachlili, 1989, 3-6.

⁶⁹ Sukenik, 1934, 57.

⁷⁰ Parkes, 1934, 176.

other members of the clergy from partaking in any Jewish feasts, particularly the eating of unleavened bread.⁷¹ Nor are Christians to enter a synagogue to pray or to tend the lamps of synagogues or pagan temples on feast days.⁷² As these prohibitions attest, Jews were not the only participants at Jewish feasts, nor were Christians the only ones to attend Church services.

According to Tsafir, it was the close contacts between Christians and Jews that led to the 'transformation of values' in which the 'Christian tradition of austerity' was adopted by Jews.⁷³ Synagogue prayer halls were at that time more decorated on the interior than the exterior. In the fifth and sixth centuries, it then became possible to 'forego the building of a splendid entrance to the synagogue on the façade facing Jerusalem, [because] the entrance was shifted to the wall opposite the direction of prayer.'⁷⁴ The apse, Tsafir reasons:⁷⁵

⁷¹ VIII, 47, 7, (Cannon 7); (for the text, see: Metzger, 1985):

Εἴ τις ἐπίσκοπος ἢ πρεσβύτερος ἢ διάκονος τὴν ἁγίαν τοῦ πάσχα ἡμέραν πρὸ τῆς ἐαρινῆς ἰσημερίας μετὰ Ἰουδαίων ἐπιτελέσῃ, καθαιρείσθω.

If a priest, a presbyter, or a deacon celebrate Passover holiday before the spring equinox, like the Jews, let him be deposed.

VIII: 47, 70(Cannon 70)

Εἴ τις ἐπίσκοπος ἢ ἄλλος κληρικὸς νηστεύει μετὰ Ἰουδαίων ἢ ἐορτάζει μετ' αὐτῶν ἢ δέχεται αὐτῶν τὰ τῆς ἐορτῆς ξένια, οἷον ἄζυμα ἢ τι τοιοῦτον, καθαιρείσθω. εἰ δὲ λαϊκός, ἀφορίζέσθω.

If a priest or a young cleric celebrates festivals with the Jews, or accepts gifts from their festivals, such as their unleavened bread or anything else of that nature, let him be deposed, if he is a laic, let him be excluded.

⁷² VIII: 47, 65 (Cannon 65)

Εἴ τις κληρικὸς ἢ λαϊκός εἰσέλθοι εἰς συναγωγὴν Ἰουδαίων ἢ αἰρετικῶν προσεύξασθαι, καθαιρείσθω καὶ ἀφορίζέσθω.

If a cleric or a laic administers in an assembly of Jews or of heretics for prayer, let him be deposed and excluded.

VIII: 47, 71 (Cannon 71)

Εἴ τις Χριστιανὸς ἔλαιον ἀπενέγκοι εἰς ἱερὸν ἔθνῶν ἢ εἰς συναγωγὴν Ἰουδαίων ἢ λύχνους, ἀφορίζέσθω.

If a Christian offers oil at a pagan sanctuary or at the synagogue of the Jews, or even for lamps, let him be excluded.

⁷³ Tsafir, 1987, 150-151. More detailed discussion of these ideas can be found in Hebrew, in: Tsafir, 1984, 150.

⁷⁴ Tsafir, 1987, 150-151.

⁷⁵ Tsafir, 1987, 152.

... emphasised the status of the Holy Ark, as did the chancel screen, which set off the *bema* from the hall proper. The *bema*, apse, and chancel screen were not imbued with special status, as they were in the church, where they were reserved for the priesthood and for mystical and 'awesome' rites that were hidden from the lay worshippers.

Conversely, Foerster claims that in synagogues, chancel screens were used solely for decoration, since according to Jewish liturgy there was no need to separate the Ark from the congregation, as can be seen 'from the literary and archaeological evidence.'⁷⁶ However, Tsafrir's theory does not explain why these synagogues suddenly adopted the apse and chancel screen within the prayer hall. Nor is it clear why he assumes that these architectural features in the synagogue possessed no special status, especially since it seems highly likely that they *did* separate the Torah Ark from the prayer hall.

Chiat proposed another possible explanation for the introduction of the apse, chancel screens, and raised *bema*. By the fifth century, Chiat suggests, some Jewish communities felt the need to 'properly store and safeguard the Scrolls from prying, and perhaps unclean eyes.'⁷⁷ Chiat advanced two reasons for the addition of apses to synagogues near Beth She'an. Firstly, the increase in the number of Christian churches in the Holy Land led to the Jews' growing acceptance of Christianity. Secondly, during the fourth to the sixth centuries the purpose of the synagogue changed from multiple civic, as well as religious, functions to primarily being religious. This idea is appealing for several reasons. The sanctity of the synagogue building may have increased as hopes faded for the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem.⁷⁸ Furthermore, as the synagogue assumed more of the functions of a house of worship, these communities might have felt the need to separate the Torah Scrolls from the people.⁷⁹ Thus, the chancel screen may have provided a boundary between

⁷⁶ Foerster, 1989a, 1810

⁷⁷ Chiat, 1980, 20.

⁷⁸ For the issue of sanctity in the synagogue and its relationship to Jerusalem Temple imagery, see: Fine, 1996a, 43.

⁷⁹ Chiat surmises that as the Torah Scrolls had a special significance for Jews, their function in the synagogue may have been similar to that the altar and relics in the church, namely, as the focus and expression of sacredness; Chiat, 1982a, 39.

the prayer hall, and the Torah Ark within the apse.⁸⁰ On the other hand, we have no written evidence for such a concept, nor is it clear why only these communities suddenly felt the need to safeguard their Scrolls, while other synagogues (such as those in the mainly Jewish Galilee) have no apparent division between the Torah Ark and the prayer hall.

However, these explanations for the addition of the apse to synagogue layouts seem to me to be more attempts to rationalise the archaeological evidence than to explain convincingly why so few synagogues had apses, whereas by the sixth century nearly one-third had apses. In the fifth and sixth centuries, the number of churches built in Palestine increased tremendously. Moreover, for the Jews to have introduced this characteristically Christian furniture into their synagogues, they must have felt either that their own prayer halls lacked something, which Christian churches possessed, or that it would improve the interior arrangement, or perhaps both.

6.6. The appearance of the apse as an architectural feature in synagogues in relation to Byzantine liturgical practice

In order better to understand the possible reasons behind the change in synagogue architecture from that of a simple rectangular hall to a basilical hall with apse, *bema*, and chancel, it is worthwhile to outline the liturgy practiced in the early Byzantine church.

6.6.1. The First Entrance of the Gospel and *Hetoimasia*

I will attempt to describe a different approach to this puzzle. We shall begin with an examination of the translation of the Gospel at the First Entrance (or Little Entrance), in the Christian eucharistic liturgy. The essence of the First Entrance was the bringing of the Gospel into the church and placing it on the altar. This movement within the church is considered the enthroning of the Gospel Book, whether figuratively, by setting the codex on the altar in the sanctuary or, literally, on a throne.

⁸⁰ Branham, 1992, 380.

The empty throne symbolised the preparation for the second coming of Christ. In forty-four Syrian churches, a cut stone *bema* platform has been discovered in the exact centre of the nave.⁸¹ Ten of these *bemas* incorporate a stone throne. This throne was not meant to be used by a person. The throne was too high to be easily reached, the seat too narrow, and the back carved at an uncomfortable angle. Tchalenko reasoned that the throne must have been used for an object, possibly a cross or the Gospels, or both.⁸² Representations of the Word enthroned (in mosaic, on ivory, or even clay ampullae) typically called the *hetoimasia*, are additional evidence for this practice.

While Egeria's description of her travels in Palestine in 383 CE provide some information on the Jerusalem Liturgy, much more can be learned from St. Maximus the Confessor, a Chalcedonian monk from Palestine.⁸³ According to his *Mystagogia*, written in the first half of the seventh century, the church should be divided into two areas: the sanctuary (ἱερατεῖον) and the nave (ναός). The sanctuary is the part for priests, and the nave is for the faithful. Mathews succinctly sets out the different symbolic meanings of these two areas according to Maximus, as follows:⁸⁴

1. the universe is divided into the invisible angelic world and the corporeal world of men.
2. the visible world is divided into heaven and earth
3. man's dual nature is divided into body and soul

In the early fourth century, Eusebius describes a carved wooden screen that was used to separate the laity from the clergy in the cathedral at Tyre.⁸⁵ By the late fourth

⁸¹ Tchalenko, 1990, 323-324.

⁸² Tchalenko, 1990, 260-261.

⁸³ Wilkinson, 1981, 123.

⁸⁴ Mathews, 1976, 121.

⁸⁵ Eusebius, *Hist Ecc.* X,4,44; see also: Mango, 1972, 6.

αὐθις καὶ τάδε, ὡς ἂν εἶη τοῖς πολλοῖς ἄβατα, τοῖς ἀπὸ ξύλου περιέφραττε δικτύοις εἰς ἄκρον ἐντέχνου λεπτουργίας ἐξησκημένοις, ὡς θαυμάσιον τοῖς ὀρῶσιν παρέχειν τὴν θέαν.

and again surrounded this part also, that the multitude might not tread thereon, with a fence of wooden lattice-work, delicately wrought with the craftsman's utmost skill, so as to present a marvelous spectacle to those that see it.

century, the Council of Laodicaea allowed only ministers to enter the sanctuary.⁸⁶ Thus, the church was divided by the chancel screen into two areas, the sanctuary and the nave.

The Early Byzantine Liturgy began with the First Entrance, that is, the entry of the celebrant into the church. The purpose of this ceremony was to read from the Gospels. Entering the church before the celebrant was a deacon carrying the Gospel codex, with bearers carrying candles and incense. As the Gospel was carried in procession up the nave, the laity simultaneously entered the church according to the rite of Constantinople, whereas in the West, the people were already in the church, waiting for the procession to begin. After the Prayer of Entry, invoking God to help each congregant individually, the procession moved through the Holy Doors (τὰ ἅγια θυρία) after which the deacon placed the Gospel on the altar.⁸⁷

According to the *De Ceremoniis* of Constantine Porphyrogenitus, when the emperor participated in the service at Hagia Sophia, he would wait in the narthex and was to greet the Patriarch first, then the Gospel, and lastly the cross.⁸⁸ Occasionally, however, the emperor would greet the Gospel first, the Patriarch second, and the cross third. This order shows the importance attached to the Gospel as a symbol of Christ, of even greater importance than the Patriarch himself.

After placing the Gospel on the altar, the celebrant would ascend the throne that was in the sanctuary. According to Canon 20 of the Council of Laodicaea, other clergy who entered the sanctuary would stand until the bishop sat, at which point they would seat themselves on either side of him in the *synthronon*.⁸⁹

Once the bishop was seated on the *synthronon* and people had filled the church, the readings from the Scriptures began. In the Early Byzantine liturgy, three

⁸⁶ *Conc. Laodic.* Canon 56, (Mansi 2, 574) "The priests ought not to enter and sit down on the bema before the entrance of the bishop, but should enter with the bishop, unless he is sick or absent."

trans. Mathews, 1976, 143.

⁸⁷ Mathews, 1976, 140-141.

⁸⁸ Mathews compares the entrance of the emperor's honour guard with the stationary liturgy. Both were derived from Imperial ceremony; Mathews, 1976, 142-43.

⁸⁹ *Conc. Laodic.*, Canon 20, (Mansi 2, 568).

readings took place: one from the Old Testament, often from the Prophets, the second from the Acts of the Apostles or the Epistles, and the third reading from the Gospels. By the ninth century, the reading from the Old Testament had stopped, and there were only two readings, from the Epistles or Acts and from the Gospels. The readings from both the Old Testament and the Epistles or the Acts occurred after the reader had ascended the *ambo*. These books were probably kept on the *ambo* itself. The reading from the Gospels was another matter entirely. First, the procession which brought the Gospel codex into the church, and the solemn placing of the Gospel codex on the altar symbolised the incarnation of Christ. When the Gospel codex was carried to the *ambo*, it was done with dignity and solemnity. Jerome writes that as a sign of joy candles were lit before the reading from the Gospel.⁹⁰ According to Paul Silentarius, during the reading of the Gospel in Hagia Sophia, the emperor removed his crown, and the people stood up. As the priest removed the Gospel from the *ambo* and returned it to the altar, the crowd was permitted to touch or kiss the codex.⁹¹

The sermon came next. At present, it is unclear how many sermons would follow the readings. Chrysostom sat while preaching from the *ambo*, which was unlike the usual practice in Constantinople, where the bishop preached from the throne. Chrysostom did this in order to be better heard. The first part of the liturgy (*synaxis*) concluded when the deacon dismissed the catechumens from the church, so that the doors could be shut before the 'Great Entrance,' otherwise known as the Entrance of the Sacred Elements, when the Eucharist bread and wine were brought to the altar.

6.7. Artistic Representations of The First Entrance and The Gospel Enthroned

In the church of San Vitale in Ravenna, founded in 526 CE by Julianus Argentarius, and dedicated by the Bishop Maximianus in 548 CE, the mosaics on the

⁹⁰ Jerome, *Contra Vigilantium*, pl 23, 361; Mathews, 1976, 149.

⁹¹ Mathews, 1976, 149.

northeast and southeast walls of the presbytery depict Justinian, Theodora, the bishop, and their attendants (Fig. 6:25). This scene has attracted scholarly attention for nearly one hundred years.⁹² Most likely, the event depicted is the First Entrance, since we see the Bishop leading with a cross, while next to him is a deacon with the Gospel, and another with incense. The emperor Justinian is next, with his gift of a paten. Near him are military officers and court officials, one of whom is Julianus Argentarius, the donor, on his left, and Belisarius the general on his right. On the opposite panel, the empress Theodora is depicted, carrying a chalice, entering the church from the atrium.⁹³

6.7.1. Imagery of the imperial throne

Turning to early Byzantine art, the imagery of the imperial throne on which Christ sits or the Gospel is placed is a reflection of the Divine realm, that is the divine kingship of Christ the *Pantocrator*. Let us take for example the partially restored fourth-century apse mosaic in St. Pudenziana in Rome (Fig. 6:26). Here, Christ sits enthroned between the apostles who are set on a lower register. The scene takes place in a courtyard, with a jewelled cross set on a rock behind Christ. According to Grabar, this image is derived from the arch of Constantine, where the enthroned emperor is depicted giving largess to those below him. However, as Mathews has pointed out, in St. Pudenziana Christ lacks the imperial diadem, cloak, boots and sceptre.⁹⁴ Through close examination of the imagery, Mathews notes that emperors and Roman magistrates did not sit on a throne, but rather on a *sella curulis*, the curule seat, a folding chair with four curved legs, often in the shape of lions' legs. Once opened, interlocking rails set lengthwise on the top of the seat kept the folding legs from opening too far. In Roman art, only gods such as Jupiter were depicted on thrones. Thus in St. Pudenziana, Christ is depicted not as an emperor on a curule seat, but on a throne as a god. In addition, the apostles are not receiving the emperor's *largitio*, as

⁹² On the founding of the church see: Mango, 1972, 104-105.

⁹³ Mathews, 1976, 146.

⁹⁴ Mathews, 1993, 97.

on the Arch of Constantine, but instead resemble philosophers listening to a teacher. Disagreeing with Grabar, Mathews asserts that this scene represents Golgotha, in the Holy Garden next to the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, on which Theodosius II erected a jewelled cross. Mathews continues, 'Implicit in such images is the bold claim of Christians to have bested their pagan adversaries in the intellectual realm.'⁹⁵ Imagery of the apse mosaic fuses three cardinal features of the Roman world: the pagan Zeus/Jupiter enthroned in the heavenly realm; kingship (*imperium*) in the earthly realm; and the philosopher teaching from his raised chair (καθέδρα). Implicit in this message is the projection of the earthly realm onto the heavenly where Christ reigns supreme.

6.7.2. The Word of God

In the development of Jewish as well as Christian thought, as Herford has pointed out, the Word of God possesses Divine authority.⁹⁶ For the Jews on the one hand, that Divine Truth was embodied in the Torah and transmitted directly from God to Moses. Accordingly, the Torah contains Divine Truth, as revealed by the prophets. As Neusner puts it, 'the Hebrew Scriptures, the Written Torah, forms the record of God's picture of humanity.'⁹⁷ This is expressed in the furnishings of the synagogue, where the Torah Scrolls, kept in a Shrine, are considered the most holy object, to which all else is secondary.⁹⁸

To Christians, on the other hand, Jesus transformed the Jewish religion through His mission. That is to say that while the Old Testament preserved its authority as a witness to God's self-disclosure to the Jews and as a prefiguration of the greater revelation reflected in Christ, the authority of the Gospels was based on the Incarnation, as fulfillment of God's promises to the Jews.⁹⁹ Thus, the written Word from the new Covenant gained prestige from the Old, and particularly from the

⁹⁵ Mathews, 1993, 111.

⁹⁶ Herford, 1903, 14-16.

⁹⁷ Neusner, 1988, 147.

⁹⁸ M. Megilla 3:1, see Fine, 1996a, 24.

⁹⁹ Barton, 1988, 55.

prophets.¹⁰⁰ The Revelation then, was of the One God of the Old Israel to the New (the Church).¹⁰¹

Herein lies a fundamental conflict: Jews and Christians each contend that it is their own version of the Word that embodies the ultimate and final Divine Truth.

6.8. Competition with Christianity and alongside its adaptation in the synagogue

How might Jewish communities in close contact with Christians contest the claim that the Gospel, rather than the Torah, was the authentic Word of God? One possibility might be for some Jewish communities to adapt the architectural language of the church interior, including the apse and chancel screen, for its use in a synagogue. An increasing number of synagogues with an apse, chancel, and platform attest that from the fourth to sixth centuries, this set of architectural features could be adapted for use in a synagogue, but obviously for a different purpose than the enthroning of the Gospel in the church. In the synagogue, set on a raised platform within an apse enclosed by a chancel screen, the Pentateuch scrolls were kept in a cabinet, (or perhaps a Shrine), known as the Torah Shrine. The architectural components of apse, chancel, and steps separating the church into two parts could be adapted by Jews. By so doing, Jewish communities could use the Old Testament, the Torah, to contest the Christian claim of the Gospel as the Divine Word. As the Gospel was enthroned upon the *mensa sacra* within the apse, or on a specially-built stone throne as in Syria, and separated from the laity by a chancel and screen, so too could the Torah, and the Torah Shrine, as it recalls the Ark of the Tabernacle in the Temple.

Inasmuch as the custom of elevating the Torah Ark on a platform had existed for several centuries, the introduction of the apse into the synagogue was not as radical a change as might at first appear. Once the apse was introduced into the synagogue, chancel screens, too, were used in the synagogue to separate the Holy

¹⁰⁰ Barton, 1988, 15.

¹⁰¹ Barton, 1986, 186.

Scrolls from the prayer hall, as the sanctuary in the church was set apart from the prayer hall by a chancel screen.

Considering the influence of the Christian liturgy on the appearance of the apse in synagogues, Chiat was partially correct in her assessment that the Torah scrolls were being 'safeguarded' by analogy of a similar arrangement in the sanctuary of the church. That is to say, by setting the Torah Shrine within an apse, the Pentateuch might be understood not as the equivalent of the enthroned Gospel, but rather as the original and authentic Divine Word. The apse and platform in the synagogue also fulfilled the need for a visual focus on the sacred scrolls contained within the Torah Shrine.

Jews who observed the enthronement of the Gospel in the churches at Scythopolis and elsewhere may have felt that it embodied the Christian claim that the New Testament had superseded the Old Testament, or that the Word of God now belonged to the ever-growing Church. In effect, there might have existed a certain rivalry with the Christians. This rivalry could have goaded some Jewish communities to reassert the Jewish claim of the superiority of the Word as embodied in the Old Testament, rather than in the Gospels. This sense of religious competition may have been a motivating force for some Jewish communities to rearrange the interior layout of their synagogues to resemble the early basilical Christian interior with an apse.

Conclusion

This re-examination of the archaeological evidence for ancient synagogues in Palestine demonstrates that the building of synagogues from the late-fourth to mid-sixth centuries did not decline under the emerging power and influence of the Byzantine Empire, but blossomed along with the growing economy of the country. From the late fourth century, new forms of synagogue layouts, as well as new kinds of furnishings, were introduced into numerous prayer halls. As more synagogues are unearthed, it becomes clear that diversity of plans and interior furnishings is the norm throughout this period. No longer can the decades-old 'three-types' theory be held tenable, which assigned certain 'types' of building to specific time periods. Rather than viewing a fourth-century Jewish community in Palestine as suffering from persecutions of a growing Christian empire, as Avi-Yonah would lead us to believe, we find a healthy and flourishing community in close contact with its neighbours.¹

The 'three-types' theory was a bold academic exercise, designed to create order among an astonishing array of synagogue plans. Yet this theory was predicated on a faulty understanding of the development of Judaism after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. In the first half of the 20th century, it was held that all Jews followed the same kind of Judaism, that which was known from the Jewish sources – the Mishnah, Palestinian Talmud, and Babylonian Talmud. This artificial Judaism was given the name 'normative Judaism'. However, those who developed this theory did not take into account other sources of information, such as early Christian writers,

¹ Cohen, 1976, 29.

pagan authors, or the texts from the Dead Sea. These other sources show that there were many kinds of Judaism – many sects, not one – all of which considered themselves Jewish. It is now understood that the two Talmuds were written by a small minority, who were themselves trying to gain power and influence.

As more synagogue remains were uncovered, the diversity in synagogue finds was made to fit into an artificial ‘evolutionary’ construct, so as not to upset the concept of ‘normative’ Judaism. For if all Jews followed the same pattern of normative Judaism, then one would expect to find similarities in building plans, in furnishings, and in decoration at any one time. As the theory states, ‘early’ synagogues had flagstone floors, while ‘late’ synagogues had mosaic floors. Unfortunately for the theory, archaeological evidence indicated quite the opposite, that mosaics existed in synagogues thought to be ‘early,’ and some ‘late’ synagogues had flagstone floors. Furthermore, even the term ‘early’, when referring to the ‘Galilean’ synagogues is now understood to be a misnomer: as more of these synagogues are excavated, they are found instead to belong to the late fourth to sixth centuries, more than 200 years later than once thought.

After a critical discussion of the archaeological evidence for dating ancient structures in chapter two, we turned to the question of what might have been the cause of such diversity in synagogue architecture. One event which could have marked a turning point for Jews occurred when Julian the Apostate gave the order to re-build the Jerusalem Temple in early 363 CE. Soon after work began, the earthquake which struck the Dead Sea rift in May of 363 CE was so massive that the destruction and damage was felt in numerous towns, including Jerusalem, Scythopolis, Tiberias, and Petra. As a result of that earthquake, reconstruction of the Temple was stopped soon after it began. For the Jews, there was no longer any hope that a new Temple could be built. A second, less-pronounced change occurred as the synagogue building was increasingly used as a place for prayer, a change which would place emphasis on the sacred character of an otherwise multi-functional building.

A larger issue concerned the location of the Divine Presence. Where was God without His abode, never to be re-built? The opinions of rabbis preserved in the Talmuds record complex and opposing views on where God dwelt. On the one hand, if He were everywhere, then it should not even matter to which direction one should pray. One fourth-century Babylonian rabbi records that prayer should be in any direction but east, since that is the direction that the *minim* (Christians) pray. On the other hand, if the Divine Presence did not leave the Temple Mount after the destruction of the Temple by the Legio X Fretensis in 70 CE, prayer ought to be directed toward Jerusalem where God still resides. Eventually this view held sway, and even today the most holy site for Jews is the Western Wall, part of the still-standing retaining wall of the *temenos* platform for the Temple.

Archaeological excavation of synagogues has been a boon for answering questions concerning Jews and prayer after the destruction of the Temple. However, often more questions are left unanswered than definitively solved. Archaeological remains preserve platforms in synagogues, of similar shape (usually square or rectangular), but in many sizes. This sole remaining furnishing in many excavated synagogue halls is most often found on the interior wall closest to Jerusalem. For synagogues in Galilee, this is the southern wall, but for synagogues south of Jerusalem, this is the northern wall. However, it took many years for the inconvenience of this arrangement to become evident. Ancient ritual and custom held sway. For if these platforms were used either as a base for the Torah Ark, or possibly as the location of the reader, several excavated synagogues preserve platforms in rather unfortunate positions within their prayer halls. One fourth-century synagogue, at Horvat Shem'a, was built on a rocky outcrop, with an entrance in the long, north wall, and another entrance in the short, western wall. Probably late in the second half of the fourth century (c.380 CE), benches along the long south wall were partially covered by a large platform, set in the centre of the southern aisle. On account of the small size of the building, two columns directly in front of this platform impede access from the north, and obstruct the view. Another example is at nearby Gush

Halav, where the fifth-century basilical synagogue with a single main southern entrance has a platform located not in the nave, but in the western aisle. This too is another less-than-ideal position for the most important object within the synagogue prayer hall. Some basilical synagogues, whose main doors were also in the same wall as the platform for the Torah Ark, sealed those doors, and then placed the main entrances in the opposite wall. This happened in several synagogues, for example, fourth-century Hammat Tiberias, fifth-century Tiberias, and sixth-century Meroth.

The result of sealing the main doors was that the most important piece of furniture in the synagogue, the Torah Ark, was now set against a blank, flat wall, instead of against a wall pierced by doors. This innovation in synagogue development solved the predicament that upon entry into the prayer hall of the synagogue one would have found the Torah Ark positioned behind the front door. Some communities solved the problem in another manner: by either piercing a wall to build an apse, or building an apse from scratch as part of a new edifice. A direct line of sight, from the entrance to the Torah Ark, solved the problem of having worshippers' backs to the most holy object in the synagogue prayer hall when entering the building. Adding an apse not only resolved the problem of the location of the Scrolls, but also, setting the Torah Shrine in the raised apse meant it could be seen in an elevated position within the hall, further enhancing the axially and centrality of the Shrine. This major renovation in synagogue layout must have had some repercussions on the liturgy, of which very little is known.

What did the Torah Ark (or Torah Shrine) look like? As there was diversity in the plans of synagogues so too, presumably were there different ways to store the scrolls. One was certainly a large wooden cabinet (*armarium* or *kibotos*), several of which were preserved in secular contexts from first-century Pompeii and Herculaneum. This cabinet could have been kept in a nearby room, and brought out to the prayer hall only when needed. Perhaps this form of cabinet was the wooden object placed on the stone platforms found in so many synagogues. However, not a single wooden Torah Ark has been found in any excavated synagogue, although traces of

burnt wood were found in the synagogue at Ein Gedi, near the Dead Sea. In contrast to the Torah Ark, the Torah Shrine is often depicted in the mosaic pavements of synagogues. This kind of cabinet probably was not movable, but nevertheless was similar in many respects to the wooden cabinet: both had doors and shelves. Shrines could also have been made of stone, with only the doors made of wood. The earliest surviving Shrine was built in the 12th century at Prague, where the Shrine has two columns flanking the doors and a decorated triangular pediment. Although hundreds of years later in date, this Shrine is remarkably similar in both form and some of its decoration to the depiction in the floor mosaic at sixth-century Beth Alpha synagogue, near Scythopolis.

Another kind of storage space for the Holy Scrolls was the niche, although whether the scrolls were placed permanently in the niche, horizontally or vertically, and whether the scrolls were first placed into some receptacle, such as the bucket-like Roman *capsa*, is presently unknown. Two synagogues in Palestine have remains of a single niche, and one other synagogue has been interpreted as having had three niches. Along with the niche, several carved stone conches have been found in synagogues in the Galilee. These have been explained as belonging to an aedicule which was framed by columns supporting an entablature and pediment.

Marble or stone chancel posts and chancel screens, some which have Hebrew inscriptions, are evidence that these typically ecclesiastical furnishings were also part of the synagogue. Dated examples attest to chancel screens first being used in synagogues from the late fifth century, but not earlier. Why did some Jewish communities introduce chancel screens into their synagogues? Interestingly, most synagogues with apses also have evidence for chancel screens. Is there some link with the appearance of apses in synagogue layouts?

Diversity in both synagogue building plans and storage space for the Scrolls attests to local decision-making, rather than a larger authoritarian body making decisions regarding the plans and layouts of particular halls. In the fourth century, not a single example exists of a synagogue with apse and chancel screen. By the sixth

century, however, thirteen synagogues had some or all of these features. The appearance of typically Christian ecclesiastical furnishings such as the chancel screen in several fifth- and sixth-century Jewish contexts reflects a turning point. Apparently, the function of the synagogue became more exclusively religious, rather than having both secular and religious roles. The cardinal difficulty faced by these communities seems to have been where to keep the most important objects within the prayer hall – the Torah Scrolls.

One solution to this problem might be related to early Christian practice in the East. In the early Christian liturgy during the First Entrance, the Gospels were set on the altar, or in the case of the bema churches in Syria, on a stone throne (*hetoimasia*). The meaning of *hetoimasia* refers to the preparation of the throne, which awaits the Second Coming of the Lord. The act of placing the Gospels on the Altar also celebrates their authenticity as the Divine Word. Enthroning the Gospels is depicted in many types of art. This act should be understood as a precursor to the convention in the synagogue, where the Torah Shrine was placed in the apse. In a fundamental way, the apse in the synagogue, separated from the prayer hall by a chancel, contained what Jews felt was the true and only Divine Word.

One fundamental problem, less referred to in the literature, relates to the status of the Torah Scroll in contrast to the Gospels. In the late fifth and early sixth centuries, several Jewish communities followed an example already tested by the Church. Placing the Torah Shrine in the apse of a prayer hall allowed veneration of the Law without being obstructed by architectural supports. These were hardly radical innovations, but rather a means to display and enhance the container for the Word of the Lord.

These aspects of the impact of Christian art and architecture on synagogues in Byzantine Palestine show that Jewish communities did not live in a vacuum. Nor was there a single solution to logistic problems within the synagogue, including the orchestration of enhanced reverence toward the Scrolls. For those Jewish communities living near large Christian populations, several ecclesiastical features

were adapted for use in their synagogues. The apse and chancel screen were tried and tested furnishings in the churches which fit the developing needs of the synagogue. By carving Jewish symbols on imported marble chancel screens, such screens were made to fit into the repertoire of synagogue furnishings. They were not merely a decorative feature, but enhanced the axial layout and focus at the end of the hall with the Torah. We would suggest that the rationale for major changes to synagogue planning and furnishing was not solely a pragmatic means to solve logistic problems, but rather it reflected an underlying rivalry between Jews and Christians for religious credibility and respectability, not least in the eyes of potential converts. This underlying antagonism was the basis for the impact of Christian art and architecture on synagogues in Byzantine Palestine.

Appendix A

On Vitruvius, a synagogue, and five churches in the Provinces of Syria and Palestine

In this appendix, we will present design analyses of five churches and a synagogue to show that all used the same 5:4 proportion in their design. This proportion defines their cardinal internal dimensions. In fact, the 5:4 proportion is the one mandated by Vitruvius for use in temples: the length of the cella should be one-quarter greater than its width.¹ Furthermore, the late sixth-century church at Nawa has the same inner dimensions as the sixth century church at Sugane. The late fourth-century church at Mamphis, in Palaestina Tertia has the same inner dimensions as the sixth-century church at et-Tuba.²

A.1. Introduction: Vitruvius and design

In the first century BC, Marcus Vitruvius Pollio devoted two books and portions of a third to the study of symmetry, harmony, and proportions. Vitruvius

¹ Vitruvius, IV:iv;1
Distribuitur autem longitudo aedis, uti latitudo sit longitudinis dimidiae partis, ipsaque cela parte quarta longior sit, quam est latitudo, cum pariete qui paries valvarum habuerit conlocationem.

The length of the temple is so arranged that the breadth is half the length. The cella itself is to be a fourth part longer than its breadth, including the wall which contains the doors. (tr. Granger, 1931).

² Chen, 1990b, 525.

describes how proportion is the key to harmony, and how principles of symmetry which utilize proportions are the key to beauty in design (III.1.i). Embodied in proportions is the relationship of one dimension to another, in other words, a ratio between two things. In architecture, ratio is expressed as two numbers describing two dimensions, such as length and width or width and height.

Under the Fundamental Principles of Architecture in Book I, Vitruvius describes the methods used to represent a building: a plan (*ichnographia*) which is an outline of the building made with compasses and ruler; the elevation (*orthographia*) which shows how the front of a building looks; and the perspective (*scaenographia*) which presents the front and sides of the building with the lines all going to a single point in the background (I:2,2). Models of buildings were called *ektupoma* or *indalmata*, or *paradigma*. One 6th century example is depicted in the apse mosaic at San Vitale Ravenna, where Bishop Ecclesius, led by an archangel, carries a model of the church toward the Redeemer.³ Another mosaic in Saint Sophia, Constantinople, on the south vestibule, shows Constantine presenting to the Virgin a model of the city, while Justinian presents to her his model of the Church.⁴

A.1.1. Names of builders and their titles

There are few extant Byzantine texts mentioning architects and builders. Much of our knowledge comes from Procopius, the sixth-century court historian. Procopius's panegyric *Buildings* gives most credit for the construction of individual buildings in his time to the Emperor Justinian. In the course of describing hundreds of buildings, Procopius mentions only five architects--three of whom worked on Saint Sophia: Anthemius of Tralles, Isidore of Miletus, and Isidore the Younger. These great architects are called either *μηχανικοί* or *μηχανοποιοί*. For the meaning of

³ Mango gives a translation of the early 9th century antiquarian Agnellus who mentions the cost of the church as 26,000 gold *solodi*, Mango, 1972, 105; Grabar, 1966, 20; for a depiction see: von Matt, 1971, 131.

⁴ This mosaic dates to the 10th century. Scholars are divided as to whether models were used for the express purpose of architectural rendering: Downey, 1948, 115 footnote 7.

these terms one needs to turn to the fourth-century mathematician Pappus of Alexandria.

Pappus wrote his greatest work, the *Collection on Greek Geometry*, sometime in the late third or early fourth centuries.⁵ He states that the science of mechanics (μηχανικὴ θεωρία) is divided into two parts, one theoretical, the other manual. Theory is composed of geometry, arithmetic, and physics, while the manual part concerns work in metals, construction, carpentry, and painting. If someone were to fulfil all the requirements of the curriculum in both theory and manual study, and few could, then they would be granted the title *mechanikos* (μηχανικός). Those who did not complete the full curriculum were simply called master-builder, *architekton* (ἀρχιτέκτων), or *oikodomos* (οἰκοδόμος), and their rank and pay was considerably lower than that of the *mechanikos*. Lower still in rank than the master-builders were the skilled craftsmen, *technites* (τεχνίτη) such as figure painters, wall painters, mosaicists, masons, and carpenters.⁶ In the sixth century, Procopius calls both Anthemius and Isidore who designed Saint Sophia, and Isidore the Younger, who repaired the dome, *mechanikoi*. These men were working under imperial contract. Isidore's skills as a mathematician are known from a reference that he had revised a book of Archimedes on inscribing solids. Anthemius authored books on mirrors, conic sections, and mechanical devices.⁷ Anthemius came from a highly educated family, since two of his brothers were physicians like their father Stephanus, another brother Olympius was a lawyer, and another brother Metrodorus was a professor of literature.

The names of a few architects who worked in Palestine and Syria are known. In the fourth century, Jerome records that the architect of the church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem was Eustathius, although Theophanes in his eighth-century

5 Heath, 1931 v.II, 356-439.

6 On the different titles, see Downey, 1948, 104.

7 Huxley, 1959, 1 and Heath, 1931, 541.

Chronicle states that the architect was named Zenobius, who flourished in 336/7 CE.⁸ An architect helped to build a church in Gaza for the Empress Eudoxia in 402 CE. Since the Bishop Porphyry was unable to decide whether the plan of the new church on the site of the burnt pagan temple of Zeus Marnas should be circular with a dome like the previous temple, or cruciform in plan, Eudoxia sent a letter with a cruciform plan for the church. The *architekton* Rufinus from Antioch laid out the plan (σκάριφος) on the ground.⁹ In this instance, an *architecton* knew how to read an architectural plan and lay it out on the ground, eliminating the need for the *mechanikos*. However, we have not been able to learn where Eudoxia obtained this plan, that is, whether it had been kept in the imperial archive or been specially drawn for the project.

A.1.2. Inscriptions from Syria

Archaeological evidence preserved in inscriptions provides another source of information on architecture in the Byzantine period. In the list of names of builders mentioned in inscriptions collected by Butler from Syria, Isidore the *mechanikos* appears only once, in an inscription from Kinnesrin dated to 550 CE. This Isidore might be the same as Isidore the Younger who repaired the fallen dome of Saint Sophia in 558 CE.¹⁰ Forty times *oikodomos* appears, and four *architectones* are mentioned. In northern Syria, *technites* is another title mentioned in inscriptions. Of these, Butler points out that a certain Markianos built five churches in Darqita, Babisqa, Ba'ude, Ksegbe, and Qasr el Banat in the end of the fourth-early fifth century, but that depends upon whether Markianos Kyr̄os who built the church of St. Paul in 418 at Darqita is the same person as Markianos Kyr̄illas who built the church

8 Theophanes states that Eustathius was a presbyter of Constantinople, and Zenobius built the Martyrium, see: Mango, 1972, 14.

9 Life of Porphyry, Mango, 1976, 16.

10 Downey, 1948, 104.

at Ksegbe, and Markianos Kyrios who built the convent, and was buried at Qasr el Banat in c. 420.¹¹

These inscriptions raise the question: In the absence of surviving ancient church plans, how can we reconstruct ancient architectural practices? The simplest way uses a tape measure and elementary mathematics. Inasmuch as the buildings uncovered by archaeologists have definite dimensions, simple division of the length by the width provides a convenient method to find one latent ratio. For example, a building twenty meters long and ten meters wide will have an interior ratio of 2:1. Another building ten meters long and five meters wide will have the same 2:1 ratio. Understanding of this underlying ratio of length to width helps the modern student define the original unit of measurement used in the design of the structure. Knowing both the original unit of measurement and the underlying ratio of the plan are basic to any reconstruction of the original design procedure.

A.2. Methodology

In the first stage of research, the most important issue is the identification of the foot or unit of measurement used in the design, for only after metric dimensions have been converted into their original number of feet can the design process be understood. Over the last 50 years, an impressive body of research has been accumulated on design in ancient public buildings. The seminal paper by Underwood appeared in 1948, in which he analysed the dimensions of the octagonal church of St. Sergius and Bacchus, built between 527 and 536 CE. Underwood found that the unit of measurement used in the design of the church was the foot of 0.315 m.¹² Underwood calculated the length of the foot by taking the average of the sides of the inner octagon (15.75 m.), and dividing by successive whole numbers. Eventually dividing this average length by 50 gives 0.315 m. He found this same unit in use at St. John's in Ephesus. For the Church of St. Irene in Constantinople, and Church Direklar

11 Butler, 1969, 255; Tate, 1992, 250.

12 Underwood, 1948, 67.

in Philippi he found another unit, that of 0.308 m., the same as that found by Abel engraved on an inscription near Bethlehem.¹³ Underwood found a third foot, of 0.32 m., at Basilica A in Philippi. Underwood noted that measurements scaled off a plan can lead to inaccurate results, so that the best method is to measure the dimensions of a building directly. Underwood used the simplest technique of division of cardinal dimensions by whole numbers to find the original unit. Further research was carried out in Illyricum by Spremo-Petrovic in 1971. Spremo-Petrovic analysed over forty churches using a similar method of dividing cardinal and other dimensions of each church to find the original unit of measurement used in their design. Of these forty churches, 5 used the foot of 0.32 m., 16 churches were designed with the foot of 0.315 m., nearly half have the foot of 0.3089 m., while a mere three use the Roman foot of 0.2957 m.¹⁴ Wilkinson examined over 80 churches published by Butler, categorizing them according to shape, and dividing inner lengths by inner widths to find their inner proportion.¹⁵ Research in Palestine and Syria over the last 15 years has analysed over 50 buildings, dating from the first to the seventh centuries. Over a third of these are synagogues. Of those in Palestine, 11 were designed with the foot of 0.32 m., 13 with the foot of 0.315 m., 12 with the foot of 0.3089 m., and 16 with the Roman foot of 0.2957 m.¹⁶

A.3. Churches with identical dimensions

Let us compare two pairs of churches in Palestine and Syria, dated between the mid-fifth to the late sixth centuries.

In 1899, at the age of 27, Howard Crosby Butler set out for Syria as the head of the American Archaeological Expedition to Syria. Spending eight months in the field, and returning to Syria on two subsequent expeditions, Butler's published work

13 Abel's measurement of the foot is 0.3089 m. Abel, 1926, 284.

14 Spremo-Petrovic, 1971.

15 Wilkinson ignored all other dimensions of the buildings, and did not calculate the original unit used in design, Wilkinson, 1984b, 118.

16 See Table A:1 in Volume II. For some of these buildings tabulated by the proportion of the internal dimensions, see: Chen, 1990b.

remains one of the most comprehensive of its kind even today. One of the towns that Butler visited was the site of Nawa, one of the larger villages of Jebel Al'a area, about 60 km east of Apamea in Northeast Syria (Fig. A:1). The village was in ruins, and only one tower still stood two stories tall.¹⁷ The town covered a large area, and included a church on the eastern edge, large numbers of private houses, and a small convent called "Deir Nawa" to the north-west.

The church on the eastern edge of the town of Nawa is interesting for its size and construction.¹⁸ The outer dimensions are 22 meters by 14 meters. The walls are of basalt. The nave of the church measures 16.00 by 12.85 m., with two rows of three rectangular piers, and engaged pilasters attached to the eastern and western walls. Piers were used instead of the typical columns to separate the nave from the aisles. Butler suggests that the mounds of clay within the church indicate that the upper sections were made of clay bricks. Inscriptions consisting of verses from the Psalms were found on four lintel stones. One of these gives a date at the end of the sixth century, 598 CE. Since the walls were standing to a height of between one to one and a half meters, Butler could easily reconstruct the plan. The eastern side had chambers flanking the apse which were reached by doorways. Remains of colonnades were visible on the south side, flanking the church, as well as on the eastern side. Perhaps columns existed on the western side also. A large cistern was built in the north-east angle of the court.

The shapes and forms of the preserved ornament are characteristic of northern Syria. The capitals are made of hard basalt, with simple carved designs of flowers or leaves, or a cross-stick pattern. The pedestals and column bases are made of one piece of stone. The diameter of the columns used in the court is 0.32 m.

Over 100 km to the northeast, on the northern edge of the Gebel Siman area, is the Bema church at Sugane, tentatively dated to the sixth century (Fig. A:2).¹⁹ Little

17 Butler, 1907-1919, 13.

18 Butler, 1969, 160.

19 Tchalenko, 1990, 62 and fig. 114.

can be said about the town except that an inscription says that Antichianos built a mausoleum here in 494 CE. Of the church remains, we note that this building has some similar dimensions, but little else in common with the church at Nawa.

The outer dimensions of this church are 20.50 by 14 meters, and the dimensions of the naos are 16.00 m. by 12.95 m. Five columns separate the nave from the aisles, and a semicircular apse is flanked to the north and south by pastophoria. There are two doorways in the southern wall. In the centre of the nave this church had a U-shaped bema constructed of stone.²⁰ The purpose and use of the central bema are still uncertain.

A.3.1. Churches at Nawa and Sugane in Syria

Close examination of the plans of these two churches makes clear that the inner length and width of the prayer halls of both churches are identical, namely 16.00 m. by 12.90 m. Is this coincidence or is it possible that the writings of Vitruvius somehow related to two churches in the distant province of Syria?

To begin to answer these questions we must first find the length of the foot used in their design. This is accomplished by using a three-step process. The first step is to determine the proportion used in the design of both churches by dividing the length of the nave 16.00 m., by the width, 12.85 m.:

$$\frac{16.00 \text{ m.}}{12.85 \text{ m.}} = 1.25$$

The result of dividing the inner length by the inner width is 1.25, which in terms of ratios is 5:4 = 1.25.

In the second stage of analysis, we further subdivide the inner length by 5, and the inner width by 4 to get the Module, the longest length common to both dimensions:

$$\frac{16.00 \text{ m.}}{5} = 3.20 \text{ m.} \qquad \frac{12.85 \text{ m.}}{4} = 3.21 \text{ m.}$$

²⁰ Baccache, 1979-80, 62; for a recent study of the archaeology and liturgical aspects of these platforms, see: Renhart, 1995b; Renhart, 1995a.

In the next stage, we divide the module by whole numbers to find the original unit of measurement:

Module	divided by =	Original Unit
3.21 m.:	10 =	0.3206 m.
3.21 m.:	11 =	0.2915 m.
3.21 m.:	12 =	0.2672 m.

From the above table, it is clear that 3.21 m. is the same as 10 *podes* or feet of 0.32 m., the value of the Byzantine foot, the same foot as already attested in Illyricum, Constantinople, Syria, and Palestine.

Calculating the dimensions of the church at Nawa according to the Byzantine foot of 0.32 yields (Fig. A:3):

outer length	68 <i>podes</i> = 21.76 m.	21.90 m. scaled off the plan
outer width	45 <i>podes</i> = 14.40 m.	14.50 m. scaled off the plan
overall inner length	63 <i>podes</i> = 19.04 m.	18.97 m. scaled off the plan
overall inner width	40 <i>podes</i> = 12.80 m.	12.85 m. published
nave length	50 <i>podes</i> = 16.00 m.	16.00 m. published
aisle width (clear)	10 <i>podes</i> = 3.20 m.	3.10 m. scaled off the plan
cord of apse	8½ <i>podes</i> = 2.72 m.	2.75 m. published
wall width	2½ <i>podes</i> = 0.80 m.	0.8 m. scaled off the plan

In terms of the original plan, 50 *podes* was used for the inner length, and 40 *podes* for the inner width.

Following the same procedure for the church at Sugane, calculated dimensions render (Fig. A:4):

outer length	64½ <i>podes</i> = 20.64 m.	20.50 m. published
outer width	45 <i>podes</i> = 14.40 m.	14.35 m. published
overall inner length	59½ <i>podes</i> = 19.04 m.	18.97 m. published
overall inner width	40 <i>podes</i> = 12.80 m.	12.95 m. published
nave length	50 <i>podes</i> = 16.00 m.	16.00 m. published
nave width (axial)	19½ <i>podes</i> = 6.24 m.	6.26 m. published
north aisle width (axial)	10 <i>podes</i> = 3.20 m.	3.17 m. published
cord of apse	9½ <i>podes</i> = 3.04 m.	2.97 m. published
wall width	2½ <i>podes</i> = 0.80 m.	0.75 m. published
south aisle width (axial)	10½ <i>podes</i> = 3.36 m.	3.52 m. published
south aisle width (clear)	10 <i>podes</i> = 3.20 m.	3.20 m. scaled off the plan

The cardinal inner dimensions of both churches are a length of 50 Byzantine *podes* and a width of 40 Byzantine *podes*. Clearly, then, a 10-*podes* module was

multiplied by the ratio 5:4, giving 50 x 40 *podes*. At Nawa, the 10-*podes* module defined the widths of the aisles to the stylobate, while at Sugane the module defined the width of the south aisle alone. The outer walls are also the same, 2½ *podes* wide. Another cardinal difference is the inequality of the width of the aisles. The width of the northern aisle was set at 8½ *podes*, while the southern aisle is 10 *podes*. Perhaps the reason for the discrepancy is that one aisle was reconstructed in antiquity. The fact that the bema is aligned with the central line of the nave rather than with the centre of the apse would indicate that the bema is part of a reconstruction of an earlier building, rather than part of the original building phase. In the rebuilding of the church, only one row of columns was shifted from their original position. Further chronological exactness on the original and perhaps subsequent phases of this church requires an excavation at the site.

In both churches, the interior outline of the sanctuary of the halls is 50 x 40 *podes*, and both were designed by the same unit of measurement, the Byzantine foot of 0.32 m. Secondly, the unequal widths of the aisles at Sugane and resulting smaller roof beams over the north aisle might indicate that this plan is the second stage of an earlier church. Third, the axis of the hall is ca. 20 cm south of the central axis of the apse, a further indication that this plan is not original.

A.3.2. Identical plans at Mamphis in Palestina Tertia and et-Tuba, in Syria

Turning now to a second pair of buildings, the West Church at Mamphis, in Palaestina Tertia, and the church at et-Tuba in Syria, a similar pattern appears. Both have the same inner dimensions, but are separated in construction dates by over one hundred years.

The town of Mamphis was probably founded by the Nabateans in the first century BC. The town is located about 40 km south-west of Beersheba in the Negev. Mamphis is mentioned by Eusebius and also appears on the sixth-century Madaba map. Seen in the early part of this century by Wooley and Lawrence, extended excavations were not carried out at the site until the late 1960's, and again in 1990 by

Negev under the auspices of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.²¹ Negev found that the town grew for almost five hundred years while it was located on the trade routes to Eilat on the Red Sea, then fell into decline sometime in the mid-seventh century.²²

The West Church is located next to the city wall in the southern part of the town (Fig. A:5). An atrium to the west is surrounded by colonnades and has a small cistern in its centre. Three doorways led to the prayer hall, which was 13.25 m. long by 10.65 m. wide. Two rows of four columns divide the hall into a central nave flanked by aisles. The central nave was paved with mosaics and the aisles were covered with paving stones. The mosaics depict birds and fruits set in a geometric pattern. Three inscriptions found on the mosaic pavement mention a certain Nilus. The limestone drums used to make the columns most likely supported a wooden roof. A burnt layer containing both charred wood and roof tiles found above the floor are indications that the roof was destroyed by fire. Traces of the fire were also found on the mosaic floor, where some areas were black from soot. The church could date from the mid-fourth century, since a coin of Constantius was found in the atrium, although the excavation report does not specify if this coin was found in a sealed locus or above the floor.²³

Following a similar process outlined earlier, Chen found that the church was designed by the Roman *pes* of 0.2957 m. and planned with the inner length of the naos 45 Roman *pedes* long, and the width 36 *pedes* long. The total inner length of the church is 54 *pedes*. The largest length common to the cardinal dimensions is 9 *pedes*, which is the Module. The tabulated dimensions of the West church at Mamphis according to the Roman foot of 0.2957 are (Fig. A:6):

nave length	45 <i>pedes</i> = 13.30 m.	13.30 m. average measured
inner width	36 <i>pedes</i> = 10.65 m.	10.68 m. average measured

²¹ Negev, 1988, 7.

²² For a recent re-appraisal of the nature and dating of the limes Palaestinae, see: Magness, 1999, 198.

²³ Vitto raises doubts in the dating of the West Church to the mid-fourth century on account of later parallels to the mid-fifth to mid-sixth century floor mosaics in several rooms near the synagogue at Beth She'arim, see: Vitto, 1996, 126; Negev, 1988, 52-63.

overall inner length	54 <i>pedes</i> = 15.96 m.	16.06 m. average measured
aisle width (axial)	9 <i>pedes</i> = 2.66 m.	2.66 m. measured

Three modules were used as the axial width of the aisles, and six modules equal the width of the nave. The intercolumniation was also set at 3 modules. In the design stage of the building of this church, the first stage was a basic square which could be drawn to any scale. Half the side of this square was projected aside, giving the overall inner length. Further subdivision of the basic square into four smaller squares defines the position of the columns. Finally, projecting aside one of these sub-squares gives the line for the edge of the prayer hall.²⁴

In northern Syria, about 50 km north west of Nawa, Butler visited et-Tuba, another site where a church was found (Fig. A:7). At this large village, a tower and a number of residences in addition to this church were found in ruin. Of the church, portions of the apse were still standing, and the *diaconicon*, the room to the south of the apse used by the deacons, had its original stone roof. Enough of the walls existed to make an accurate plan. Butler discerned that the interior of the church was a typical basilica, yet the superstructure was different from other churches. Four cruciform piers carried stone arches, both longitudinally and transversally. The weight of the roof was borne by the side arches in the aisles, which acting as buttresses were at a lower height. The inscribed lintel of the western portal which Butler found nearby, gives the construction date of September 583 CE, so Butler reasoned that this building is one of the earliest examples of the cross-vault in the region.²⁵

Since the interior dimensions of this church at Mampsis were built as 13.25 x 10.65 m. it is surprising that nearly identical dimensions measured by Butler at et-Tuba, are 13.20 x 10.60 m.. Calculating dimensions of the plan in terms of the Roman foot of 0.2957 m. yields (Fig. A:8):

24 Chen, 1981, 238.

25 Butler, 1907-1919, B. 20, and Butler, 1969, 163-164.

nave length	45 <i>pedes</i> = 13.30 m.	13.20 m. published
overall inner width	36 <i>pedes</i> = 10.65 m.	10.60 m. published
overall inner length	56½ <i>pedes</i> = 16.70 m.	16.8 m. scaled off the plan
aisle width (axial)	9 <i>pedes</i> = 2.66 m.	2.70 m. scaled off the plan

The form of the nave of this church follows the same pattern as the earlier church at Mampsis, and both have the same inner width and inner length. However, where the church at Mampsis has two rows of 4 columns flanking the nave, set on the axis of the 9 *pedes* grid, the church at et-Tuba has 2 large piers set on the same axis of a similar grid. Lacking at et-Tuba are two further roof supports on each side of the nave.

The planning process used for the late 6th-century church at et-Tuba must have been similar to that of the church at Mampsis. A Pythagorean triangle was probably used to set a right angle. According to the ratio 5:4 ratio, with a module of 9 Roman *pedes*, the interior length was set as 5 x 9 *pedes* = 45 *pedes* and the width was set as 4 x 9 *pedes* = 36 *pedes*. Two modules set the axial width of the nave as 18 *pedes*, while the aisles were 9 *pedes* wide, according to the typical 1:2:1 proportion. The positions of the piers were set at the intersection of the first and third module square. The placement of roof supports on the intersections of the grid follows the example of the pattern at Mampsis.

These two examples at Mampsis in Palaestina Tertia and et-Tuba in Syria there are another pair of churches which were designed according to the simple 5:4 ratio. This ratio was multiplied by a module 9 Roman *pedes* long, instead of the 10 Byzantine *pedes*-module found at Sugane and Nawa. Common to both is the design phase which multiplies a module by the ratio 5:4. The earliest example of 9 Roman *pedes* as the standard length for a module has been found in the first century synagogue at Masada. At Masada, 9 *pedes* is the axial distance between columns. The inner width at Masada is also 36 *pedes*, as at Mampsis and Tuba.

A.3.3. The southern church at Burdaqli in Syria

One further example shows that architects were not limited to using a 10-foot or 9-foot module, but sometimes used other lengths, depending on particular

circumstances. Of the two churches at Burdaqli, the southern church has been sufficiently preserved for the plan to be drawn (Fig. A:9). Butler found the outer walls partially preserved, but every stone from the interior had been removed to allow the interior space to be used as a cattle pen.

The type of its plan belongs to Butler’s Class 1, that is, basilicas with columnar supports and apses. Some in this group have straight walls concealing the apse, while others have the curved apse protruding between the two side chambers (square *pastophoria*). Dated churches from this group belong to the early 6th through the early 7th centuries.

The interior nave of the south church is large, measuring 17.65 x 14.25 m. Butler believed that the interior had five bays, but this cannot be proven since not a single stone was left in the interior.

To determine the proportion used in the design of the church we divide the length of the nave 17.65 m., by its width, 14.25 m.:

$$\frac{17.65 \text{ m.}}{14.25 \text{ m.}} = 1.24$$

The result of dividing the inner length by the inner width is 1.24, that is nearly one and a quarter, or in terms of ratios, 5:4 = 1.25.

Further subdividing the inner length by 5, and the inner width by 4 we get the longest length common to both dimensions, namely, the Module:

$$\frac{17.65 \text{ m.}}{5} = 3.53 \text{ m.} \qquad \frac{14.25 \text{ m.}}{4} = 3.56 \text{ m.}$$

Finally, dividing the average module by whole numbers gives the original unit of measurement:

Module	divided by =	Original Unit
3.55 m.:	10 =	0.3546 m.
3.55 m.:	11 =	0.3224 m.
3.55 m.:	12 =	0.2955 m.

In this case, 0.2955 m., is a mere 0.0002 (two-tenths of a millimeter) from the value of the Roman foot, 0.2957 m. Calculating the dimensions of the plan in terms of the Roman foot of 0.2957 m. yields (Fig. A:10):

overall inner length	79 <i>pedes</i> = 23.36 m.	23.35 m. scaled off the plan
overall inner width	48 <i>pedes</i> = 14.19 m.	14.25 m. published
nave length	60 <i>pedes</i> = 17.74 m.	17.65 m. published
nave width	24 <i>pedes</i> = 7.10 m.	7.20 scaled off the plan
aisle width (axial)	10 $\frac{1}{2}$ <i>pedes</i> = 3.10 m.	3.10 m. scaled off the plan
wall width	2 <i>pedes</i> = 0.59 m.	0.60 m. scaled off the plan

The interior metric dimensions correspond to 60 x 48 Roman *pedes* of 0.2957 m. In this case, the Module was 12 *pedes* long. Multiplying the module by 5 gives 60; multiplying it by 4 gives 48. Unlike the other churches, the geometric line of grid in this church at Burdaqli follows the inner side of the stylobate, rather than the center of the stylobate. This church therefore has the widest nave, and was purposefully designed so that the wooden beams for the nave were more than 2 modules long. The position of the stylobate is set with the clear width of the nave a full 2 modules wide or 24 *pedes*. The underlying geometry of the 5:4 rectangle is common to this church, too.²⁶

A.3.4. The synagogue at Ma'oz Hayyim, Palestine Secunda

Churches were not the sole ecclesiastical buildings to use this particular geometric form, the 5:4 rectangle. So far we have only one other building, that is, the late fourth-century synagogue from Palaestina Secunda at Ma'oz Hayyim. Three superimposed buildings dating from the fourth to the seventh centuries were found about 4 km. west of Scythopolis in the Jordan Valley. For some unknown reason, but perhaps after the earthquake of May 363 CE, an earlier synagogue (phase I) was rebuilt. The prayer hall was enlarged three meters to the north, a mosaic floor was laid on top of an earlier flagstone paving, and an opening was punched into the southern wall, where an apse protrudes to the south.²⁷ Mosaics from the second stage depicting a *menorah* and *shofar* indicate that the building served as a synagogue. Two entrances were found in the eastern wall, each 1.3 m. wide. These entrances lead to a stone-

²⁶ Butler, 1969, 129.

²⁷ The interior dimensions of the second structure are 14.5 m. x 12.2 m. The walls are composed of squared field-stone facing with a rubble fill, Tzaferis, 1982, 219.

paved courtyard c. 4.0 m. wide which probably continued to the north, although its extent is unknown.

The interior is divided into a nave and two aisles by two rows of 5 columns each. The width of the nave is 6.0 m. Few column drums were found, but a simple Ionic capital found as a base for a column in the latest stage, was surmised by the excavator to have been used in the second phase. The interior was plastered, as indicated by traces remaining on the walls.

Concerning the construction date of Building B, the excavator states that material found within the fill of the mosaic floor can be ascribed to the end of the 4th – beginning of the fifth centuries.²⁸ However, since all this datable material comes from a possible repair of the first mosaic floor, and not from directly beneath the original mosaic, we can not be certain of the date of the construction of Synagogue B.

Chen has shown that the second phase of this building was designed by means of the 5:4 ratio (Fig. A:11).²⁹ The module used in the design of the synagogue was the Roman 10-foot-long *decempeda* of 2.96 m. The inner length was set at 50 Roman *pedes* and the inner width at 40 Roman *pedes*. In this synagogue, the axis of the columns is set on the line of the 10-foot Module.

Thus, the 5:4 proportion, using the identical number of feet (50 x 40 *pedes*) was employed here as it was at the churches at Nawa and Sugane.

A.4. Conclusion

These six buildings are examples of one simple proportion used in Palaestina Tertia, Palaestina Secunda, and Syria Secunda. For a modern student measuring these buildings according to the metric system, different lengths and widths defined the cardinal dimensions of the buildings. But after attempting to trace measurements back to their source, one finds that common to these five churches and the synagogue is the 5:4 ratio—the rectangle enclosing the prayer hall. A simple reason for the use of this

²⁸ Tzaferis, 1982, 235.

²⁹ This synagogue was first analyzed in 1980, Chen, 1980, 256.

ratio might be the ancient surveying technique for ensuring a right angle. Starting with the 3:4:5 triangle, a right angle can be obtained to any size by multiplication. Next, after projecting aside the hypotenuse, a rectangle with length one-fourth greater than the width can be laid on the ground. In the first century, Vitruvius wrote about this ratio as an established rule for laying out temples. These six buildings suggest that the 5:4 rule survived well into the 6th century.³⁰

Concerning the builders of these six structures, it is still early to establish patterns in the evidence. Yet, some assumptions can be made. Assuming that a builder, architect or school of architects used a single unit of measurement in a building, one pattern can be seen in the placement of the stylobate. Those structures using the Roman foot have the axis of the grid along the center of the stylobate, or along its inner edge. Those using the Byzantine unit place the stylobate along the outer axis of the grid.

We still do not know why different units of measurement are to be found in possibly similar chronological or geographic contexts. For example, why was the Roman foot of 0.2957 m. used in et-Tuba in 582 CE while at nearby Nawa the Byzantine foot of 0.32 m. was used in 598 CE?

In spite of the different layouts of the piers or columns, a similar geometric form based upon the same 5:4 proportion is common to both structures. However, for broader conclusions a larger sample size is needed. One possible explanation for the continuity of a design process using the 5:4 ratio for public buildings covering so large an area over two centuries is that a manual existed with which *oikodomo*i and *architekton*es used to build public structures.³¹ The practice would be to multiply a chosen number of common feet by a ratio such as 5:4 to get the total length and width of the building. Disposition of the roof, columns or piers, and doorways was a matter

³⁰ The earliest example we have so far that this ratio was used in design comes from the Middle Bronze fortress-temple at Shechem, identified as the Temple of Baal Berit, dating to roughly the 17th century BCE, see: Milson, 1987a, 98.

³¹ Very little evidence of such manuals exists until the Middle Ages, see: Scheller, 1995, 27-29.

for local preference, most likely dependent upon the materials to hand, whether strong stone for arches or wood of sufficient length for beams. Yet, this is not the only explanation. Another would be that the training of technicians involved using several basic ratios, making a manual unnecessary.

Using this unified approach to design allows us to compare churches built of cut blocks of stone in the limestone massif to a synagogue with walls made of a core of rubble. The similarities in design are remarkable. These six buildings include: five Byzantine churches in Syria, Palaestina Tertia, and a Byzantine synagogue from Palaestina Secunda, which testify to the existence of a single canon of practical design much like that laid down by Vitruvius in the first century, and followed for Christian and Jewish structures alike.

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